

FAMILY MAN: OUT TO LUNCH WITH BELGIUM'S GREATEST GOALKEEPER

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None of FIFA's business

As football madness grips the planet, passion for the sport is nowhere greater than on the continent which is hosting the World Cup for the first time. There, far from floodlit stadiums, packed hotels and corporate wheeling and dealing, playing football is the spice of life and the stuff of dreams. A new book and a related exhibition of photographs show the indomitable spirit of grassroots footie across Africa

In 2009, Brussels-based British photographer Jessica Hilltout embarked independently on a nine-month, 20,000-kilometre journey through 10 countries in Africa's southern and western regions. "With me was a Hasselblad [camera] with one 80 mm lens, 300 rolls of film, a digital camera, my log book, a mini printer and a stock of new footballs, all packed into an old VW Beetle equipped with a roof rack, three spare tyres and two jerry cans," she writes in *Amen*, the book she has just published about her trip. Her self-assigned mission was to photograph 'authentic' football, the kind played for love, not money, all over the continent.

Along the way, she traded her stock of new factory-made footballs for 'tired' and hand-crafted ones, ending up with a collection of 35 used footballs. Most are made of recycled materials and are neither regulation size nor exactly round. Still, they work their magic. "It takes one football to bring a whole village together," Hilltout observes.

She had to win the confidence of her subjects to convince them that her focus was strength and resilience, not poverty. The degree to which she succeeded is apparent in her book's title, *Amen*. "That's what people would say to me when they said goodbye. It's an expression of agreement. They were wishing for the project's success."

A selection of Hilltout's photographs, together with excerpts from the book's texts (by Hilltout, Ian Brower and football writer David Goldblatt) appear here and on the next four pages.

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"Football is at home on grass but can be played with fearsome elegance on dust, dirt, tarmac and sand. It can be crammed into tiny urban spaces or spread out on a beach, such as this one, in Togo





34 photography

▶▶
Sani's ball, Anok e Stars
FC, Kumasi, Ghana;
far right: yarn ball,
Gondola, Mozambique





‘Six out of 10 African men wear football shirts on a daily basis’: Odwa’s jersey, Cape Town Stars FC, Kayelitsha, Cape Town, South Africa



‘Every village in Africa has one open-air temple with goalposts at opposite ends and devoted followers in the middle.’ Vento Inha vs Barcelona: Pacasse, Mozambique



Worldly cup: Etoile Brillante’s trophy, won against Treshville, Eburnie, Ivory Coast



Amen, an exhibition of 47 photographs from Hilltout’s football series, is on view at Le Botanique, 236 Rue Royale, Brussels, June 10 to July 18, Wednesday to Sunday, 12.00 to 20.00 (free admission), www.lebotanique.be

Amen, the book, is available in soft- and hardcover editions (208 pages, €20 and €50, respectively) from Club, Fnac, Filigrane and other bookshops in Brussels.

www.jessicahilltout.com

Hilltout’s photographs were printed by Philippe Rottier



Above, from left:
Aphelélé's ball,
Khayelitsha township,
Cape Town, South
Africa; stockingball,
Kayelitsha township,
Cape Town; plastic
bag and tree bark ball,
Chicome, Mozambique;
fist-sized ball, Fort
Dauphin, Tolagnaro,
Madagascar; Domingo's
ball, Chicome

Dressed for a match:
player for Ferroviário
FC, Beira, Mozambique

All eyes on the ball:
Benoi's team defends the
goal during a freekick,
Ouagadougou, Burkina
Faso



