

## HISTORY

**Peter Alegi. *Laduma! Soccer, Politics and Society in South Africa, from Its Origins to 2010*.** Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2010. 2nd edition. xv + 230 pp. Photographs. Bibliography. Index. No price reported. Paper.

**Peter Alegi. *African Soccerscapes: How a Continent Changed the World's Game*.** Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010. xvi + 179 pp. Photographs. Bibliography. Index. No price reported. Paper.

Although both Peter Alegi's *Laduma! Soccer, Politics and Society in South Africa, from Its Origins to 2010* and *African Soccerscapes: How a Continent Changed the World's Game* focus on "the beautiful game," these two engaging works also offer superb insights into Africa's past and present social, political, and economic challenges, while simultaneously highlighting the resilience, creativity, and determination of the continent's residents. Both *Laduma!* and *Soccerscapes* feature material that will edify even the most avid followers of soccer (football), though these highly accessible works also have much to offer more casual readers motivated by, for example, a desire to learn more about how South Africa came to host the 2010 World Cup Finals—the culminating topic in each of the texts. Via these outstanding works, Alegi has placed African soccer on firm historiographical footing, while also popularizing a subject about which little was previously known beyond Africa's borders.

*Laduma!*—a Zulu expression meaning "to thunder" or "to be famous," commonly proclaimed by television commentators after a goal is scored—examines the history of soccer in South Africa, with Alegi expertly interweaving this sporting narrative with a broader account of the political, social, and economic histories of the colony-cum-state that facilitates an understanding of the changing relationship between sport and society. Through the prism of soccer, the book's chronological organization offers windows into different eras in South Africa's past, enabling readers to see how the practitioners, organizers, and administrators of football operated during, for example, the colonial period, apartheid, and black majority rule. From football's humble origins in mission schools and mines, soccer steadily grew in importance within the black, Coloured, Indian and, to a lesser extent, white communities in South Africa, though often only in parallel due to strict racial segregation. Alegi contends that during this roughly 130-year process, soccer became a (largely urban) "sphere of social action" created and maintained by Africans, in which class and generational relations were shaped and contested, rural expressions of masculinity were reconstructed, and neighborhoods and nationalist organizations alike mobilized members to pursue often overlapping social and political objectives. By focusing on various club teams, including a detailed examination of the legendary Orlando Pirates, Alegi renders abundantly evident the ways that Africans' cultural production and institu-

tionalization of football have shaped individual and collective identities—uniting and dividing both real and “imagined” communities.

Perhaps the strongest analytical contribution that *Laduma!* makes is its consistent attention to the inextricability of football, politics, and the struggle for racial equality in South Africa’s history. Rather than an innocuous pastime, soccer—as a physical pursuit, spectacle, and organized association—constituted a constant site of tension between the racist agents of the state and South Africa’s marginalized and repressed underclasses. From the early struggles over leisure time and recreational space to the formation of indigenous playing styles and alternative, autonomous, often nonracial football institutions and networks, Africans successfully, if not without considerable pain and suffering, challenged a series of white-only administrations in South Africa. Ultimately these efforts drew attention to the barbarity of apartheid and helped bring about the international sporting bans on, and the political isolation of, what had become a pariah state. Alegi contends that following the institution of majority rule in the early 1990s, the game continued to play an important political role, “symbolizing institutional democratization under black leadership at a time of great uncertainty.”

*Laduma!*’s few faults are related to the book’s organization, rather than its content. One peculiar feature is the highly uneven length of the chapters; for example, chapters 2 and 4 comprise only 5 and 9 pages, respectively. Moreover, the latter reads like an obligatory effort to feature “football on the Witwatersrand” in order to offset the much more detailed coverage of the development of soccer in Durban. The book also features a brief “Scholarly Considerations and Sources” appendix, which would have been better positioned prior to the succession of chapters or more profitably incorporated into the introduction. Either way, the useful considerations and illuminations that Alegi posits in this section should inform a reader’s perusal of the chapters, rather than follow it. Regardless of its placement, the section also seems to imply that the book’s “scholarly contributions” are confined to a few pages—a notion belied by Alegi’s regular citations of fellow historians’ contentions and his thoughtful engagement with relevant academic concepts and theories throughout *Laduma!*

In *African Soccerescapes*, Alegi expands his coverage of African football history to the rest of the continent, employing evidence that complements the material presented in *Laduma!* to argue for Africa’s significant global impact on football. By adjusting his lens, first to the continent and then to the world (though mainly Europe), Alegi argues cogently that Africa has helped to shape the global game in a much more profound way than its underfunded domestic leagues and modest success in international competitions, such as the World Cup, would suggest. Alegi also turns his global perspective back on the continent, examining how the various processes that make up the contemporary globalization phenomenon have had deleterious impacts on the ways that soccer is played and consumed *within* Africa.

Beginning with the introduction of football via the agents of European colonialism, *Soccerscapes* follows the game's diffusion from coastal entrepôts along newly erected railways into the African interior. At each stage, Alegi demonstrates how the colonial powers—though most zealously, Britain—deemed sport to be an important pillar of their alleged “civilizing missions.” Yet Africans successfully appropriated many of these physical pursuits, including football, and subsequently utilized them to confront the social and racial inequities upon which colonial projects were predicated, which, in turn, contributed to the consciousness of emerging African national identities. Alegi carefully, and rightly, assigns much of the credit for these subversive endeavors to African civil servants and others possessing discretionary income and leisure time, who, as cultural intermediaries, were among the first to be exposed to the game, and also constituted its earliest practitioners, spectators, and organizers. Alegi demonstrates how decades later, following political independence and with the game by then thoroughly democratized, football helped to construct broad-based, if fragile, senses of nationhood that helped newly independent African countries navigate an extremely challenging period.

The organization of *Soccerscapes* is primarily chronological, though also somewhat thematic, loosely mirroring the arrangement and topical coverage featured in *Laduma!* In each chapter Alegi initially presents the overarching themes and important developments that occurred within the respective temporal parameters before presenting colorful, illustrative case studies from across the continent—a recurring format that never ends up feeling mechanical. South Africa is well-represented in these sections, yet Alegi also adroitly moves around the continent, introducing examples from Anglophone, Francophone, and Arabophone Africa, though Lusophone Africa is afforded relatively less attention.

Alegi's interesting account of the origins and development of soccer in Africa moves along briskly over the course of this 130-page text, flowing seamlessly from one chapter to the next, consistently highlighting African agency and influence. However, chapter 6, “The Privatization of Football,” serves as a type of speed bump in this otherwise smooth progression. While the chapter is crucial in linking soccer on the continent to global developments in the game, Alegi presents what amounts to an African victimization narrative that stands in sharp contrast to the preceding story. In this section, the author concurs with scholars who have maligned the alleged “neo-colonial” soccer relationship between Europe and Africa and bemoaned the disappearance of a seemingly romanticized football past, or at least an unrealized trajectory. In this somewhat oversimplified account, greedy Europeans and African elites deprive ordinary Africans of the opportunities to play and watch locally. While Alegi rightly condemns the corruption, exploitation, and (corporate and individual) avarice that are regrettable features of today's game, the chapter omits potentially powerful counterpoints. For instance, many emerging footballers from wealthy countries,

including America, Australia, and South Korea, also play in Europe, while, within Europe, many footballers from rich nations relocate to play in poorer ones; in each case, these labor migrants deprive their (rather weak) respective domestic leagues of talent, though without any associated outcries of exploitation. Thankfully, though, this rather incongruent section only marginally interferes with the otherwise consistent, insightful contentions that are featured in *Soccerscapes*, a text that ultimately serves as both a fine contribution to the growing body of football scholarship and a wonderful complement to the equally excellent *Laduma!*

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