

Following the Ball

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Introduction

I remember speaking to a Portuguese colleague of mine at work in Mozambique about my impending departure to play for Sporting Clube de Portugal [a major Lisbon-based squad] and he told me, “When you arrive there, you will be a man. A football player in Portugal is a very important person.”

—Hilário da Conceição, 2013

In 1965 I was the first player from Africa and from Portugal to be awarded the World Player of the Year. For me it was an enormous responsibility. . . . I realized the enormity of winning [the award] because at that time I was twenty-three years old—old enough to understand what an honor, and a responsibility, it was. I represented Africa and Portugal, and there had never been a footballer from either to receive such an honor.

—Eusébio da Silva Ferreira, 2004

When superstar soccer¹ player Eusébio left the field following Portugal’s 2–1 defeat at the hands of England in the 1966 World Cup semifinals, he was awash in tears, fiercely clutching his red and green jersey—the national colors of Portugal (see fig. I.1). Yet Eusébio da Silva Ferreira was neither born nor raised in the Iberian nation; instead, a Mozambican, he was one of the many Africans who made their way from Portugal’s colonial territories to the metropole to ply their athletic skills from the late 1940s to the end of the colonial era in 1975. Like Eusébio, many of these African soccer players



Figure I.1. Eusébio leaving the pitch following the 1966 World Cup loss to England.

performed spectacularly on the field, significantly elevating the stature of their respective club teams and vaulting the Portuguese national team to unprecedented levels, and remain among the greatest footballers of all time.

While both Eusébio and Portuguese everywhere grieved following the squad's exit from the 1966 World Cup via the match that came to be known as the *Jogo das Lágrimas* (Game of Tears), the country was simultaneously engaged in far graver matters. Having disregarded the “winds of change” that had heralded European nations' abandonment of imperial territories in Africa beginning in the late 1950s, since the early 1960s Portugal had been actively attempting to suppress armed insurgencies in three of its five African colonies: Angola, Mozambique, and Guiné (the other two, Cape Verde and São Tomé, remained relatively quiet). Unlike other European colonizing nations, Portugal's dictatorial *Estado Novo* (New State) regime intransigently resisted mounting international pressure to decolonize, locking itself in a struggle to retain its African possessions. The government's insistence on the territorial—and, thus, racial—integration of Portugal and its African colonies was central to its public relations campaign

intended to legitimize, and thereby maintain, the empire. As such, the reforms that facilitated the relocation of African players to the metropole were, at least in part, politically motivated, aimed to appease external critics of Lisbon rather than to genuinely loosen social restrictions and liberalize colonial society. The inclusion of African players, such as Eusébio, on Portugal's club and national soccer teams and their sustained continental and international success constituted valuable propaganda for the increasingly embattled Estado Novo regime, which was utilized to highlight the supposed unity of the metropole and the colonies, as well as the opportunities for social mobility that its African subjects allegedly enjoyed.

This book examines the experiences of these African athletes as they relocated to Portugal from 1949 until the conclusion of the colonial era in 1975, negotiated this politically charged environment, and consolidated their post-soccer futures.² Although always minorities on their Portuguese clubs, these players' sporting, social, and political impacts in the colonies, metropole, and, ultimately, globally, far outweigh their numerical modesty. Beyond their outsized sporting influence, they also instilled both racial and national pride among their African compatriots and concurrently generated esteem for an increasingly beleaguered Portugal. In reconstructing the players' transnational histories, the narrative traces their lives from the humble, informal soccer spaces in colonial Africa to the manicured pitches of Europe, while simultaneously focusing on their off-the-field challenges and successes. By examining this multicontinental space in a single analytical field, *Following the Ball* illuminates the structural and experiential consistencies and discrepancies across the constituent settings, and also considers the components and processes of empire. These athletes' experiences also serve to blur the lines between colonial and metropolitan milieus, as players, clubs, and sporting news and tactics increasingly circulated between these various nodes, reinvigorating their historical links and drawing them into closer dialogue, even as African liberation movements fought to sever these imperial connections. This book also engages with global processes by exploring not only how external political and sporting developments shaped these Lusophone histories, but also how players and clubs across the Portuguese empire articulated them locally.

Although this study features football and its practitioners as its central topics, it also provides a window into social relations in colonial and metropolitan societies, embedding sport in these shifting historical

contexts and elucidating the ways that African players forged cooperative, symbiotic relationships across seemingly unbridgeable divides. Institutionalized racism profoundly shaped social interactions in Portugal's colonies, yet the meaningful and durable bonds these players cultivated with teammates, fans, and club officials suggest a complexity in race relations in both the colonies and the metropole that belies reductive renderings. Within this relational spectrum, the players often assumed roles as social and cultural intermediaries, operating between an assortment of societal segments and strata in Africa and Europe. Ultimately, by exploring the ways these players creatively exploited opportunities generated by shifts in the political and occupational landscapes in the waning decades of Portugal's empire, the book aims to prompt reconsiderations of social relations and processes in late colonial Lusophone Africa, as well as in the metropolitan core, while also opening up new ways of thinking about sport, society, and power in this pivotal period in global history.

From Africa to Europe: Navigating the Metropole

Although the Portuguese regime sanctioned the relocation of African players due to their athletic skills, it also deemed them valuable resources in an increasingly fraught global-political scenario. As such, even as the regime progressively emphasized football's role as one of the three pillars of the nation, alongside *fado* music and Fátima (famed location of a shrine to Christianity)³—the so-called “three f’s”—the state secret police closely monitored players' actions. Even the labor reforms that facilitated the players' migration to Portugal were, ultimately, similarly restrictive. For example, despite steady interest from clubs across Europe to secure the signatures of these African footballers, the regime refused to permit them to transfer abroad, even going so far as to classify Eusébio as a “national asset” to preclude his exit. This unwillingness to allow athletes to practice their trade elsewhere contradicted the Estado Novo's self-congratulatory propaganda regarding the expansion of freedoms within the empire that these soccer migrants supposedly epitomized.

In addition to geographical constraints, African players faced an array of challenges associated with their long-distance migration. Having en-

dured protracted journeys to Portugal, newly removed from friends and family members, and thrust into a climate that most of the athletes found disagreeable, many initially longed for their homelands. For example, as José Maria, who hailed from Angola and first traveled to Portugal in December 1962 to play for Vitória de Setúbal, explained, “I knew it was going to be colder . . . but I never imagined it would be that much colder. . . . That negatively affected my career when I first arrived. I wanted to run the field but I couldn’t because I could feel the cold wind touching my skin like razor blades. . . . I thought I was going to die.”⁴ Notwithstanding the formidable climatic acclimation obstacles that migrant athletes faced, the vast majority eventually settled in well, adjusting to their new environs, succeeding both on and off the pitch, and often remaining in Portugal after their playing days concluded.

This transitional success was, however, predicated on more than just the players’ sheer athleticism. Their typically steady integration into metropolitan society, their decisions to parlay their ability to migrate into a host of educational and remunerative opportunities—the benefits of which endured long after their athletic abilities faded—and their generation and sustenance of genuine adulation among a fan base that stretched from the metropole to the colonies (and beyond) required much more than simply excellent soccer skills. I argue that these players so adroitly navigated their new milieu owing to a series of strategies that they adopted, including: cooperation across a range of social and racial divides; the internalization of Portuguese customs prior to their arrival; employment of labor tactics learned or observed in the colonies; and an unflinching apoliticism, even as the wars for independence were raging in Portugal’s African colonies—their homelands.

Most of the strategic behavior that underpinned players’ social and athletic success in the metropole was formatively developed in the colonies, well before the migrants ever set foot in Portugal. As members of neighborhood (*bairro*) teams and underfunded clubs across an assortment of African municipalities, players began to forge the personal relationships that would assist them as they steadily ascended the successive layers of colonial and metropolitan soccerdom. Although social relations were initially cultivated among neighborhood friends, as the players moved up the levels, their clubs’ rosters increasingly featured racial, religious, and geographical diversity.

These new teammates provided indispensable support as players transitioned from casual practitioners to professional athletes, committing increasing amounts of time to improving their soccer skills. Although football in Portugal's colonies had initially developed strictly along racial lines, and thus in parallel, after World War II the sport newly began to constitute a more diverse, inclusive space. Experiences on integrated squads in the colonies would serve African players well following their relocation to metropolitan outfits, as, despite their growing ranks, they never outnumbered their white teammates on any of the Portuguese clubs.

If participation on squads in Africa that featured demographical diversity helped these footballers integrate socially upon reaching the metropole, meaningful exposure to Portuguese culture in the colonies was similarly vital. Indeed, virtually all the African clubs with which these players were affiliated before being "discovered" featured Portuguese coaches and were invariably located in urban centers, the loci of European colonization. Consequently, every one of these future migrants spent time in intensely colonized spaces and was, therefore, exposed to Portuguese customs and values prior to leaving the continent.

Additionally, many of the players were members of an extremely small, semiprivileged minority in Portugal's colonies, known as *assimilados*, or "assimilateds." Until 1961, when the Estado Novo regime abandoned this classification, Africans whom the state deemed sufficiently Portuguese in regard to language, culture, religion, and so on could apply for this designation, which, in turn, afforded them a special, intermediate legal status. Assimilados typically benefited from otherwise-rare educational opportunities and were often the offspring of Portuguese fathers and African mothers, known as *mestiços* (mulattoes). In 1950, although less than 1 percent of the colonial subjects in Portugal's empire were officially "assimilated," almost 90 percent of *mestiços* were.⁵ It's not a coincidence that many of the African footballers who relocated to Portugal derived from the mixed-race population; for these players, the process of cultural integration had begun even earlier and was inherently deeper.

Immigrant athletes also actively facilitated their success in the metropole by pursuing a variety of occupational strategies. If African players largely adapted—or integrated—culturally and socially with few difficulties, a series

of creative, short- and long-term labor strategies that they had either previously employed in the colonies or simply observed and internalized helped them capitalize to the fullest extent possible on their new opportunities. In some ways, the superstar status that many players enjoyed helps to obscure both their fundamental existence as wage laborers and their reliance on strategies that were derivative, or even imitative, of those that African workers in Portugal's colonies had been employing for decades, if not longer. For example, prior to leaving Africa, many soccer prospects sought advice from players who had already migrated to Portugal, typically inquiring about which clubs offered the best working and living conditions. Armed with this knowledge, many followed in the footsteps of the athletes who had preceded them, roughly analogous to one of the countless Mozambicans and Angolans who worked in South Africa's mines during the colonial period soliciting occupational information from a returning migrant laborer, and then accordingly targeting a specific operation for employment. Once established in the metropole, these footballers also sought advice from more experienced coworkers (i.e., teammates) when renegotiating their contracts. Many players also engaged in secondary migration, subsequently affiliating with a series of different Portuguese clubs, just as migrant mine laborers deliberately switched employers in an effort to improve their working conditions. Thus, even as these African footballers navigated drastically different professional terrain, they fell back on well-established tactics. Indigenous laborers throughout Portugal's African empire would find neither the basic occupational nor the migratory strategies that these soccer migrants employed wholly unfamiliar.

The secondary migration paths that these athletes traversed didn't always entail simply swapping one club for another. Instead, many of the footballers parlayed their ability to travel to Portugal to continue their studies in the hopes of receiving an education that would, in turn, serve them well long after their athleticism withered. The pursuit of a degree in higher education was primarily accomplished by playing for Académica, located in the central Portuguese city of Coimbra. This football club was associated with the country's premier university, the Universidade de Coimbra, and during the colonial era the squad was composed solely of matriculating students. Mário Wilson, who arrived in Portugal from Mozambique in 1949, was one of many soccer migrants from Africa who

acknowledged having strategically pursued this educational option: “I came to play for Sporting [Clube de Portugal]. But I only played there for one year even though I was the top scorer that season. I felt that football wasn’t the solution; no one achieved financial independence from [just] playing soccer. . . . So I went to school in Coimbra and also played for many years for Académica in the first division.”⁶

Other African footballers pursued postsoccer security by attaining long-term employment with CUF (Companhia União Fabril), an industrial conglomerate located near Lisbon that required members of the first division team it sponsored to be company employees, and also guaranteed them jobs following their playing days. Although neither Académica nor CUF were particularly competitive on the pitch, in both these scenarios the secondary migration strategies that players employed in order to secure academic and employment opportunities constituted foresighted thinking that sacrificed (potential) short-term athletic glory for long-term financial security.

Just as these players strategically seized educational and remunerative opportunities in Portugal, they also deftly navigated the politically charged environments in both the metropole and the colonies that the wars for independence were fueling. Consequently, they were viewed neither as subversives in Portugal nor as political stooges by their African brothers who were fighting—and literally dying—for independence. Although often internally conflicted, the athletes’ professionalism and determination to improve their lives underpinned their conspicuous apoliticism throughout this turbulent period. As such, despite their allure as potential nationalist symbols for the various African independence movements and the Portuguese regime, they failed to serve either the insurgencies or the counterinsurgency well, while remaining widely respected and admired in both the colonies and the metropole.

Historiographical Significance

Scholars are increasingly engaging with topics related to soccer and Africa, generating a nascent yet growing body of literature.⁷ This trend is also evident in the Lusophone context, with this project contributing to the emerging corpus.⁸ Although the on-the-field accomplishments of African players who migrated to Portugal during the colonial era have pre-

viously appeared in a number of homages—virtual hagiographies—this study is the first to consider these athletes’ daily experiences beyond the stadium walls, far from the droves of cheering spectators and laudatory biographers.⁹ In fact, *Following the Ball* constitutes the initial academic engagement with this otherwise-renowned stream of migrant athletes who ushered in the golden era of Portuguese soccer, while also helping to shape an evolving system of global football in which national borders are increasingly immaterial.¹⁰ This belated scholarly consideration stands in sharp contrast to the considerable attention that African footballers who played in France during the colonial period and, in particular, their radical political activity, have received.¹¹ While my study is informed by this scholarship, I link the Lusophone migrants’ destination and places of origin not through revolutionary politics, but via durable occupational strategies and the extended process of cultural integration.

In the following section, I outline the broader historiographical, analytical, and epistemological utility of five aspects of these African footballers’ histories, including their strategic apolitical disposition and comportment; their social engagement across an array of well-established divides; their role as cultural intermediaries; their importation and application of labor strategies in the metropole, which facilitated success both on and away from the pitch; and their self-improvement objectives vis-à-vis colonial and, ultimately, neocolonial exploitation. Through an analysis of these distinguishing features, this book moves soccer studies in novel directions, while also making utile contributions across a number of scholarly fields well beyond the realm of African football.

I. Scholars of the history of soccer in Africa have cogently established that although Europeans introduced the game, indigenous practitioners were hardly passive consumers, contesting various aspects and fashioning new meanings of the sport.¹² Pioneering work by Fair and Martin, among others, astutely identified the nationalist and proto-nationalist dimensions of soccer in British and French colonial Africa; insightfully reconstructed the contention over leisure time and the limits of European control; and rightfully analyzed football as a “terrain of struggle.” More recently, Alegi, Bittencourt, and others have built upon these foundational studies.¹³ In much more hyperbolic fashion, Goldblatt has claimed that “all across the continent, Africans turned the colonists’ game against them,” and that

“lessons learned on and off the pitch were [newly] turned against colonialism.”¹⁴ And, in perhaps the most extreme examples of the politicization of football, Lanfranchi, Taylor, Wahl, and others have considered the Francophone African players who fled France to overtly support the struggle for Algerian independence.¹⁵

In continuing to highlight Africans’ active, if less confrontational, engagement with the sport, Domingos and others have demonstrated that indigenous practitioners essentially appropriated the game, attributing meanings to it unintended by those who had originally introduced it. As part of this process, African players produced unique, often “creolized” styles that reflected local aesthetic values and typically featured a performative “flair” largely absent in European versions of this activity.¹⁶ Beyond such patterns of amendment and transmutation, Fair, Alegi, and Moorman, among others, have shown that when banned from white clubs and associations in the colonies, African players and coordinators formed teams and leagues of their own that helped foster the development of distinct (local and national) oppositional identities and, concomitantly, political consciousness.¹⁷ In certain cases, this autonomous endeavor of sporting organization simulated the process of institution building in an imagined postcolonial state.

This book builds upon the aforementioned landmark scholarship, but instead of highlighting appropriation, contestation, or even liberation politics, it explores the ways African soccer players adopted European styles and conventions and, microcosmic of the broader colonial populations—settler and indigenous alike—embraced Portuguese football clubs and their local affiliates. This amenability constituted neither a Gramscian, hegemonically induced capitulation to cultural power, nor a Fanonesque, reverential, if perverse and subconscious, emulation of the dominant community; rather, Lusophone African footballers pragmatically pursued opportunities to improve their lives and, by extension, those of their families, while still retaining indigenous identities that were, of course, never static in their composition.¹⁸ Throughout these processes of engagement, players remained strategically apolitical as they transitioned from Africa to the metropole, even as their sporting success provided political cover, confidence, and a semblance of legitimacy—no matter how spurious—to the increasingly besieged Portuguese colonial project. While acknowledg-

ing the asymmetrical power relations that existed between African athletes and club, colonial, and metropolitan officials, the analytical salience of the former's deliberate, willful cooperation significantly outweighs the much less frequent instances of discontentment or confrontation. By unconditionally applying their athletic acumen to this erstwhile foreign leisure activity, the footballers generated opportunities for social mobility and, ultimately, a ticket to, and (for some, permanent) placement in, metropolitan society.

II. If these players increasingly began to join the traditionally whites-only clubs in the colonies, at a more personal level they also cooperated in both Africa and Europe across a range of social and racial divides with teammates, supporters, and, in many cases, women-cum-wives. As these players ascended the different tiers of colonial soccerdom—in the process moving spatially from the largely black suburbs to the predominantly white city centers for their “home” matches—they experienced greater diversity among their teammates, who derived from different neighborhoods or even provinces. Indeed, over the course of the colonial period, football became a more integrative than divisive endeavor. Although players' divergent backgrounds and the resultant unfamiliarity, or even rivalry, may have generated hostility in other scenarios, as teammates any identity politics dissipated in the face of common goals and cultivated camaraderie. At the top levels in colonial leagues and even more profoundly once in Portugal, African players on racially integrated clubs forged meaningful, reciprocal relationships with players of European descent that problematize purely antagonistic understandings of race relations in these settings.

In fact, once in the metropole, provenance served as a durable social bond, transcending, eroding, or at least tempering racial divides. It also generated a type of resilient solidarity, as black and mestiço players shared a series of formative experiences with white players from the colonies—many of whom also traveled to Portugal to play and, like their African counterparts, were permitted to do so only after formal policy adjustments. Indeed, the Portuguese had been active in, for example, Angola and Mozambique for centuries; and, thus, the many white migrant footballers that these settler communities produced felt stronger connections to Africa than to the imagined *patria* (homeland), a place many of them had never previously visited. Testimony from Hilário, a mestiço footballer who first arrived in Lisbon

in 1958, captures these social dynamics and the experiential importance of (African and, more specifically, Mozambican) provenance:

Players from Africa—black or white—who were already in Portugal always helped a lot because they wanted to see the new African players succeed and triumph. The players from Africa had a deep connection with the continent and most would have rather stayed in Africa than have traveled to Portugal, but we had to come to play soccer. Therefore, we would support everyone who came from Africa, giving advice or anything else they needed. We liked helping one another. We didn't care about the color difference. . . . Normally, whoever was from Mozambique was proud of being born in that country. . . . Wherever we were in the world, if there was someone from Mozambique there, we would be supported; the “Mozambique nation” will always be there to help.¹⁹

Although scholars have considered the implications of provenance among immigrant communities elsewhere, examples of interracial cooperation in these reconstituted communities are rare, as diasporic populations often reflect and actively maintain preexisting social divides.²⁰ My emphasis on the experiential importance of provenance and, in particular, its transcendent role in helping to facilitate and deepen intercultural amity among these migrant athletes builds upon work by scholars who have examined the development of genuine interracial, intergender relations in colonial Africa.²¹ However, this book extends the analytical and geographical scopes of such work by adding intragender examples that featured on the continent, but also persisted into the diaspora. Although scholars have rightfully debunked Lusotropicalism—the notion that the Portuguese were uniquely predisposed to interact with their colonized subjects in a more congenial, less exploitative manner—these players' engagement in a multitude of cooperative and conciliatory relationships with Portuguese in both the metropole and the empire to enhance their lives suggests that a more complex rendering of race relations in both settings be perpended.²²

III. By considering the ways high-profile immigrant athletes occupied liminal spaces and, thereby, bridged gaps in colonial and metropolitan society, this book also engages with the extensive literature regarding Afri-

can intermediaries. Heretofore, scholars have reserved this category for indigenous clerks, soldiers, and police, and, at times, traditional authorities—in short, those who assisted with the delivery or facilitation of colonial projects.²³ The inclusion of African soccer migrants broadens this collection of historical actors. In the colonies, the migrant footballers increasingly operated in an intermediary manner as they ascended to play for predominantly white clubs in the urban centers, while continuing to reside in the largely black suburbs. And, in the metropole, as successful indigenous practitioners of a European game and tangible manifestations of Africa at a time when few individuals from the continent were present in Portugal, they routinely functioned as social and cultural intermediaries. Their ability to navigate, straddle, and increasingly move fluidly between African and European circles helped to erode some of the perceived cultural distinctions between these communities.

Analogous to African clerks, soldiers, and police “delivering” colonial control, these players’ success with Portuguese affiliate clubs in the colonies, with the parent clubs in the metropole, and, for some of them, with Portugal’s national team, transmitted Portuguese culture as sport and greatly intensified the (Lusophone) African consumption of it. Indeed, Africans in the colonies increasingly, and enthusiastically, engaged with this dimension of Portuguese culture, listening to broadcasts of their favorite metropolitan clubs, reading about these squads in the newspapers, attending matches that Portuguese teams played in the colonies as part of extremely popular summer tours, and, in particular, closely following African footballers who were playing in Europe.²⁴ In practice, these players constituted the palpable go-betweens of the distant metropole and African stops, familiar vessels through which well-received entertainment, rather than exploitative colonial policy, was conveyed to the indigenous subjects of empire.

Although scholars have traditionally characterized African intermediaries as having wittingly bolstered colonial projects, thereby prejudicing their fellow imperial subordinates, these soccer players engaged in neither predominantly “collaborative” nor resistive behavior. While acknowledging the difficult roles the footballers were forced into as individuals who were conversant in multiple cultures, compelled to navigate a collection of settings that featured varying degrees of racial hostility, and simultaneously

exalted by a wide range of supporters from all backgrounds, their experiences as social intermediaries evince a pattern of multidirectional strategic engagement. Ultimately, by highlighting these athletic intermediaries' recurring expressions of cooperation and conciliation, this study further problematizes the "interpretive dichotomy of resistance and collaboration" that reductively construes Africans' actions as either assistive of or obstructive to the colonial process.²⁵

IV. Through an examination of the ways these African migrants drew upon occupational skills in the metropole that had been learned in their homelands, this book also engages with the extensive literature that traces the application of indigenous knowledge and techniques in the diaspora. Studies by Carney and Knight, for example, demonstrate how Africans in the Americas employed assorted techniques and skills to enhance their lives or simply to mitigate the hardships that many of these marginalized, or even enslaved, individuals faced.²⁶ This study extends the area of investigation to include not only particular proficiencies, but also a series of operative labor tactics to which emigrant athletes had been exposed or had practiced themselves while still in Africa, typically during nonsoccer employment arranged for them by their colonial football clubs. Following their arrival in Europe, players applied these tactics in creative ways or drew upon them to inspire new occupational strategies.

African footballers also displayed a type of professionalism in the metropole that they had cultivated and internalized while playing in the colonies and, thus, even before they became remunerated practitioners. This approach included adherence to strict practice schedules and cooperation with coaches, teammates, and club officials. Yet this ethic also extended to life away from the pitch, including players' commitment to lifestyles that wouldn't undermine or compromise their athletic abilities or capabilities.²⁷ In most cases, the Portuguese coaches active in the colonies were responsible for instilling this approach to the game among aspiring talents. As former players in Portugal, these overseers introduced the tactics, strategies, and, perhaps most importantly, training regimens that African players would need to adopt if they were to succeed in the elite echelons of the Portuguese, European, and, eventually, global soccer firmaments.

If indigenous practitioners had infused the game with theater and artifice—supposed constituents of the “flair” that the African-appropriated game came to feature—aspiring players had to temper these tendencies and demonstrate the type of athletic discipline and tactical approach demanded at the highest levels of the sport. In these contentions, my analysis diverges from conclusions drawn by, for example, Lanfranchi and Taylor, who have argued that “the particular skills required have allowed African [footballers] with relatively low levels of ‘Westernization’ to become successful on both continents. . . . Like music, football has created popular figures . . . who have progressed without . . . requiring training to adapt to Western standards.”²⁸ In the Lusophone context, players’ occupational “Westernization” was absolutely vital to their success in Portugal. Former player Hilário, who hailed from Mozambique and starred on Portugal’s 1966 World Cup squad, confirmed this assertion in testimony he offered during our interview: “On almost all of the teams in Mozambique, the coaches were Portuguese. . . . When I left Mozambique at the age of nineteen, I was already able to play for Sporting [Lisbon] and the [Portuguese] national team. . . . In the colonial time, the soccer formation was better, the Portuguese coaches maximized our skills. When we got to Portugal, we could play for [the best teams], and now if the best player from Mozambique comes here [Portugal], he would have to play in the second or third division.”²⁹

V. Finally, a substantive examination of these Lusophone players also helps to shift scholarly focus away from “exploitative colonial and neo-imperial states” and “predatory clubs”—recurrent themes in African football scholarship—to the athletes themselves.³⁰ By listening to these migrant footballers’ motivations and objectives, by considering their social origins, and by examining their strategic actions, it’s clear that their experiences not only reflected but also actively shaped colonial and metropolitan interactions and policies. Furthermore, the salaries they earned from their clubs were commensurate with their experience; meritocratic (Eusébio, appropriately, eventually became the highest-earning footballer in the country); and largely consistent with Portuguese players’ wages, while many African-born footballers also captained their squads and even the national team. Similarly, their relationship with the Portuguese regime was functional for both entities, rather than purely exploitative for

either, and even its political dimensions remained largely undeveloped.³¹ Throughout their careers, these athletes exhibited both highly pragmatic and calculated behavior, belying a passivity and victimization that “predatory” relationships inherently feature.

In this contention, my study echoes the work of scholars who have dismissed reductive characterizations of African migrant footballers in Europe as “merely tools of European club owners,” thereby dispelling notions of these athletes as casualties of alleged exploitation.³² Instead, I analyze them as emigrant workers—professionals—who, with an eye to their postathletic lives, strategically offered their labor to those employers in both the colonies and the metropole that provided the most appealing working conditions. As Eusébio’s mother candidly proclaimed after being asked why her son chose Benfica, a celebrated Lisbon-based outfit, over other metropolitan clubs who were also aggressively courting him: “Benfica gave ‘big money.’” Studies that sound the alarm regarding the historical (and contemporary) exodus of African footballers thereby risk ignoring these migrants’ aspirations to improve their lives, and those of family members, just as millions of Africans did throughout the colonial era and continue to do today.

Methodology and Sources

This book draws upon archival materials, popular media sources, and interviews with former players and coaches in order to reconstruct the experiences of these African athletes and the multitude of settings in which they operated. Portugal’s Ministry of Education houses the most useful and insightful archival sources, namely, the colonial-era records associated with player transfers from Africa. This trail of documentation is particularly illuminative of the period covering the buildup in the 1940s to the initial relocation of African footballers to Portugal, as it features debates between metropolitan and colonial officials and representatives from the most powerful Portuguese clubs, including Benfica, Sporting, Porto, and Belenenses, which coveted the star prospects. Sensing that the Estado Novo government might be amenable to these athletic imports, during the 1940s metropolitan clubs began submitting formal appeals to the admin-

istration to permit their relocation. Although each of the eventual player transfers to the metropole prompted a clutch of accompanying paperwork, these sources are most revealing when problems arose during the transfer processes. Recurrent issues included disputes over fees, competition among clubs for a particular player, and the accommodation of players' requests to relocate to a specific location, often to live with relatives or to continue their studies. In these situations, the paper trail features a range of contributing entities and offers considerable detail, which proved extremely useful to reconstructions of the players' lives.

Popular media similarly constituted extremely illuminative source material. Portuguese newspapers from the period provide not only social and sports commentary, but also interviews with the footballers, even if these players' statements primarily relate to on-the-pitch events. Much more insightful was the extended run of *Ídolos* (Idols) pamphlets, published as a series in Portugal during the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, each issue of which featured a particular athlete from one of an array of sports, including soccer. These booklets include biographical information, personal histories, interviews, and photos. And although many of these "idols" were white Portuguese athletes, a number of African-born players were included in the collection as well. Although the tenor of *Ídolos* is light and naturally celebratory, the African footballers offered candid answers to questions that probed their "likes" and "dislikes" about life in Portugal and how they spent time away from the pitch in their daily lives—the fodder of social history.

For all the insights these sources provide, however, they remain limited in several important ways. First, although many of the popular media sources feature African voices, forthright expression of political opinions or other "topics of national safety and security" was impossible during the reign of the dictatorial Estado Novo regime. As such, the commentary provided by players in newspapers was typically highly guarded and concentrated around "safe" matters, namely, their sporting exploits. Similarly, mention of political matters in the *Ídolos* pamphlets is conspicuously, if predictably, absent. Second, written materials offer only very brief and often superficial glimpses into players' broader lives. Such limitations hinder a reconstruction of their experiences away from the pitch, including virtually the entirety of their time in the colonies prior to relocating to

Portugal, as well as their daily existence once in the metropole, beyond the few hours a week they spent in the public eye during matches.

As such, oral testimony constitutes essential evidentiary material for this study. I gathered these articulations from a number of different sources, including recent interviews given by the players that appear in newspapers, videos, and in published form. Even more useful was the recently released book *Finta finta*, which offers brief biographical sketches of the thirty-one greatest Mozambican footballers of all time (a list that includes a number of players from the colonial period). As part of this endeavor, author Paola Rolletta interviewed some of the footballers profiled in *Finta finta* and periodically incorporates excerpts from their testimonies in the text.³³

Much more insightful than any of the aforementioned sources, though, were the interviews that I conducted in Africa and Europe with former players, their Portuguese teammates and coaches, and members of the, albeit extremely small, nonfootballing African community resident in Portugal during the colonial period. These indispensable sessions enabled me to reconstruct these African athletes' lives in the colonies, including: their social origins, their ascension through the various leagues in their respective settings and across different eras, the assorted challenges they faced as they were enjoying this athletic success, and the eventual attention that metropolitan clubs paid them. Further, their testimonies illuminated their understandably anxious departures from the colonies, the often weeks-long voyages to Portugal, the important social insights they gleaned during the journeys, and the ways travel experiences solidified bonds among migrants, irrespective of race, who shared common points of departure. Finally, this testimony proved equally crucial in attempting to understand footballers' social experiences in the metropole and to better comprehend the role(s) they wanted soccer to play in their lives, especially for those players who sought to consolidate their postathletic lives by strategically seeking educational or long-term employment opportunities. In fact, most of my informants, accustomed to fielding countless, virtually identical questions about their footballing feats in Portugal, were pleasantly surprised, arguably even bemused, when I inquired about their experiences—both quotidian and significant—*away* from the pitch.³⁴

Organization

Over a series of loosely chronological chapters, I consider the development of football in the colonies and thereafter trace these athletes' histories as they enjoyed initial success in Africa and subsequently relocated to Portugal, negotiating a metropolitan environment that was, at once, both vaguely familiar and unsettlingly unfamiliar. Utilizing the aforementioned archival and oral evidence, I highlight change over time within each thematic chapter in order to provide a diachronic understanding of the various settings and the changing ways the footballers navigated these milieus.

Chapter 1 offers a foundational overview of the Portuguese empire in Africa, including the shifting environments that indigenous residents daily negotiated. To illuminate these contexts, I consider the social backgrounds of the emigrant footballers, many of whom were *mestiços* or were otherwise intermediate members of colonial society. This chapter also explores the introduction of football into Portugal's African empire by a variety of agents, whose interests often overlapped, and the role that newspapers and radio played in the sport's popularization. Both practitioners and fans catalyzed this growth, eagerly consuming soccer developments from the metropole and around the world, and rapidly forming allegiances to Portuguese clubs.

Chapter 2 examines the various ways Africans began to play the sport, including by forming "native" clubs and associations (leagues). Initially barred from participation in associations reserved for white practitioners, Africans gradually began to organize their own versions. Over time, *mestiço* and black players were invited to play in the formerly whites-only leagues in the colonies, and eventually this racial barrier was dissolved, the first step toward the very best players—irrespective of race—showcasing their skills in the metropole. The chapter further examines the social backgrounds of these footballers and also plumbs the process of cultural exposure and adjustment that commenced in the colonies—in mixed-race households, on racially integrated clubs while playing for Portuguese coaches, and at workplaces—which collectively played a key role in the migrant athletes' success in the metropole, both on and off the pitch.

Chapter 3 explores the regime's motivations to permit these footballers to relocate to Portugal, as well as the scouting and signing processes

that advanced and facilitated the outflows. The chapter explicitly links Africa and Europe, following the athletes as they undertook long journeys from the colonies to the metropole, during which they often established or deepened relations with fellow migrant athletes—white, black, and mestiço—as well as with Portuguese copassengers. Upon arrival, these players remained under the custody of their new clubs, which supported the footballers materially and helped them adjust to their new environments. Although many of the African migrants would be based in or around the capital city of Lisbon, many others headed north, some south, and a few into the eastern interior of the country.

Chapter 4 examines the range of challenges players faced as they attempted to settle into life in Portugal. Most of their tribulations were attributable not only to separation from friends and family, but also to the rigors of professional football in Europe. The footballers also faced other impediments, including the inability to transfer to clubs beyond Portugal's borders owing to their propagandistic value and the regime's political insecurities, as well as to the considerable competitiveness and attendant fame they generated for Portugal's club and national teams. In response to these constraints, players drew from a set of labor strategies to capitalize upon opportunities available *within* the metropole. Although the athletes relied on their prodigious soccer skills to succeed on the pitch, the labor tactics they applied away from it constituted vital methods for those footballers who farsightedly sought to exploit their situations before their athleticism faded.

Chapter 5 explores the ways players navigated the politically charged environments in both the colonies and the metropole, especially following the outbreak of the wars for independence in the African territories in the early 1960s. Most of the players eschewed politics, at least overtly, strategically cooperating with an assortment of entities, as manifested in recurring, eventually normative, displays of social conciliation and professional focus. This approach was at times difficult to maintain, however, namely, during moments of political unrest in Portugal, in which football was used as a vehicle for both popular protest and statutory repression. Although the regime tried to exploit the players for political ends, they generally maintained their distance from the dictatorship in an attempt to dispassionately avoid co-option. Nor did most of these Lusophone athletes

engage in revolutionary politics and, thus, none of the nationalist movements operating in Portugal's colonies actively sought their support.

Finally, an epilogue considers both the immediate plights and the enduring legacies of these African athletes in the years and decades following their playing days. Many of the retired footballers remained in Portugal, while others returned to their respective homelands or relocated elsewhere in the world, forming a global diaspora of former athletes. It would be difficult to overemphasize the effects these players had on their Portuguese club teams and, perhaps more visibly, on a national team that had been in shambles prior to their arrival. Yet their impact wasn't limited to the period in which they were engaged in athletic careers. These "Jackie Robinsons" of global soccer were among the first African players who collectively precipitated waves of aspirant athletes to trace their footsteps from the innumerable pitches and endeavoring associations on the continent to the various leagues in Europe and beyond.³⁵ Had these Lusophone footballers not been so effective on and off the pitch, this form of athletic emigration may well not have developed so rapidly, or spawned so many imitators.