

AmaXhosa Maradona: Life and death of soccer talent and youth “development” in rural South Africa



Presenter:
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AmaXhosa Maradona is a biographical snapshot of a young soccer player, Abongile Elton Qobisa, better known as ‘Maradona’. It is also a metaphor, which conveys admiration for soccer excellence of a particular generation of amaXhosa (literally: people of Xhosa ethnicity). Sixteen years old Maradona, from a rural Western Cape town, played as attacking midfielder for the Rawsonville Gunners Football Club. His becoming ‘Maradona’, his talent and ambitions, and the circumstances within which he plays soccer – all illuminate a section of social text as it unfolds for black youth in post-apartheid South Africa. Maradona’s life conditions are a product of colonial and apartheid history, in which his parents continue to carve out precarious livelihoods as “migrant” laborers. Soccer, for a long time, has served as a means for African labor ‘to cope with the dislocations of urbanisation and build vital alternative networks’ (Alegi 2004: 19). In contemporary times, soccer is promoted as a tool for “development” and socialization of youth. While the legacies of labor extraction policies continues to pose irreconcilable ethical questions about livelihood options and labor conditions in South Africa, “sports-for-development” discourses tend to absorb much of this complexity in claims to protect and deter youth from crime and violence through sports interventions. Navigating through the life and death of soccer talent and youth “development”, this paper reflects on what soccer does in the lives of past and present generations of working-class amaXhosa as they negotiate life-making.

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Venue: PLAAS Boardroom

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