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Laurent Dubois. *Soccer Empire: The World Cup and the Future of France.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010. xx + 329 pp. $27.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-520-25928-7.

Paul A. Silverstein. *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004. x + 298 pp. $23.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-253-21712-7; $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-34451-9.

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Global France, Plural France

The word shared in the titles of these two books is "France," but that word can mean many different things. In Laurent Dubois's recent and highly readable book *Soccer Empire*, "France" is the mass-merchandised brand of *Les Bleus*, the French national football team. At the same time "France" is a far more fragmented territorial sovereignty scattered from the Caribbean to the Pacific. This is a *France métissée,* a product of multiple crossings, both slave and free. The France of Paul Silverstein's close participant-observation of Algerians in Paris, is both France and Algeria at once, perpetuating in underground ways the coerced and ruptured connections that bound these territories together for more than a century. It is also a France of multiple transversal identifications that challenge the postcolonial French and Algerian nation-states from within. What these two books show, then, is that France must be understood in a plural sense. Too many English-speaking observers–whether neoconservative France-haters or multiculturalist critics of the "republican" model–have fallen into the trap of projecting a unitary vision of France, a France stripped of its messiness, its ambiguities, its contradictions. These two authors–following on from seminal works by Tyler Stovall, Gary Wilder, and others–represent a different and refreshing trend, one which deserves the full attention of all serious students of contemporary France, colonialism and postcolonial theory.[1]

What these books share is a wholehearted commitment to the people who live in this plural France, a determination to tell their individual stories in all their complexity, and to build from that base toward a wider analysis of French society, its structures, and challenges. Silverstein approaches his subjects through the medium of everyday life, following the random individuals encountered in his field work in the 1990s, applying an ethnographical methodology with a highly critical and self-reflexive awareness of the environment he shared with them. As much an outsider as those he studied, Silverstein is able to strip away many of the preconceptions of French and even of Algerian observers: he does not present this space as a "problem" of integration or of political loyalties, but as a space in its own right, as he aptly frames it, a "transpolitical" space.

The names that pepper Dubois's story are much more glamorous: Zinadine Zidane, Lilian Thuram, Thierry Henry. These are names familiar to anyone with the remotest interest in football, but Dubois uses their compelling rags-to-riches stories to illuminate a raft of other less prestigious players and teams, along with their families, their neighbors, and the histories from which they emerged. *Soccer Empire* is above all the story of the French team, not a sociological analysis of the sport itself. Indeed, in many ways it is an unashamed paean to that team, to its diversity, its strength, and its skill. It is a celebration of the extraordinary moments of possibility that football seemed to open up in the World Cup of 1998 and again in 2006, moments that few observers of France could afford to ignore.

The triumph of the French soccer team against Brazil in 1998, on the home turf and in front of a jubilant crowd, is the only World Cup France has ever won in the eighty-year history of the competition, a triumph sealed by winning the European Cup two years later. This victory is the central tableau of Dubois's book, and he insists that it must be understood as a key event in modern French history. For the crowds pouring onto the streets, more numerous even than those who welcomed the Liberation of 1944, it certainly seemed so. There is little doubt that this moment brought the diversity of the French population into the spotlight in a way that nothing else had done before. A few churlish xenophobes complained that the team was not "really French," but Dubois makes a convincing case that the victory changed many people's understanding of what that "real" France could be.

Sport can be discomforting to the historian because of the role that pure chance plays in its outcomes. In this instance it seems possible that a random case of food-poisoning sealed Brazil's fate and allowed the *black-blanc-beur* (black-white-Arab) French team to win. Would a French loss have changed the understanding of diversity in the long term? As historians we try to analyze the processes at work across apparently random events, and Dubois certainly marshals a vast range of references to contextualize the responses to that victory. It is important to recognize, however, that in the case of sport it is precisely the sense of play, of luck, of miracle even, that defines its attraction. In that sense, sport must inevitably explode from within our best attempts to contain it within a rational, historical explanation. One of the great strengths of Dubois's book is how fully he gives rein to this other passion, how vividly he brings to life in his writing the roller coaster emotions of exhilaration and despondency. That intimacy and involvement might seem to place into question its historiographical "objectivity"–but Dubois is very clear what kind of a book this is, and it deserves to be understood both as a great football book, and as an experiment in a new kind of *histoire engagée.*

In Dubois's hands, the story of the French national soccer team is much more than just a canvas for the great sporting moments of exaltation and despair: it opens a space for exploring some of the more shadowy aspects of French colonial and postcolonial history. His early chapters investigate the ambivalent insertion of sport in the fabric of colonial society–as a "safe" activity to occupy colonial workers as their working hours were gradually reduced, or as the terrain for the rising resentments of the colonized, which would eventually explode into years of violence and repression. These conflicts are never black and white, although race and color play a powerful role in their development. Between colonizer and colonized are a panoply of other contradictory figures–the black colonial governor who fought against Vichy; *harkis* who fought for the French in Algeria; Kanak New Caledonians traumatized by their experience in a Parisian "human zoo," Algerian Jews playing on Muslim teams to make up "European" quotas. Football is a thread that connects the lives of these people in tangled ways, dispelling any sense that there is any simple "national" story to be told.

Dubois–an eminent historian of the Haitian Revolution–never succumbs to the temptation to simplify these concatenating realities. In giving historical shape to this diversity, he shows how deeply rooted in French history the ethnic and religious plurality of the French team of 1998 actually was, with its white convert to Islam, its Antillean players of various backgrounds, its French Arabs and Berbers and Basques and Africans. One group not represented in the team, of course, is the other half of the population: women's sport has never been given the same recognition as the games of men. But women are neither absent nor passive in this story: they can be formative influences, like Thuram's charismatic grandmother; agents of political action, like the young woman who led the pitch-invasion during the Algeria-France match of 2001; or international athletes in their own right, like the track star Marie-José Péréc. This rich multiplicity is a both an advantage and a disadvantage of *Soccer Empire*–the rollicking story allows ample space for all these elements to coexist, but they are never quite pulled together into an overarching argument.

Algeria in France provides a more tightly analytical framework: Silverstein is acutely conscious of the powerful genealogy of anthropological knowledge about Algeria, and in particular the Kabyle household (*axxam*) which played a crucial role in the ethnological theory of Pierre Bourdieu. Silverstein both challenges and renews these ideas, reconsidering Bourdieu's "structural nostalgia" in the context of populations displaced during the Algerian War, and resituating questions of space and spatializing practice in the urban suburbs of Paris. He emphasizes the ways in which ethnicity was shaped and even produced by larger historical events, and then maps these formations of identity back into the everyday lives of individuals and groups in France. He shows very effectively how these formations have become as French as they are Algerian, articulating themselves increasingly alongside Breton, Catalan, and Basque regionalisms, ex-

tending solidarity to other Berberophone populations in North Africa, while seeking shelter under the transnational umbrella of the European Union on questions such as human rights.

Such transformations are part of the phenomenon that Silverstein identifies as "transpolitics"–an increasingly deterritorialized set of claims and contestations that no longer take as their ground a single nation-state–in this case France or Algeria. Yet in drawing upon these powerful genealogies for his analysis, at times the inherited ethnographical focus seems to inflect his argument away from the wider implications of "transpolitics." From the title of his doctoral thesis and earlier publications, it seems that Silverstein's original fieldwork was devoted to the question of "Berberity" rather than to "Algeria": and for this reason all of his subjects were Kabyle (a term for Tamazight-speaking eastern Algerians, with an indigenous/Berber identification), some of them activists in enforced exile in France.

Both Dubois and Silverstein make reference to Zinedine Zidane, a French citizen born in Marseille of Algerian parents, who takes great pride in his identification as a Kabyle. But, as Dubois notes, at other moments Zidane has spoken of himself as an "Arab" in terms of his wider cultural attachment. This "Arab" question is almost entirely absent from Silverstein's study, and with it the majority of Algerians, whether in Algeria or France, who identify themselves primarily as Arabs. Of course, many Kabyles consider themselves wholly distinct from any Arab identification, and reject the "Arabization"–sometimes extremely violent–enforced by the Algerian state. But to project "Algeria in France" solely through the prism of Berber nationalism is problematic. Dubois, in contrast, brings a much more volatile and plural set of identifications in the Antilles to bear on his discussion of these Algerian configurations, and this external gaze allows some of these complexities to appear in ways that Algerian nationalisms, whether Arab or Kabyle, may not.

Despite this limitation, *Algeria in France* is a critical work in opening up a broader consideration of the complex set of identifications running between France, Algeria, and the wider Arab and Muslim world. That world today includes large diasporic populations across Europe, the Americas, and Australasia, and new factors such as the independent Arab media (Al Jazeera, al-Arabiyya) and the blogosphere. Silverstein's analysis of "transpolitics" is more relevant than ever in regard to the recent wave of democratic revolutions sweeping across the Arab world, and in understanding their implications for the future of France: his book should be required reading for addressing these new global conditions.

But the real change effected by these revolutions confronts us with a question. Does sport really offer a path to a new politics? Dubois is very clear in presenting football as a kind of vanguard and model for political change, arguing that "the mass communion that took place in the streets in 1998, liberating many from the shackles of their own uncertainty about their place in French society, should serve as a charter for a different way of being French" (p. 169). But for others, sport is no more than a distraction, or, worse, a substitute for political change. Silverstein expresses such doubts in his book, seeing football instead as a colonial instrument and an expression of multinational corporate interests. In a 2000 article on soccer he argued that "the celebratory discourse of multiculturalism in the wake of the World Cup victory was itself largely predicated on the active suppression of certain kinds of cultural and religious difference deemed incompatible or dangerous to the French nation."[2] Dubois shows that some French footballers–notably Lilian Thuram–have engaged in political activism, speaking out with great force and clarity, and shaping the debate in important ways. But this highly articulate use of celebrity has not opened the way to increased diversity in the ranks of government, industry, or the media in France. Both Silverstein and Dubois struggle to see a way forward out of the trap of tokenism, with varying degrees of optimism about the future.

These divergent viewpoints come together again in considering the "riots" of November 2005, triggered by the deaths of two young men in a Paris suburb after a chase by police. Those events came too late to be treated in Silverstein's book, but Dubois builds in many ways quite closely on Silverstein's subsequent writings on the subject.[3] What both writers recognize is that these events provoked an important act of protest by the inhabitants of the *banlieue* against deteriorating urban conditions–poor housing, unemployment, lack of infrastructure–but also against their exclusion from the wider French society. That exclusion was summed up in the contemptuous way that Nicolas Sarkozy, then minister of the interior, dismissed as *racaille* (scum) those who booed his arrival in a Paris housing project, offering to clean them out with a pressure-hose. Despite Dubois's unequivocal celebration of 1998, he does not pull his punches in describing the violence of 2005. Both writers see this three-week uprising as a turning point, and as a form of political protest rather than an "eruption" of violence as the French media so often portrayed it. But

six years on from those protests (and their lesser known sequels) it is not clear how much change has really taken place: indeed, recent indications suggest a surge in support for the xenophobic right as the economic downturn stretches on.

Dubois's book closes with the famous *coup de boule* that ended Zinadine Zidane's participation in the World Cup final of 2006, and marked the last act of his football career. At the heart of that event is a question–not just the unanswerable riddle of what the Italian player Marco Materazzi said to provoke Zidane into headbutting him in the chest, but the question of what political or historical significance we should attach to such an act. Unlike Thuram, Zidane long shied away from direct political involvement, preferring to keep his private life out of the public eye. But he found himself drawn nonetheless into the highly charged political relationships between France, Algeria, and what Silverstein calls "Algeria in France," most notably in organizing the "friendly" match between French and Algerian national teams in 2001. Intended to promote reconciliation, the match ended in a pitch-invasion by French Algerians when it became clear that France was heading for victory. In the hands of many French critics, that moment became a confirmation (only a month after the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington) that French citizens of "Arab" backgrounds had no intention of integrating into French society.

Zidane's 2006 gesture, however, elicited remarkably different responses. While expressing regret about the incident, many French observers, from President Chirac down, refused to pronounce judgment on the man himself, insisting instead on the nation's admiration and respect for Zidane as a great French player. Does this different response to a critical moment of loss and violence suggest a gradual transformation in the understanding of French identity and the role of diversity? Or is it an extension of the football exceptionalism that has allowed national fans to embrace individual players while rejecting their Arab and black neighbors? In the end, the great virtue of Dubois's book is in accepting that it is both, and in his vivid picture of his own struggle to comprehend this incident which seemed to bruise his own belief in the redemptive power of football. What Dubois and Silverstein show, with considerable panache, is that the historian and the anthropologist–not always in agreement, but in dialogue with one another–can engage in the fray itself, not just stand on the sidelines taking notes.

Notes

[1]. Tyler Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Press, 1996); Tyler Stovall and Sue Peabody, *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); and Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). See also John Bowen, *Can Islam be French? Pluralism and Pragmatism in a Secularist State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[2]. Paul Silverstein, "Sporting Faith Islam, Soccer, and the French Nation-State," *Social Text* 18 (2000): 42.

[3]. Paul Silverstein and Chantal Tetreault, "Postcolonial Urban Apartheid," online at `http://riotsfrance.ssrc.org/Silverstein_Tetreault/`.

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