Introduction

The Language of Happiness

In 1953, at the age of seventeen, Smaïl Zidane left his village in the French colony of Algeria, heading north. He traveled to Paris, where he found a job at a construction site in Saint-Denis, a suburb famous for an abbey church that houses the tombs of generations of French kings. Unable to find lodging, he spent the winter nights on the ground near where he worked. He remembers the day he received his first paycheck: "I experienced the first real happiness I had since arriving in France. That day, I didn't feel the cold anymore." He sent most of his earnings back home to his parents. Soon he met other men from his village, and together they rented a small room in Saint-Denis. They were among hundreds of thousands of colonial workers who helped rebuild France in the wake of World War II.[1]

A year after Smaïl left home, a bloody anticolonial uprising began in Algeria. A political organization called the Front de Libération Nationale (F.L.N.) launched a series of attacks in Algiers. In 1955 the French declared martial law, rounding up thousands of men and using torture to crush the insurrection. Many Algerian laborers in metropolitan France supported the F.L.N., which soon instituted a "revolutionary tax," collected by its operatives in the shantytowns where the workers lived. In 1958 a group of well-known professional football players from Algeria sneaked out of France and gathered in Tunisia to create an F.L.N. football team. Traveling to Eastern Europe and Asia, they used the sport as a weapon of war, a tool of diplomacy, and an act of political imagination. When the team played, the flag of the revolutionary movement was raised and its anthem sung, and imagining that Algeria would one day be independent became a little bit easier.

Three years later the F.L.N. carried out a series of deadly attacks against police in France. The government declared a state of emergency in early October, banning Algerians from meeting and circulating at night and allowing police to search their homes at any time and without a warrant. On 17 October 1961

twenty thousand to thirty thousand Algerian men, women, and children marched into Paris from the shantytowns outside the city to protest the curfew. The demonstration was peaceful, but the Paris police chief organized a fierce response. As columns of protestors approached the center of the city, the police brutally attacked the crowd. They threw into the Seine the bodies of demonstrators they had beaten unconscious or to death. In some parts of Paris bodies were piled up in the streets. The police detained fourteen thousand demonstrators, holding them in stadiums on the edge of the city. Some were also kept in an athletic facility, the Palais des Sports, though they were moved elsewhere after a few days so that French fans of soul music could enjoy a concert by Ray Charles. Many were beaten, and more were killed, while in custody. For days afterward bodies of demonstrators washed up along the banks of the Seine. Seared into the memory of witnesses, the truth of the massacres of October 1961 was nevertheless carefully suppressed by French officials, unacknowledged and uninvestigated for decades. The killings remained a kind of subterranean haunting that many remembered privately but few spoke about publicly. Only relatively recently, through books, trials, and the popular film *Caché,* has the memory of these killings been publicly excavated.[2]

Smaïl Zidane lived in Saint-Denis at the time, and the French police's brutality could have been on his mind when, after Algeria gained its independence in 1962, he decided to go home. But he never made it back to Algeria. On the way he stopped in Marseille, where he visited relatives and met a young woman from his village named Malika. The two quickly fell in love. They married and settled in Marseille, eventually living in the neighborhood of Castellane, to the north of the city. With Algeria's independence in 1962 they were transformed from French colonial subjects into Algerian citizens, and they remained in France as foreigners. They had five children in France. The youngest of them, born in 1972, they named Zinedine.

Six months earlier, in Guadeloupe, Mariana Thuram had a child she named Lilian. The island of Guadeloupe is largely populated by the descendants of slaves brought there from Africa by the French to work on sugar plantations. Mariana Thuram, like many others in the Caribbean, still worked the cane, even as she carried Lilian, and when she wasn't in the fields she worked as a domestic servant to make ends meet. When Lilian was eight, Mariana decided to join a stream of migrants leaving the islands for metropolitan France. So Lilian Thuram grew up in a *banlieue* (suburb) to the south of Paris. Both Zinedine and Lilian were avid and talented football players, and as teenagers were recruited to football academies. When they met for the first time, it was at tryouts for the French national team.

Since the 1950s, when Zidane's father worked there, the town of Saint-Denis has mushroomed into one of Paris's many large *banlieues*. Pocked with concrete projects, it is home to immigrants from North and West Africa and to their children and grandchildren. Looming over the town, not far from its ancient abbey church, is another, newer temple: a football stadium called the Stade de France, built to host the 1998 World Cup. Though the tournament began with worry about rowdy crowds and disinterest in the tournament on the part of much of the population, as victory followed victory, people began to rally around their team. In a riveting semifinal game against Croatia, Thuram scored two miraculous goals to secure France a place in the final. A few days later, on 13 July 1998, Zidane scored two goals against the widely favored Brazilian team to win for France its first World Cup.

Paris erupted in a massive celebration. The city projected Zidane's face on Napoleon's Arc de Triomphe, and chants of "Zidane Président!" echoed through the streets. Older residents remembered only one event that compared: the liberation of Paris from the Germans in 1944. For a few days it felt as if France was a unified, joyful, hopeful nation—a nation capable of anything, even overcoming the racism rooted in its colonial past. Politicians, journalists, and intellectuals rushed to celebrate the victory, often proclaiming that it signaled the dawn of a new era in French political and social life. The team, they declared enthusiastically, represented the possibilities of the collaboration of white and black, immigrant and native born. It signaled the birth of a new French identity that, like the French flag, brought together three colors: black, white, and *beur*—the last a term describing children of North African immigrants. It showed France what it could be: a nation free from racial divisions and conflict, a nation that gained strength from its diversity.

In the next eight years such hopes came to seem utopian. The far-right Front National party led by Jean-Marie Le Pen, whose platform claimed that immigration was destroying France, attracted many voters. The *banlieue* neighborhoods, where the majority of immigrants and their children and grandchildren live, festered in continued poverty and isolation, frequently exploding into insurrection, most powerfully in November 2005. In the wake of those riots Thuram spoke up on behalf of young *banlieue* residents, attacking the government and reminding people about the ways the history of empire and ongoing racism had created France's contemporary problems. When the football team took to the field in the summer of 2006, France couldn't help but be reminded of its complicated past or its conflicted present. Seventeen of twenty-three players on the team that year came from fami-

lies with roots in West or North Africa, the Indian Ocean, or the French Caribbean. And nearly all of the players had grown up in the *banlieue* areas of France, still smoldering from the previous year's uprising.

Le Pen attacked the team—as he had once before, in 1996—for having "too many players of color." For Le Pen the diversity of the French team was a distressing symbol of how immigration was changing the face of France. It also, of course, put him in an interesting bind. Whom should he root for: his country, represented by a team that challenged everything he believed, or, in an act of shocking disloyalty, the other team? Like the runners John Carlos and Tommie Smith, who famously raised their fists in a salute to black power as they received their medals for the United States in the 1968 Olympics, the French team simultaneously represented and challenged the nation.

When Zidane and Thuram stepped onto the field for the 2006 World Cup final, they entered the largest theater that has ever existed in human history. This has been true for every World Cup for several decades, and it will be true again in 2010, when teams and fans from throughout the world pour into South Africa, assured that they will witness a dramatic new chapter in history unfolding. The competition is now the largest sporting event in the world, surpassing even the Olympics in the size of its audience, crystallizing political conflicts and hopes, and creating a seemingly endless and inexhaustible site into which people have pumped their hatreds and phantasms, not to mention their money.

Today there is no sport more popular and powerful in its global reach, or more tightly linked to international politics, than football. Indeed football may well be the most universal language that currently exists, its empire more extensive than that of any political or religious ideology. "The only denominator common to all people, the only universal Esperanto," one enthusiast wrote in 1954, "is football. . . . What? A game has done what the cardinal virtues, laws, and modern science have not? Yes!" Football was a "world language, whose grammar is unchanging from the North Pole to the Equator," its worldwide influence predicated on the fact that it is "spoken in each corner of the globe with a particular accent." If that was already largely true in 1954, it is even more so today, as boosters of the sport, notably the powerful international football organization F.I.F.A. (Fédération Internationale de Football Association), constantly remind us. Our planet is now saturated with professional and international football: from individual games, to

proliferating tournaments and regional and continental competitions, to, increasingly, international competitions for youth and women's teams.[3]

The World Cup, however, remains the defining competition for the sport. Its games focus national hopes on a vivid drama. Novelists and filmmakers often struggle to transform individual characters into symbols of a larger collective. But for its fervent fans, a national football team really *is* the nation, at least for a time. An athlete can instantly become a national icon after even one play on the field. When this happens, the accident of his biography, of the story that brought him to the crucial moment when he changed the course of a game, and therefore history, become charged with larger meaning. At such moments football produces a crossroads between personal history and national history that illuminates and shapes the language and practice of politics.[4]

Indeed in the midst of a World Cup the choices made by football players can seem much more significant than the actions of elected politicians. Writing about the 1966 World Cup in England, which unfolded in the shadow of a government crisis linked to the state of the economy, Alastair Reid recalls, "Breaking open the morning papers and reading banner headlines like 'England in trouble' our hearts would sink for a while until, after a closer glance, we found that they applied merely to the state of the economy" and "not, as we first feared, to the football team."[5]

What is it about football that generates such passions, transforming what detractors identify as an artificially constructed and futile game, dominated by and infused with capital and accused of corruption and corporate influence, into a terrain of political passion, utopian longing, and philosophical reflection? To answer this question, we need to think about the form of football itself. On the one hand, the stage of football (and other sports) seems the ultimate embodiment of the promises of egalitarian meritocracy, a place where the mythological promise that any individual, of any background, can succeed if he or she is talented and disciplined enough, can actually come true. As such, the field of play condenses the broader, often diffuse promise of a certain kind of liberal democratic society into a spectacular physical drama. At the same time, however, it also foregrounds a potentially conflicting necessity for collective action, in which players often need to efface themselves, passing the ball to someone in a better position rather than seeking to score themselves. Just as important, the game also constantly highlights the basic and disturbing truth that life is, with stunning consistency, completely unfair. Football is, after all, notoriously unpredictable, a realm of constant surprise. The ball, as anyone who has played knows, fully obeys no one, even

those who would seem to be its absolute masters. And because games are often won or lost on the basis of a few points, mistakes matter dramatically.[6]

So does the role of the referee, whose instant and irreversible decisions often determine a game's outcome. Referees make split-second decisions without the benefit of video replay. They interpret the flow of the game, since they are allowed to ignore a foul if they determine that to call one would disadvantage the attacking team. But players well know that the referees often are unable to fully see what has happened, and that they inhabit a "flawed system of justice." Trickery and playacting are therefore a crucial and time-honored part of the game, and many fans deeply appreciate the ability of a player to get an advantageous call, whether or not it is deserved. It often seems as if nearly every call and decision by the referee is the subject of some kind of protest at the time, from fans or players. Many calls become the subject of intense debate after the game, and some particularly pivotal decisions are lamented for decades. Each football match, then, produces an unending field of interpretation, not only about talent and success, but also about justice and injustice, fate and luck, fakery and virtue. It is a "drama of fortune in the world," and as such it opens up enormously diverse possibilities for narrative and symbolism.[7]

No matter how lopsided the matchup, you can never be sure what will happen in a game. French football fans of an earlier generation, as one scholar notes, vividly recall how this truth came home in 1957, when a small football club from the town of El Baïr, a suburb of Algiers, defeated the Stade de Reims, then one of France's greatest teams, in a knockout game of the French Cup competition. It is also a "particularly unstable" game, in which the score is often tied through large portions of a match, which heightens the stress and intensity of the experience of watching.[8]

All of this makes for a particularly riveting form of theater. Indeed one French theater director wrote in 2006 that she couldn't help feeling jealous upon realizing that football was "a new theatre that makes entire crowds hum with emotion and passion." The sport had replaced her profession, brilliantly evoking the drama of the larger society as theater once had done among the ancient Romans and Greeks. Lilian Thuram also thinks of a football match as a theatrical performance that begins with a "magical ritual." It is "unforgettable," he writes, to walk out of the locker room, down the hallway, and out onto the field to be greeted "with shouts and applause. . . . It's the unchanging prologue to a play that lasts ninety minutes, performed with the greatest improvisation imaginable."[9]

Over the years the theater of football has been invested with great hopes.

Jules Rimet, a French veteran of World War I and the founder of the World Cup, envisioned an international tournament that would create communication and collaboration between nations, who could meet on the field of play rather than the field of battle. Others shared this vision. In 1938 a journalist in France wrote that the competition could "civilize" conflicts and even help to solve "the great problem of our times, peace." Another suggested that it was possible to see the tournament as "a kind of active, living United Nations, inspired by a common idea and subjected to universal, formal rules accepted and respected by all." Football certainly didn't bring peace in the bloody decades that followed. But it has become a deeply powerful force in politics, a place where nations take shape in the form of eleven players on the field, and where the hopes of these nations are worked out on a green rectangle surrounded by white lines.[10]

"Soccer is never just soccer: it helps make wars and revolutions, and it fascinates mafias and dictators," writes Simon Kuper as he embarks on a journey that highlights the fusion of football and politics from Cameroon to Scotland. For Franklin Foer, meanwhile, football literally explains the world, helping us to understand the formation of identities and the complexities of globalization.[11] Football has many, often contradictory and even ambiguous effects, just as globalization does. As some walls come down, others go up. If some people move around the world more easily than ever, others are stopped at the border or forced into increasingly deadly attempts to cross it. In today's world football crosses and even seems to erase some barriers. At the same time it also helps to deepen and sometimes even create differences and barriers. What makes the sport particularly powerful, though, is its unpredictability, the space for maneuver and improvisation it allows fans and players, many of whom, notably Zidane and Thuram, are many things at once, occupying shifting positions, taking on multiple affiliations, in the fields of both football and politics.

In his classic book on cricket in the West Indies, C. L. R. James famously described how sport is always much more than a game. The "social and political passions" of the islands in the early twentieth century, he wrote, were "fiercely" expressed through cricket. Indeed the sport was a kind of apprenticeship for the political activism to which James devoted much of his life: "Cricket had plunged me into politics long before I was aware of it. When I did turn to politics I did not have too much to learn." "Apolitical sport does not exist," the scholar Youssef Fatès has argued more recently. Athletes who compete internationally are told, with justification, that they are "ambassadors for their country," and often that they represent a certain "economic

or social system" as well. "The ceremony of sport, with its raising of colors, the resounding of national anthems," is "a condensation of politics," in which "athletes become true living flags." Writing about the 2008 Olympics in the *New Yorker,* Anthony Lane put the point more succinctly, describing the "attempt to keep politics out of sport" as being "as futile as trying to keep the sweat out of sex."[12]

In fact in many places, notably France, the nation exists as a widely shared and performed symbolic form only thanks to international football games. As in neighboring Germany, nationalist symbols in France are relatively rare and even regarded with justifiable suspicion by many citizens. But football unleashes an effusion of body painting, flag waving and draping, anthem singing, and general celebration. Football has produced the most significant moments of national unity and public celebration in France during the past decades. Precisely for this reason the commentary and celebration that surround football have delved deep into the question of what France is, what it has been, and what it can become.[13]

France's national football teams have, since at least the 1920s, consistently been diverse. All of the national teams' great leaders have been the children or grandchildren of immigrants. Three legendary players led the team through its best periods: Raymond Kopa, the son of Polish immigrants, in the 1950s; Michel Platini, grandson of an Italian immigrant, in the 1980s; and Zinedine Zidane, the son of Algerian colonial migrants, in the 1990s and in 2006. These three men embody the history of immigration into France, recalling the vast migration of Polish workers to the mines of northern France before World War II, the arrival of Italian workers throughout the twentieth century, and the large-scale migration of North Africans that began with individual male laborers in the 1920s and then accelerated, and increasingly involved entire families, from the 1950s through the 1970s. The national football team has served as a reminder of an aspect of French history that has sometimes been conveniently forgotten: France is a nation deeply marked by immigration, a nation in which, according to the historian Gérard Noiriel, fully one-third of those living there in the 1980s had at least one parent or grandparent born abroad.[14]

But if French football has been shaped by migration, it also has its roots firmly planted in the history of empire. In Guadeloupe and Martinique, Algeria and Tunisia, Senegal and the Pacific islands of New Caledonia, poli-

tics infused football throughout the twentieth century. Kopa's generation included several players from French colonies in North Africa, including the Algerian Rachid Mekloufi, and Platini played with the Guadeloupean defender Marius Trésor and the Mali-born Jean Tigana. One of the earliest French football stars, who played on the French team in the late 1930s and 1940s, was the Moroccan-born Larbi Ben Barek. And at the 1938 World Cup a man named Raoul Diagne, the son of the well-known Senegalese politician Blaise Diagne, played for France.

The presence of players of immigrant or colonial background sometimes spurred discussion. Were these players truly French? Could they truly represent the nation? Until 1998, however, no French team ever won the World Cup. With victory in that year, the stories of individual players, and their families and communities, became the story of a nation redeemed and reawakened. And because of who Thuram and Zidane were, that national story was inescapably shot through with the story of empire.

The team powerfully announced an often overlooked truth about the French republic: that its history and institutions have been, from the beginning, deeply shaped not just by the project of empire but by how the subjects of empire responded to, confronted, and remade that republic. Republican France has always been what one scholar dubbed an "imperial nation-state." Territory, population, and state have never lined up neatly. Instead overlapping legalities and political formations defined by a series of contradictions, as well as by movement within and across borders, have shaped and continue to shape French politics and culture.[15]

The far-right Front National led by Jean-Marie Le Pen, and many of its sympathizers, claims that the uncomfortable legacies of empire can be expunged from France. Immigrants from former colonies can be either deported or made to carry the full burden of integrating themselves into French society. The past can be massaged, colonialism presented as something that might have involved blood and conquest but that also had a "positive role," in the words of the legislators who passed a 2005 law regarding the teaching of colonial history in schools. Though such revisionist attempts represent an extreme and do not go uncontested—the 2005 law was widely criticized and ultimately abrogated by President Chirac—they are aided and abetted by the fact that in school and university curricula the history of empire is usually presented as a relatively minor sideshow in the broader history of France rather than as one of its constitutive elements.

But it is too late to imagine a French republic free from empire. It has been too late for a long time. It was already too late by the early twentieth century,

when the French Empire stretched from the Caribbean and Africa to India and Vietnam. It was too late in the 1830s, when a French invasion of Algeria laid the foundation for tight economic and political links between the two regions. It was too late by the 1700s, when France's economy boomed thanks to the sugar and coffee produced by over a million African slaves brought to their Caribbean colonies on French ships. For four hundred years France has been an empire, and this history made France what it is today. In London in the 1980s some migrants from former British colonies in the Caribbean responded to racist attacks with a powerful slogan: "We are here because you were there." Immigrants and their descendants in France can say the same thing.

Through nearly four hundred years of interaction the colonies and their populations left a durable imprint on France. You can see it in the background of some of France's most cherished figures: Alexandre Dumas was the grandson of a Caribbean slave, Edith Piaf was the granddaughter of an Algerian woman, and Albert Camus was born into a settler family in Algeria. You can see its traces on the history of France's economy, expanded thanks to slavery and the slave trade in the eighteenth century, and in the course of its wars, which for nearly three centuries have involved disputes over colonial territories and have been shaped by the contributions and sacrifice of troops recruited in the colonies. And you can see it play itself out every day on the streets in the racial stereotypes and suspicions that permeate French society.

This colonial history also shaped the very values and ideas that most French people believe make up the core of their identity, and that many accuse immigrants of threatening. From the eighteenth century on, the radical universalism and egalitarianism that most French people rightly take pride in were shaped in important ways by the actions and ideas of colonial subjects. The colonized consistently fought against the exclusion and oppression they experienced by wielding and sharpening the most powerful tools available to them: the republican political ideas touted by the French state. In the eighteenth century intellectuals and revolutionaries in Paris spoke and wrote about the natural rights shared by all human beings; African slaves in the French Caribbean (most notably in Haiti) put those ideas to their most radical use when they insisted that they had rights too and successfully fought for and won their freedom. In the process they transformed the abstract universalism debated in Paris salons into a robust and dangerous political weapon. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries colonial subjects, often in collaboration with radical French activists and intellectuals, broadened and concretized republican ideas.[16]

Sport, and particularly football, played a crucial role in shaping this larger political reality. While many colonial administrators saw football as a vehicle for inculcating the colonized with the values of European civilization, in many colonies, particularly in the Caribbean and Algeria, it rapidly became a powerful vehicle for individual and community expression, as well as for demands for equality and justice. This contrasts intriguingly with the parallel history of race, racism, and sport in the United States, where athletes like Jackie Robinson challenged the segregation of sport. By overcoming segregation such athletes also challenged the broader social order, opening the way for other challenges to the system. In France sport was never officially segregated, though in practice in many colonies there was de facto segregation in that most teams drew only from one particular social group. But in many colonies there were some teams in which people of different backgrounds mixed together, and since the 1930s France's national football teams have consistently included black and North African players, which for several decades distinguished them from other European teams. These athletes, often beloved and celebrated, have performed in the midst of a larger situation defined by exclusion, violence, and repression, limited opportunities for political representation, and the constant struggle to think and act against the brutality of colonialism. The story of the empire of French football condenses and illuminates the complexities and ironies of French colonialism. But it is also the story of how athletes used the equality and freedom of playing, and winning, on the football field to confront the inequalities and injustices of the system in which they lived.

To tell this story, I begin by exploring the history of football in the French Empire before turning to the intertwined stories of Thuram and Zidane and of their road to victory in 1998. We first follow the story of Thuram, on his way to a remarkable moment on the football field during the semifinal game of the 1998 World Cup, and then the story of Zidane, who sealed the victory that year. The second half of the book is the story of what happened after 1998: of the disappointed hopes, conflicts on the football field, of Zidane's last gesture on the field in 2006 and what it came to mean in France and beyond.

The biographies of Zidane and Thuram are woven through the book. Teammates on the field, the two have played very different social and political roles off it. They have both been in the media spotlight constantly and been tapped for endorsement deals, and they have both navigated the complexities of a professional football world in which players are often pawns and careers can be made and unmade with striking rapidity. But they have also

FIGURE 2. Thuram, right, and Claude Makelele, center, congratulate a pensive Zidane after he scored a penalty kick against Portugal during the semifinal of the 2006 World Cup. Pascal Pavani/AFP/Getty Images.

been highly politicized figures. Especially since 2005 Thuram has embraced this role and become a prominent public intellectual in France, speaking out against racism within football and in the broader society, supporting and participating in cultural efforts aimed at increasing knowledge and understanding of the history of slavery and colonialism in France, and taking on powerful government figures, such as Nicolas Sarkozy, who was elected president in 2007. Zidane has cultivated and profited from many celebrity endorsement deals, but has been more laconic in his political statements and has worked hard to avoid certain kinds of personal exposure. Some have criticized him for not being more openly political. But, perhaps in spite of himself, Zidane's actions on the field, and his occasional statements off it, have been a catalyst for political debate, especially during and after the 2006 World Cup. "Zidane *is* political," notes one scholar, "because his persona

FIGURE 3. Thuram, far left, and Zidane, center, accompanied by teammates, take flight in celebration after defeating Spain in the 2006 World Cup. A. Bibard © Maxppp, Panoramic, Action Press/ZUMA.

represents so many conflicting identities. His image is politicized, whether he does anything about it or not. His every action takes place on a minefield of identity and memory." "If Zidane fascinates us so," writes another, it is because throughout his career, simply through his presence in the games he played, "he made sport into something other than sport."[17]

Though much of the difference between the two players is certainly a difference in personality, how they have been perceived and how they have responded to these perceptions have been shaped by their family histories. These histories link them to two very different colonial experiences. Thuram comes from the Antilles, which have been French colonies since 1635 and whose residents are French citizens. He is part of a long tradition of political activism in the French Antilles, which has insisted that the promises of French universalism be fulfilled by ending discrimination and creating a truly egalitarian society.

Zidane's inheritance is quite different. The wounds left by the Algerian war run deep in French society, and the children and grandchildren of Algerian (as well as Tunisian and Moroccan) immigrants are the most stigmatized of all French citizens. Few have ever lived in North Africa, yet they are still

seen as a group apart. For many among them Zidane's stardom was a vindication. Some dared hope it would convince the white majority that, rather than being dangerous outsiders, they are an indispensable part of French society. Zidane has been made to carry the uncomfortable burden of challenging deep-seated, ongoing racism in French society. Reasonably enough, this never seemed to be a burden he really wished to carry, and while in the spotlight he worked hard to maintain his privacy, even silence. In contrast to Thuram, he rarely spoke out publicly about politics. What he did want to do—and what he did consistently do—was to awe and entertain his fans by a kind of playing that was smooth, at times euphoric, and often surprising. He played by the rules, most of the time, but like most great football players also learned how to bend the rules, to dribble around and through them. Throughout his storied career he also repeatedly broke the rules, striking out against other players as he did on his final day on the field.

"Who came up with these rules?" Many an offside forward, yellow-carded defender, or infuriated fan has asked the question. The answer—those English public school boys!—isn't much of a consolation. People all over the world have kicked or knocked balls around for millennia, with varying degrees of organization involved. The oldest written rules for a ball game come from China, where they played a game "with two teams on a market pitch with goals at the two ends." Across the Pacific in ancient Mesoamerica, civic and religious events often centered on elaborate ball games, in which players couldn't touch the rubber ball with their hands, using their hips, shoulders, feet, and head instead. In Renaissance Italy a rough and physical ball game called *calcio* was played in the plazas of Florence.[18]

The immediate ancestors of today's football are the muddy and sometimes brutal ball games played in English towns starting in the Middle Ages, and perhaps before. Players in these games tackled and kicked each other, aiming the ball at a goal placed anywhere from across the plaza to the other side of town. Authorities regularly outlawed the games, seeing them as "an ill-defined contest between indeterminate crowds of youths, often played in a riotous fashion," that "produced uproar and damage to property" while "attracting to the fray anyone with an inclination to violence." Many people still feel the same way about football. But then, as now, it was futile to try to stop the games. The orders to stop playing kept coming over the cen-

turies, but it doesn't appear that people ever paid much attention. In the eighteenth century the game was sometimes considered not just a public nuisance but a threat to the social order. Football provided a gathering place for unruly apprentices who enjoyed spending the time away from their masters' control. In 1764 the game was put to direct political use when locals in Northamptonshire, angry at the government's enclosure and privatization of previously commonly owned land, organized a game on the land. "The message was clear and the outcome predictable. Within moments of kick-off, the football match degenerated into an overtly political mob which tore up and burned the enclosure fences."[19]

These games had about as many different rules as there were towns in which they were played. But in the nineteenth century ball games increasingly found a new home in the public schools of England (the equivalent of prestigious private schools in the United States), where teachers and administrators considered them an ideal way of channeling the energy and hostility of their students into something organized and contained, even educational. The rules initially varied from school to school, but by the mid-nineteenth century a common set of regulations began to emerge. In 1863 a group of men hailing from different public schools met at Cambridge and produced what became known as the "Cambridge Rules." A few days later, at Freemason's Tavern in London, representatives of several football clubs met and formed the Football Association. In meetings over the next months these representatives hashed out a set of common rules for the game. Although these rules still allowed limited handling of the ball, they privileged a dribbling game and also banned "hacking," or kicking opponents. This chagrined one representative, who complained that eliminating hacking would "do away with the courage and the pluck of the game." Worse, he threatened, "Frenchmen . . . would beat you in a week's practice."[20]

Conflicts over the rules led to the withdrawal of one representative and ultimately the creation of the rival Rugby code, which thrived throughout England and also took root in North America, where it was the foundation for the development of American football. But the Cambridge Rules created in 1863 became the core of "Association football." The rules continued to evolve over time. But the basic structure of this remarkably resilient form of play was firmly in place in England by the last decades of the nineteenth century, to spread from there along the sinews of British formal and informal empire, as well as through war, migration, and the seemingly unstoppable volition of football itself. The inexhaustible human appetite for playing

with bouncing and flying balls had found a specific form that would spread throughout the globe with startling rapidity.[21]

The fact that football has become humanity's most popular sport might be seen as further proof—if any such proof is needed—of our basic perversity as a species. A major triumph of human evolution, after all, is the ability to grab things with our opposable thumbs as we stand upright. But our most popular game forces us to use our poorly controlled feet to move a ball around a field. Of course, that may be precisely why we like it so much. The sport exposes and perhaps pushes at the limits of our evolutionary abilities. In a June 2006 report on a recent scientific study of football a scientist noted wryly, "For a whole month from June 9 of this year all civilized activity and conversation will be silenced by the quadrennial competition for association football's World Cup," an event in which "32 national teams will try to slot an air-filled plastic sphere through a rectangle measuring 2.4 by 7.2m. . . . This is not as easy as it sounds," the scientist noted, pointing out that frequently teams fail to score at all. One useful technique for actually getting the ball into the net is the "banana kick," by which a player kicks an arcing ball whose trajectory is very difficult for the goalie to read. Stars such as Ronaldinho and David Beckham have used the banana kick to devastating effect, for, according to the study, "the natural environment provides no reason for human perception to have developed [the skill of handling] fast-spinning objects with unpredictable trajectories." As a goalie for a club team in Algeria, where he grew up, the writer Albert Camus "learned right away that a ball never arrives from the direction you expected it." Sometimes you can do something about it, sometimes you can't. So it goes, unfortunately, for goalies.[22]

The Englishmen who codified football saw it as a civilizing activity that could channel the energy of youth into a pastime that taught them the virtues of fair play, respect, and acceptance of the rule of law in the form of the referee. Camus insisted that "what [he knew] most surely about morality and the duty of man" he had learned playing football in Algeria, and many others would agree with him.[23]

Despite the intentions of the rule makers, part of the attraction of football was that it was a place where hierarchies could be challenged, even broken, because—at least in principle—it didn't matter who you were or where you came from, as long as you could play. Like other sports, football can be seen as a beautiful condensation of the ideology of meritocratic egalitarianism

that is a fundamental part of liberal democracy. "Just as suffrage is based on the formal equality of those who vote, no matter their social condition," writes one historian, "modern sport is founded on the identity between individuals denuded, during the time of the competition, of the characteristics of their social being." Boosters of the sport, and those who represent its durable national and international institutions, often go further, seeing football as not just an embodiment of democratic ideals but as an ideal environment in which young people learn the values that constitute responsible democratic citizenship. The idea that football and other sports can be a socially progressive civic force has been particularly popular in France, where many government officials have sought to rein in the movement to privatize teams, and where the state has traditionally invested more heavily than other European states in public sports infrastructure.[24]

There is, of course, one categorical limit to how well a football team in the World Cup can represent a nation: all the players are men. There are many prominent female athletes in international competition, notably in tennis and track, and women's football—including the women's World Cup competition started in 1991 by F.I.F.A.—is increasingly popular. But when people talk about the World Cup it is generally understood that they are talking about the *men's* World Cup, unless they specify otherwise. The audiences for the men's World Cup do include a large number of women, unlike audiences for professional football, which are overwhelmingly male. But the fact that women are excluded from the teams that are the most popular and fervently supported athletic representatives for their nations reinforces their broader symbolic and political exclusion.[25]

Many contemporary critics, meanwhile, argue that sports mainly celebrate and reify individualism and commodification, and that their major social role today is not to serve any greater good but simply to serve the interests of corporations by encouraging the consumption of sports media and the ever-expanding pile of sports paraphernalia on sale throughout the world. For the French philosopher Robert Redeker, sport represents the death of progressive politics, and football fandom is an abyss into which all hope for community, humanity, and political mobilization vanishes. Wherever there is sport, Redeker declares, "nothing civilized can grow again." The media, multinational corporations peddling sportswear, and owners of teams all conspire in killing our political imagination, so that sport becomes the only metaphor for life and capitalism the only life we can imagine. "Sport erases the past, history, the future, political projects," he declares, and is the "author of a devastation of existence."[26]

Though particularly vehement, Redeker's arguments are just a recent twist on a long and often powerful tradition of criticism. For much of the twentieth century many intellectuals have considered sport a form of leisure and recreation unworthy of serious consideration. Sport has been presented as a form of "bread and circus" to placate and distract the population or as a vehicle for fascistic populism, a tool dangerously useful to dictators and demagogues like Hitler and Mussolini. "Trotsky had said that the workers were deflected from politics by sports," writes C. L. R. James, although based on his experience in the Caribbean he found the claim unconvincing. "With my past I simply could not accept that."[27]

There is no doubt that capital suffuses and in many ways commands today's sports culture and that football has repeatedly been mobilized by fascist and authoritarian populism. But, as I show in the following chapters, it has also been mobilized for very different ends. Today football fans, players, and managers are about as varied in their political perspectives as the population of the world is. They also are quite aware, and often apt critics, of the corruption, ugliness, and cynicism that exists in the athletic world. Given both the tremendous reach of football and the diversity of its fans, those who dismiss the sport or consider it of only marginal political importance risk sounding like what Edouardo Galeano has described as "ideologues who love humanity but can't stand people." James responded similarly, decades earlier, to a "professor of political science [who] publicly bewailed that any man of [James's] known political interests should believe that cricket had ethical and social values." "I had no wish to answer," James writes. "I was just sorry for the guy."[28]

In fact, as Grant Farred shows, football spurs many people's political imagination, anchoring them in a political geography that spans long distances and creating complex affinities and commitments. Describing his attachment to FC Barcelona, for decades a symbol of Catalan national pride and therefore resistance to Franco's centralizing authority in Spain, he defines football fandom as "an absolutist, deeply political commitment." Football, Farred writes, "makes political conflicts accessible" and "animates them for you as a fan and a political animal." The sport is "foundational, if not singular, in its ability to move you to take sides in a long-standing political animosity." This is in part because of its role in political and geographical pedagogy. Sport, particularly football, is perhaps the most effective teacher of world geography, a continual lesson about the existence of far-off lands with unfamiliar names and interesting flags, about the surnames of people who come

from there. Farred writes, "[Football] engendered in me the need to know about other places, other histories, other forms of violence and oppression."[29]

Football's political power lies largely in its ability to condense and channel feelings of belonging, loyalty, and commitment. Of course football is not always linked explicitly to politics. Much of the time it is a social activity, and fans' team loyalties don't take on any larger political meaning. Even in such contexts, though, local sporting institutions, which have often been at least formally structured by democratic principles, continue to shape civic life in important ways; at the national level state representatives and policymakers have invested in sports education, often aimed at improving performance in international competitions. The intensity of involvement and feeling that football often evokes exerts a seemingly irresistible pull on political actors, who recognize that the game creates the conditions of possibility for later political mobilization. In times of crisis or change, through the action of fans, managers, or players, teams can be transformed into political symbols.

When football and politics do directly link up, they do so in ways that are nearly as varied as the many contexts in which football is played. Sometimes football can become a proxy in a larger political conflict between neighborhoods, towns, regions, or states, channeling but not altering larger political circumstances. And yet the story is frequently more complicated than that. Political actors instrumentalize football at their peril, since what happens on the football field is dangerously unpredictable. It is not just that teams can lose as often as they win, dragging down the political symbols they are burdened with as easily as they elevate them. What happens on the field has a certain autonomy, as do the players who create beauty or ugliness on the field. The story that follows is about a place and a time in which football has escaped the political certainties that surrounded it. The players who made up the French team, particularly Zidane and Thuram, revealed and illuminated realities of France's history, and its present, that otherwise have remained concealed, forcing a public discussion of and confrontation with the issues that will crucially define the future of France: the question of empire, the meaning of race, and the role of migration. The players didn't—they couldn't—resolve these issues, but they helped to force them into the public sphere, constituting a political discussion and therefore helping to shape political reality. In the past decades European football has often been in the news because of the actions of violent and racist fans. But if football has been turned to ugly and xenophobic ends, it can also be, as I show in the pages that follow, a powerful forum for imagining and enacting political alternatives.

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As an eight-year-old I watched the legendary 1980 Olympic hockey game between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. with my heart pounding. It was thrilling to feel that the entire population of the United States was watching an international sports event, waiting for the seconds to count down to seal an unexpected and signal victory. It was the last time I can remember feeling that way in this country. Cities and college towns might rise up in celebration, and sometimes riot, after a team's victory, but these are local celebrations, not national ones. A vast majority of Americans might tune in to the World Series or the Super Bowl, but they do so divided, with many viewers agnostic about the outcome. The Olympics sometimes galvanize viewers, but in general the competitions are cumulative and dispersed; although the fate of one athlete hangs in the balance of one run, dive, or performance, the fate of the entire nation never does. Soccer is not important enough in the United States to make our appearances in the World Cup the cause for mass mobilization, and the international competitions surrounding the sports that are more popular here are simply nowhere near as global as the World Cup.

In 1998 I was captivated by the victories of the French team, and by the way those victories mobilized and challenged French society. But I long assumed that the kind of spontaneous, national street celebrations that shook France in 1998 and 2006 simply could never happen in the U.S. But just as I was finishing this book, on 4 November 2008 Americans throughout the country poured out into the streets to celebrate the election of Barack Obama, waving flags and posters and singing the national anthem at full voice into the night. Celebrants danced in front of the White House, taunting the current resident, and throughout the country—even in normally sleepy downtown Durham, North Carolina, where I live—they honked horns as they paraded through the streets and hugged and slapped hands with strangers. Certainly not everyone was celebrating. But the scope of the celebrations, which took place throughout the country and in many parts of the world, was startling. The election, like a World Cup competition, was a truly global event, with people from Paris to Kenya keeping vigil throughout the night, waiting for the result, exploding in celebration when it was announced. At the beginning of election night, I thought the evening might turn out to be *almost* as stressful as watching France play in a crucial World Cup game. In the end it turned out to be even more stressful, something I never thought possible. The half hour between 10:30 and 11:00, when the election was finally called, felt

like a never-ending game in which your team is ahead but you can't breathe until the referee blows the final whistle.

Sports and politics both thrive on hope, and both consist largely of disappointment. In many democracies, at least those where voting is a well-established ritual, many voters go to the polls with some weariness, casting a ballot for a candidate they know will probably lose, just as fans returning to watch a team on a losing streak still show up and cheer. Fans also often feel helpless in the face of the mistakes, bad luck, and sometimes the outright stupidity of managers, coaches, and players of the teams they love. Still, they keep returning, hoping that their presence and their prayers might make a difference, just as voters aware of the political corruption and the limits of democracy nevertheless keep returning to the polls. Sport and politics have in common a belief among the faithful that even when in practice the game or the government seems hopelessly corrupted, the form itself remains pure, worth preserving, a potential source of redemption. They are both driven by a hope for victory and the knowledge that one victory can stand in for many defeats.

Football has a ritual structure, made up of events that recur with tedious consistency. The games and rivalries seem endless, each confrontation the sequel to a previous one and the prelude to another. Yet within this fixed structure football games open up incredible spaces of mass mobilization, public fervor, and hope. They give spectators the rare feeling of being "exactly at the right place at the right time" and "at the centre of the whole world," writes Nick Hornby. "When else does that happen in life?" Despite all the disappointments created by losses, tedious games, and the corruption and ugliness that often infuse the sport, each game begins with a surge of promise and possibility. "Always, at the start of each match, the excitement, often the only moment of excitement, that this might be the ONE match," writes the novelist B. S. Johnson, the one "where the extraordinary happens," the game "one remembers and talks about for years afterwards, the rest of one's life."[30]

At their best, football matches condense and sometimes seem to stop time. They streak across it, creating connections between past, present, and future. No game is "temporally hermetic," writes Grant Farred. It is always "crowded by the past (previous victories, the memories of excruciating losses)" as well as by the future. Fans know that games are unpredictable and victories fleeting, yet many experience them as though they are irreducibly and eternally significant. Football may be a curious and arbitrary construction, but it is an inescapable one, as real as any government or church.[31]

C. L. R. James described sport as a particularly powerful "mode of appre-

hending the world, history and society." That is, in part, the foundation of its political power. But if it mobilizes people so dramatically, it is also because of the incredible joy that it can produce. The experience of communion around sport, whether in defeat or celebration, mourning or ecstasy, literally constitutes a community. That community is often evanescent, with little power to produce any effect outside itself. Sometimes it channels and even deepens xenophobia and exclusivist nationalism. But it can also push people to imagine alternatives, to alter their vision of themselves and the communities they are a part of. If sport is politics it also creates a sphere in which a different imagination of community, of the foundation for politics, is possible. And if that is possible, it is ultimately because of the beauty that, amid all the ugliness that also haunts the football field, sometimes shines on this deadly serious site of play, "a beauty that has no desire to destroy us," but only to "bring light to our lives." Asked in 2006 "What is football?," Lilian Thuram answered, "It is the language of happiness."[32]