



Introduction

Two Sports in Senegal

Je suis lutteur. I'm a wrestler. Apart from greetings, these were the words Modou,¹ a friend and neighbour of the family I was staying with, said to me when I first met him at the beach, just a few days after I had started my fieldwork in Senegal. I remember the words clearly, because they seemed so incongruous to me at the time. This short, barrel-chested young man in his early twenties did not look like the Senegalese wrestling behemoths I was familiar with from television and YouTube, so I was more than a little sceptical at first. For one thing, many of the other young men with us looked more like my idea of what a wrestler should be: tall, broad and athletic. Although I did not challenge Modou on his status as a wrestler, my face must have betrayed a trace of disbelief: he swiftly set about organizing a miniature wrestling tournament between the men present on the beach. First up was Cheikh, a young man with massive chest and arm muscles. Modou defeated him in a matter of moments with a well-timed *mbóot* – a common move that involves throwing one's opponent over an outstretched leg. He dispatched with relative ease two additional similarly tall and muscular contenders, only one managing to put up any semblance of a fight before submitting to defeat. Finally, it was my turn to be thrown on to the hot sand a few times, while the others stood around and laughed at my total failure to offer any resistance. I now understood that Modou's diminutive physique belied an impressive athletic potential.

As I got to know Modou over the following months, I learned more about his life and his wrestling career. He was 21 years old and lived with his parents, grandmother, sisters and young daughter in the suburb of Yeumbeul. His father was a baker but no longer worked regularly; Modou considered himself to be the primary breadwinner of the family. Since leaving school at 15, he had been involved in a variety of income-generating activities, including packing coal, making hair weaves, petty trade and other odd jobs. However, first and foremost he saw himself as a wrestler. He had been a licensed wrestler for three years and had won each of his four official combats in the discipline of

lutte avec frappe – wrestling with punches² – up until the time I met him. Modou's schedule was structured largely by the demands of his chosen sport, which required him to train on average twice a day; alone, at the gym with friends or together with his teammates at the *écurie* (wrestling association) of which he was a member. His self-professed dream was to become the *roi des arènes* – the king of the arenas, an unofficial title conferred upon the country's best wrestler at any given moment. However, he knew full well that this dream was out of his grasp. He was, quite simply, too small to join the elite group of VIP wrestlers who dominated the sport with their powerful physiques.

Around the same time I met Modou, I was introduced to Pape, a young man of around the same age. Like Modou, Pape was a friend of the family I was staying with. His late mother had been a close friend of one of the daughters of the house and good relations had been maintained after her death, even though he no longer lived close by. When my hosts discovered that I was interested in speaking to aspiring football players, Pape was swiftly summoned to the house to tell me about his burgeoning career. He was a member of the elite team at a renowned football school in Dakar, and his aim was to play in Europe – or at least to leave Senegal. Listening to him speak, it felt as if he was already on the verge of departure. At least, it seemed as if his mind was already elsewhere. Many other players with whom he had played had ended up abroad, he told me, in the United States of America, Portugal, France or Italy. An athletic and talented striker, Pape seemed certain that he would be the next to leave. The football school, Galaxy FC, was the ideal launching pad for an international career. It was, after all, founded by Salif Diao – a hero of Senegal's glorious 2002 World Cup campaign, who had played for famous European clubs including Monaco and Liverpool. Other famous players, including Senegalese football's notorious superstar El Hadji Diouf, regularly trained at the school's facilities, giving the young players a chance to test themselves against the very best.

I decided to visit the football school the following week to watch him play, and I ended up returning regularly over the course of my fieldwork, establishing good relations with several of the players, coaching staff and administrators. And indeed, the very first time I showed up, El Hadji Diouf was among the veteran players taking part in a training match against Pape and his teammates. It was also true that several players had made the step abroad, an impressive feat for a football school that had only existed for a few short years. They regularly played matches at the grounds of Senegal's most prestigious academies under the watchful gaze of French scouts from professional clubs. Perhaps Pape's route to the top was as straightforward as he had described it to me. But there



Figure 01. A corner flag blowing in the wind. © Mark Hann.

was a catch. The football school, it transpired, was run primarily as a charitable organization focused on educational achievement, and most players who had moved abroad had gone on scholarships to a private school in Florida. Pape was too old to qualify for the scholarship, and time was running out for him to fulfil his dream of a transnational football career.

Sport and the Precarity of Hope

Pape and Modou shared an aspiration to a career in the sport industry. This was not the only thing they shared. Both were in their early twenties, unmarried and still living with their families in low-income neighbourhoods – although in very different parts of town. Despite their commitment to sport, both men had to find other ways of making ends meet as they pursued their goal. And for both of them, the dream was a bittersweet one. Success was both tantalizingly close, in the shape of the rich and famous athletes with whom they trained and rubbed shoulders, and yet somehow unattainable. Their situation was far from unique. Over the course of my fieldwork I came across hundreds of young men with similar talent, similar aspirations and similar frustrations. In Sen-

egal, sport seems to be one of the few ways in which young men can achieve a degree of success based on sheer hard work and talent alone, without relying on the networks of influence that shape careers in other areas of life, such as politics or the public sector. While sport is hardly a perfect meritocracy, it conjures up the image of a successful ‘self-made man’ who relies only upon his own efforts to ‘become someone’. The seduction of this image is widespread; almost every neighbourhood in Dakar now hosts numerous wrestling *écuries* and *écoles de foot* (football schools) of varying levels of organization, filled with young men chasing a sporting dream.

Although sports – and in particular football and wrestling – have always been popular in Senegal, the way in which they are practised has changed in recent decades. With the advent of satellite television, the evolution of wrestling accelerated, as it shifted from a traditional activity with roots in rural harvest celebrations to the lucrative and highly mediatised commercial enterprise that it is today. Similarly, since the 1990s, the structure of football has changed; it is no longer limited to national formats such as the Senegalese *championnat* and the interdistrict *navétanes* competition, but also provides a route to successful careers abroad, mainly through the many academies and football schools.

These developments in Senegal reflect broad global dynamics. As transformations often described as ‘neoliberal’ reshape the economic and social landscape, men find it increasingly difficult to meet the expectations placed upon them as providers and breadwinners. In the Global South in particular, traditional forms of masculinity appear under threat as men struggle to find productive roles in a world marked by stark inequality and precarity. In many areas of the world, sport appears to offer a solution of sorts. As a result of the liberalization of the global sports industries, rugby players in the Pacific Islands, footballers in Latin America or West Africa and baseball players in the Caribbean – among others – are presented with opportunities to make it in the wealthy leagues and competitions of the Global North. Sport thus takes on new meanings as a beacon of economic hope for thousands of men who strive to convert their athletic potential into a lucrative career. At the same time, however, the fickle nature of sport leaves even those who can make a career in a position of uncertainty, while thousands of others are left by the wayside. The wealth and glamour at the industry’s pinnacle stands in stark contrast to the hope and desperation that fuel its base.

Sport, and football in particular, have been theorized as a site in which hopes of a better future are negotiated among young African men (Unguhe and Esson 2017). Sporting success and especially migration to Europe are envisioned as a pathway to economic and social becoming, with

vast rewards awaiting those who have the right combination of talent, hard work and sheer good fortune. Hope thus emerges as a collective practice that contributes to addressing the paralysis of ‘waithood’ – a portmanteau of *waiting for adulthood* that describes the prolonged sense of stasis and powerlessness experienced by young adults unable to acquire the social and economic capital needed to reach social adulthood (Honwana 2014).

This book examines how the dynamics of both global and local sport industries shape the lives of young men in the Global South in the neoliberal era. Through an ethnography of two sporting worlds, I examine how the macroeconomic structures of neoliberalism produce certain types of subjectivity and practices among aspiring athletes and beyond. Sport is the setting for this particular ethnography, but it is perhaps also a particularly productive field in which to illustrate some of the social effects of neoliberalism. However, the processes and practices that I outline in the following are not unique to sport; they are versions of similar phenomena operating in numerous other contexts. In this sense, the fate of aspiring athletes in Senegal is connected to that of other people, both in Senegal and around the world, through a shared desire to succeed within emergent economic, social and cultural parameters. At the same time, the experiences of wrestlers and football players are particular, and take place in relation to local specificities. Neoliberal subjectivity does not emerge in the same way in every setting; it moulds and forms itself around the shape of existing local structures. It is therefore simultaneously representative of global changes and deeply local in its expressions.

The crystallization of what I identify as a neoliberal subjectivity is particularly visible in the domain of sport, which itself has been subject to massive transformations in recent decades. Since the 1980s, partly as a consequence of deregulatory neoliberal policies, sport has gained huge significance as a vehicle for generating capital through its associated industries of advertising, marketing, television and media, and gambling. At the same time, sport has increasingly become viewed as a career option for young men living in precarious conditions, a way out of poverty that can be achieved through individual hard work, determination and talent. As a result, the athlete might be considered the neoliberal subject par excellence of the contemporary world order. This is certainly the case in Senegal, where the expectations of aspiring athletes have shifted – broadly speaking – from the ludic to the economic, from the ritual to the mundane, and from the celebration of the collective to the adulation of individual celebrity.

This leads to the central research question of this book: how does this turn to the neoliberal and its attendant subjectivities and dispositions

manifest itself in the world of Senegalese sport? Because of the particular way in which sport is anchored in Senegalese society, this question draws attention to a number of sub-questions and themes that are deeply relevant to the lives of young athletes. The first of these asks: what are the relationships among sport, work, ideas about professionalism amid precarious conditions, and the resulting emergence of what I describe as the neoliberal ‘athlete self’? A second area of interest is the athlete’s body, which is both the central tool of his sporting endeavour and the means through which neoliberal subjectivity is enacted and contested: how is a neoliberal ethos expressed through the body? A third concern of the Senegalese ‘athlete self’ is located in the realm of the mystical, the magical and the religious; in short, how and why does a reliance on supernatural mediation influence sporting success? Fourth, I explore how the re-emergence of ethnicity (at times in tandem with nationalism) as a key category of identification relates to the production of the ‘athlete self’. And finally, I ask how sport is implicated in global markets and systems, and informed by narratives and aspirations of migration and mobility.

This coming together of the local and the global is also evident in the ethnographically unorthodox decision to focus attention on two domains of economic and social life rather than one – in this case, two sports. Wrestling and football appear to be diametrically opposed in their orientation, with the former concerned with an ancestral village past, the latter with global markets and competitions. Closer inspection reveals that this distinction is in fact an oversimplification of a more complex reality in which wrestling is very much connected to the global, and football is very much a part of emphatically local structures. Through the juxtaposition of ethnographic materials from both sports, this book addresses the similarities and differences between them, as well as the tensions that arise at the interface of the global and local.

Neoliberalism and Sport

In the last few decades, the emergence of regulatory regimes, policies and structures described as ‘neoliberal’ has had a considerable impact on all aspects of personhood or subjectivity. At the macro-level, neoliberalism has been described as being founded on principles of ‘deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision’ (Harvey 2005: 3), at least where the state was involved in provisioning for the citizenry in the first place. More precisely, neoliber-

alism involves forms of regulation that are different from those extant in post-Second World War capitalism, particularly by the state, which must intervene to ensure that aspects of life that were hitherto not regulated by the market (e.g. education, healthcare, the environment) become so. At the same time, in contrast to classical economic liberalism, which rests on a faith in the power of laissez-faire policies, neoliberalism must be actively constructed (Mirowski 2009: 434–35). The classic example is the structural adjustment programmes that international bodies such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund impose on countries in the Global South.

Neoliberalism comes in many shapes and configurations (Ferguson 2010) but one thing that all its incarnations share is the fact that they have fundamentally transformed people's lives. As a particular style of governmentality, which thus defines conditions of possibility for acting and thinking (Foucault 1991), neoliberalism is predicated on the insecurity and precarity of the individual subject (Bourdieu 2003). The neoliberal subject is a self-reliant, sovereign and entrepreneurial entity who must navigate networks of interpersonal connections, and on whose shoulders rests the responsibility of both success and failure (Gershon 2011; Gershon and Alexy 2011; McGuigan 2014; Miller and Rose 2008). The mutual interaction of neoliberalism's macroscopic manifestations, such as its transformation of economic structures, and its microscopic manifestations, such as its effects on minds and bodies, is central to the analysis.

The effects of neoliberalism on people have been widely explored in a range of contexts including exploited factory workers (Hann and Parry 2018), employees who engage in branding and self-improvement (Gershon 2014) and citizen-consumers who are governed by the regulation of their choice (Rose 1996). To these archetypes of neoliberalism, I propose to add the figure of the aspiring athlete, who embodies and internalizes doctrines of self-discipline, self-reliance and self-improvement while simultaneously facing a highly uncertain future. These conditions, coupled with unstable identities and requirements of extreme flexibility, lead me to borrow Guy Standing's concept of the 'precariat' (2011) to describe the condition of young Senegalese athletes – while recognizing that their historical and economic conditions are vastly different from those of the post-industrial workforce usually associated with the term. Sport has been identified as a prime site in which to observe neoliberal structures (Andrews and Silk 2012), with its strong emphasis on competition and individual success, the reification of ideals such as meritocracy and self-responsibility, and the processes of extreme commodification that have accompanied sport through recent history.

Masculinities, Mobilities, Bodies

Sport has long been a domain in which men have demonstrated and performed their masculine prowess and maintained gender hierarchies. In recent decades, however, it has gained in significance as a highly desirable way for men – particularly in the Global South – to translate their bodily capital into a productive form of masculinity, allowing them to escape poverty, claim status and provide for their families (Besnier et al. 2018). Success in the global sports industries is often predicated upon migration to the lucrative leagues of the Global North, with the mobility of athletes increasingly a feature of the globalized sports world. As a result, sport under neoliberalism acts as a point of convergence of questions about masculinity, mobility and the body.

It has been suggested that under global economic restructuring and neoliberalization, masculinity is in crisis – or multiple crises (e.g. Perry 2005). This crisis is often connected to changing gender relations, and men's inability to adapt to socio-economic shifts. While anthropological work on gender has tended to focus on women as gendered subjects, masculinity has in the past often been treated as an unmarked default setting that does not merit critical enquiry. In recent decades, works on masculinity have gone some way towards redressing this balance (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994; Miescher 2003; Ouzgane and Morrell 2005) by examining how male subjectivities and masculine identities are produced, reinforced, challenged and transformed through historical and cultural processes. Masculinity can be viewed as a 'moral performance' (Zigon 2008) in which men are constantly required to perform a culturally determined set of values in order to demonstrate and reassert their gender identity. Michael Herzfeld's (1988) ethnography of a Cretan mountain village distinguishes between 'being a good man' and 'being good at being a man', denoting the significance of being able to actively perform masculinity – rather than simply being a man. Increasingly, scholarly recognition of the fragile nature of masculinity raises questions over the much-debated notion of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), which has been used to describe gendered practices that guarantee male dominance in the social sphere. A number of different approaches can be identified when discussing men as gendered subjects (Gutmann 1997). One set of approaches deals with exclusively male activities (such as sexual and social relations between men, initiation rites, etc.), whereas a more progressive perspective sees women's views and experiences as an integral part of studying masculinity.

Masculinity is frequently conceived as a project of self-making, as something that has to be achieved and worked towards. This is a result

of what are often considered the traditional social roles of men, roughly formulated as establishing, provisioning and protecting of kin in the example of Mediterranean masculinity (Gilmore 1990), but similar variations of which can be found across the world. Male identity is strongly predicated upon being a husband and a father, and these roles are dependent on the ability to provide financial and material support for dependents. Yet men are often less able than women to adapt to structural changes in production and the labour market, which have highly gendered social consequences (Silberschmidt 2005). While women are able to diversify their economic activities in the domestic and informal spheres, men's identity and dignity are tied up in formalized notions of waged or industrial labour.

Many men in the Global South consider mobility – and specifically transnational migration – as a solution to economic hardship. Although migration is a complex process motivated by a range of socio-economic factors, South–North migration is generally presented as a product of global economic disparity. In this respect, migratory flows are a ‘by-product of late capitalism’ (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007) in which cheap labour is exchanged for remittances. High rates of male migration can both produce and simultaneously threaten masculinity (Osella 2012; Margold 1995). In certain contexts, men must migrate to obtain material wealth and status and claim adult masculine status in their home country – they need to be absent in order to meet expectations (Melly 2010). Economic dependence on overseas migration can also have an effect on gender relations among those who stay in the sending society, for example in the way that families value the livelihoods of non-migrant members. In addition, when women rather than men are the pioneering migrants, men often perceive them as undermining masculinity (Gallo 2006) by reversing traditional gender expectations of support and provisioning. Drastic changes in how masculinity is understood and performed do not only occur within the context of transnational migration, but also in relation to internal migration and projects of modernization (Ferguson 1999), or simply as a result of economic developments at the local level.

As an archetypal sending location, Senegal has frequently been scrutinized under the lens of transnationalism (Riccio 2011; Buggenhagen 2004, 2012). My primary field site of Dakar acts as a hub for migrants from all over the country as well as the wider region, and is therefore an ideal location in which to examine migratory and transnational practices and aspirations. Of particular interest is the way in which ideas surrounding migration structure everyday practices, with regards to remittances, the desire to leave, the status of and myth-making around

migrants, and the inevitable process of ‘waiting’ for an opportunity to migrate. In my fieldwork, the presence of a ‘migratory disposition’ (Kalir 2005) looms large in the lives of aspiring athletes, who imagine themselves living and working in the countries of the Global North.

As my research takes place in the overtly physical sporting arena, a body-centred approach is useful in better understanding the connections between people, bodies and the social environment. For Bourdieu (1977), drawing upon previous work by Mauss (1934) and Merleau-Ponty (1962), the practices of the body are informed by a person’s ‘habitus’ and thus reflect the social structures within which that person is embedded. In collapsing the mind–body and subject–object dualisms of Western philosophical tradition, a body-centred approach to anthropology locates the body as an active agent in the social world, thus moving beyond an analysis of the body as a biological given and a symbolic ‘text’ that expresses cultural meaning. Here, I see the body as the primary vehicle through which individuals experience their surroundings. By proposing to understand human experience through the body in the world, I thus consider the body as a generative site of culture, indeed as the very subject of culture. Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of the habitus simultaneously expands upon and partially rejects this phenomenological understanding by introducing the ‘socially informed body’, which emphasizes the unconscious, culturally inculcated nature of bodily practices. In Bourdieu’s theory of practice, the actions of everyday life are enacted by the body within an explicitly social and historical context.

Feminist theory has been integral in bringing matters of the body to the forefront of the social sciences, with an emphasis on the denaturalization of sex and the social construction of gender. Gender performativity (Butler 1990) in particular posits that gender is primarily an iterative performance of the body, rather than a biological given. This approach locates the body as a site in which the cultural meanings of gender identity are shaped and reproduced, rather than passively expressed or reflected. Whereas biological determinism previously characterized the relationship between gender and the body as ‘natural’, more recent theoretical contributions have stressed that the biological and medical orthodoxies that dominate our conceptions of the body are themselves culturally conditioned (Grosz 1994). Such concerns have tended to focus on women and femininity, although a growing body of work has also examined the highly constructed nature of masculinity. Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005) much-cited study of masculinities has been influential in establishing that there are multiple ways of being a man, as well as placing an emphasis on the central role of the male

body in enacting these multiple versions of manhood – although as we shall see in the following section, this is not entirely unproblematic.

Another influential strand of social thought deriving largely from the work of Michel Foucault has identified the body as a site of disciplining and power relations. Foucault's (1977) concept of 'political anatomy' engages with the way in which bodies are subjugated and shaped in order to increase their utility and reduce their capacity for resistance. Foucault understands discipline upon the body as a 'mechanics of power' that initially took hold in the context of eighteenth-century military practices and can be observed in prisons, schools and various other institutions. The politics of the body (in particular in relation to sexuality) created bourgeois identity (Foucault 1978), an analysis that Stoler (1995) extends by exploring the racial 'biopolitics' inherent in the making of the colonial body. Stoler's work on the racialization of the body is of continued relevance in the context of a project on the migration of athletes from the Global South to Europe, as the ascription of specific bodily qualities and characteristics along racial lines remains an enduring theme. Body culture (Brownell 1995) combines the Foucauldian view of sport as a disciplining technology with Bourdieu's concept of habitus, providing a framework that allows for the interrogation of ideas about race, gender, sexuality and class within the context of sport as a bodily practice.

Global Sport

The relationship between sport and global processes is a historical one. Since the nineteenth century, sport has been closely intertwined with colonialism, globalization and capitalist expansion. This is certainly the case for sports such as cricket, rugby and football, which originated in the British public-school system and were frequently introduced to other parts of the world in the context of colonial projects. While these sports have followed multiple trajectories specific to different regions, they were generally imbricated in colonialism's civilizing missions in order to pacify and discipline native populations (Forsyth and Wamsley 2006). In many cases, sports were considered useful in the formation of moral subjects, as was the case in ideologies such as muscular Christianity, which valued teamwork, athleticism and discipline (MacAloon 2006). In other instances, sport was practised initially only by colonial elites, and thus acted as a means of social distinction before being adopted by wider populations. Sport can also be a site of resistance or creative adaptation, as in the case of cricket in the Caribbean during the colonial and postcolonial era (James 1963). In all of the processes, the meaning of

sport changes over time as it travels across the globe (Besnier, Brownell and Carter 2017).

It is not, however, only sports practised on a global scale – such as football, rugby, cricket and others – that are subject to the vicissitudes and flows of world history. So-called traditional or indigenous sports have also followed a variety of different trajectories during the colonial encounter. Some, such as the Tutsi form of high jumping known as *gusimbuka urukiramende*, died out and were replaced by colonial sports (Bale and Sang 1996). Other supposedly indigenous sports become a site of resistance against colonial hegemony, for instance Maori *waka ama* (Wikaire and Newman 2014) or Indian *kushti* wrestling (Alter 1992). Yet other sports acquire new meanings as they travel across the world, like surfing (Walker 2008) or certain Asian martial arts (Brownell 2008) – both of which have gained widespread popularity and recognition as ‘modern’ sports. These multiple trajectories point to the pitfalls of essentializing boundaries between traditional and modern sports (Besnier and Brownell 2012), as these supposedly distinct categories are the products of globalization and colonial encounters.

Despite the presence of a handful of notable sport-related studies in the ethnographic canon, it is only relatively recently that anthropology has discovered sport as a field worthy of significant attention. The centrality of concerns such as the body, gender, mobility, nationalism and modernity have aligned the study of sport with recent developments in the discipline and social sciences more generally, resulting in increased scholarly attention to various aspects of sporting activity (Besnier and Brownell 2012; Besnier, Brownell and Carter 2017). The sporting arena may provide a useful site in which to explore embodied practices, contemporary masculinities and transnational mobilities in a global world.

Although the Balinese cockfights that Clifford Geertz made famous in anthropology may not necessarily be considered a sport in the modern sense of the term, his observation that culture is a set of stories people tell about themselves (Geertz 1973) remains influential in that sport is often considered in terms of its symbolic and ritual capacity to reflect cultural values and ideals. This type of approach understands sport as a cultural performance and emphasizes its meaning as a public spectacle. Such perspectives have been influential in the interpretation and analysis of the social meaning of sporting events. This has resulted in a proliferation of academic research with a particular focus on how sports channel political and ideological trends – in particular those related to nationalism, globalization and colonialism.

The historical spread of purportedly modern sports such as cricket, rugby and association football from colonial centres to the periphery has

led to the positioning of sport within a framework of modernization, civilization and progress (Guttmann 1983) – an account that has been critiqued for its failure to allow for narratives of resistance or adaptation (Carter 2002). Indeed, even global sports such as football and cricket have been invested with local meanings and linked to state-building projects, sometimes in direct opposition to or subversion of the conventions of the colonial power. A classic example is the anthropological film *Trobriand Cricket* (Kildea and Leach 1976), which memorably portrays a complex and creative reimagining of the sport tailored to local Trobriand understandings of the world, notwithstanding the critique that Trobriand cricket was linked to political power relations rather than cultural agency (Foster 2006). Likewise, Argentinian football is involved in narratives of national identity and character in order to distance it from its British originators, as are other Argentine national pastimes such as polo and tango (Archetti 1999).

Sport is thus a site of resistance and adaptation, as well as one of creative cultural enterprise. MacAloon (1990) has notably argued that international sports may be seen as an ‘empty form’ that is ‘filled’ with locally or nationally specific cultural meanings or ideologies – although this concept overlooks the fact that even international sports come with cultural and moral baggage (such as football’s origins as a character-building activity for the English upper classes). Appadurai’s (1995) study of cricket in India for example shows how sports may be stripped of and reinvested with cultural content, which is subsequently remoulded over the course of history. In this particular account, cricket moves through a number of transformations: the initial decoupling of the sport from colonial hegemony, followed by its widespread popularization as a symbol of post-independence India, before entering its current guise as a lucrative global circulation of talent, money and celebrity. The example of cricket not only demonstrates some of the complex ways in which global sports are involved in colonial, postcolonial and global narratives, but also shows how they are simultaneously engaged in local and global discourses about nationalism and identity.

The relationship between sports and nationalism has been much explored, but is not always clear-cut. Sports regarded as ‘national’ sports are sometimes valorized as vehicles of national sentiment, but may also be relegated to a relatively marginal status as archaic repositories of local traditions (Bairner 2001). Here, we may distinguish between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ sports – although using these as essentialized categories is not without its pitfalls. Just as modern sports may be imbued with a variety of local meanings, sports considered to be traditional are unlikely to be timeless edifices of the past.

Some sports that are widely considered to be ‘traditional’ are in fact largely modern constructions. Martial arts such as judo in Japan are among the notable examples of such ‘inventions of tradition’ within the domain of sport (Inoue 1998). Sports, then, are constructed in relation to nationhood, but their cultural meanings are also subject to historical developments and shifts in perception over time. The fact that multiple national sports coexist in a country or region is evidence of the complex and contradictory nature of national identity: for instance, Gaelic games and football illustrate the distinction between ethnic and civic nationalism in Northern Ireland (Bairner 2001). Meanwhile, the popular sporting traditions of India articulate with decolonization and nationalisms in various ways, differentiating between cricket’s status as an extremely popular yet elite sport and wrestling’s status as a somewhat marginalized pastime that is nonetheless rooted in specifically Indian ideas about morality (Alter 2000). Sports are symbolically and ideologically charged events containing political and cultural meanings that extend beyond the physical routines at their core.

While sports thus constitute cultural performance, such approaches tend to locate the field of sport within anthropology’s symbolic and interpretive traditions. A different set of approaches can be traced back to Bourdieu’s practice theory, which broadly speaking seeks to explore the dialectical relationship between human action and social structure. The body is the primary agent in such a theoretical perspective, and it is therefore unsurprising that Bourdieu paid significant attention to the emphatically corporeal field of sports (1978). The everyday actions and habits of those who participate in sports both reflect and construct the social structures within which the individual is embedded. The sporting body makes visible the various social hierarchies and cultural systems that we use to classify ourselves and others, such as social class (Bourdieu 1978; Robson 2000; Wacquant 1995), race (Carrington 2010), gender (Hargreaves 2002) and ethnicity (Ronsbo 2003). Sport serves to inscribe these and other social categories on to the body, thus establishing relationships between specific body practices and associated social positions. It follows that an examination of the body within sports can open up fruitful avenues towards a better understanding of diverse social processes.

The global sports industries value athletes primarily in relation to physical attributes such as size, strength, speed, skill or stamina; athletes’ transnational circulation is therefore dependent on the athletic qualities of the body. Their mobility, success and ability to determine their own career paths are to a large extent dependent on what their bodies are able to do – or at least what the clubs, managers, scouts and agents who

assess and value them think they are able to do. Sports migration is quite literally a case of ‘human bodies moving through space’ (Carter 2011: 7), a deceptively simple observation that calls to attention the athletes’ agency: the desires, motivations and projects that inform the process of migration. The flows of sports migration, especially within the global football industry, demonstrate the demographic trends and currents that shape migratory patterns (Poli 2006; Maguire and Falcois 2010). However, the empirical data used to show the structures and constraints that characterize the sports industry as an economic system frequently stop short of explaining why and how these patterns emerge. While quantitative approaches thus constitute an invaluable resource in charting where athletes migrate from and to, a practice-centred approach can flesh out the data by exploring how the process is actively shaped by the stakeholders who are involved in it.

Sport provides a powerful context in which to conduct multiscalar ethnographies (Besnier, Brownell and Carter 2017) – that is to say ethnographies that link the minute actions of the body with global markets and processes. Sport thus connects the local to the global in immediate and concrete ways. This is evident in my ethnography of Senegal, where the everyday practices of young athletes in remote suburbs are informed by the demands and conventions of sports industries that operate at global (in the case of football) or at least national (in the case of wrestling) levels. Sport is also significant as a site in which gender – here, in particular masculinity – is articulated. Senegalese consider both football and wrestling to be masculine domains, and they are thus ideal settings in which to study the lived experience of (young) men and some of the specific challenges they face. Finally, sport is without a doubt the most popular form of entertainment in the world. In Senegal, as in many other places in the world, there is no other subject that can unite, divide or cause discussion among people from all walks of life as much as the latest wrestling or football news.

The Field Site

Precolonial Senegambia was home to a multitude of peoples, including the Wolof kingdoms of Jolof, Kajoor, Baol and Waalo, and the Sereer kingdoms Siin and Saalum, located in the central and coastal areas of what is present-day Senegal. Many lived in centralized states or kingdoms. Neighbouring the Wolof were the Fula-speaking Tukuloor in the north-east, the pastoralist Peul living further inland, the Joola and Mandinka in Casamance, and various other smaller groups (Mandinka, Son-

inke, Bassari, etc.) living in the southern and inland regions of present-day Senegal and what is now Gambia. Historically speaking, Senegambia was home to a number of diverse groups with different types of social organization. Most were organized in stratified systems based on endogamous and hereditary ‘castes’ or occupational groups, maintained through patron-clientage (Diop 2012). The precise nature of these caste divisions is contested (Irvine 1974; Diop 1985), but broadly they distinguished between a superior caste (Wolof: *géer*) who were usually farmers, and an inferior caste (Wolof: *ñeeño*), which was further divided into artisanal groups (Wolof: *jëf-lekk*, smiths, shoemakers, weavers, wood craftsmen) and griots (Wolof: *gëwël*, praise-singers, musicians, oral historians). Caste in Senegambia is further complicated by the presence of slave castes, as well as the association of certain caste positions with outsiders such as members of other ethnic groups (Diop 2012).

From the sixteenth century, as a result of its location on early modern sea routes from Europe to India and southern and eastern parts of Africa, Senegambia was deeply involved in the transatlantic slave trade (Curtin 1975), becoming a strategic economic and commercial location for competing colonial powers including the Dutch, French and Portuguese. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the French intensified their colonial control of West Africa. The settlements of Dakar, Rufisque, Gorée and Saint Louis were administrative centres of French West Africa and designated as communes, with first Saint Louis (from 1673 to 1902) and then Dakar (from 1902) serving as the capital of the imperial project. In accordance with the French colonial policy of intensive monocropping, the groundnut was established as the region’s main export cash crop, with its associated products – in particular groundnut oil – finding varied and extensive use in industry, manufacturing, animal feed and food (Copans 1980). The groundnut trade largely replaced existing forms of subsistence agriculture in many parts of the region. Meanwhile, resistance to the French came in the shape of charismatic Sufi Muslim brotherhoods, in particular the Tijaan and Murid, which gained influence in the political vacuum that emerged immediately after the conquest. The relationship between the brotherhoods and the colonial powers was complex. While the Tijaan brotherhood under the leadership of El Hadji Malick Sy maintained pragmatic relations with the French, the Murid founder Cheikh Amadou Bamba was seen as a figure of anti-colonial resistance and was exiled on numerous occasions. Nonetheless, the labour and organization of the Murid brotherhoods became integral to the success of the burgeoning groundnut economy (Copans 1980; Cruise O’Brien 1971; Coulon 1981). The connection between the Murid brotherhood and the groundnut trade remains until the

present day. Cooperation between the French and the hugely influential Murid marabouts was a key economic factor during the colonial period, and the link between politics, the groundnut economy and religion continued after independence in 1960, when politicians had to mobilize the support of religious leaders in order to cement their popularity.

The economic transformations during the colonial era altered the gendered division of labour in Senegambia. While ‘traditional’ forms of labour have in fact always been subject to variation by region and ethnic groups (Hann 2013), land was generally allocated patrilineally to male household heads (Callaway and Creevey 1994). Women also participated in subsistence farming and had their own plots of land from which they benefited independently. The colonial mode of production favoured men, who were more heavily involved in cash-cropping – in Senegal, primarily in the groundnut economy – thus increasing gendered economic inequalities. As a result, women’s subsistence farming grew in importance, although the overall levels of subsistence farming went down because of an increasing reliance on rice imports.

When Senegal gained independence in 1960, it entered the global economy as a small state with a disproportionate reliance on one export commodity. When France withdrew price subsidies for groundnut products in the late 1960s, the economy entered a period of uncertainty (Delgado and Jammeh 1991). By the late 1970s, the economic landscape had changed: the groundnut trade was no longer competitive on the world stage, and the state had attempted to diversify its economy in ways that benefited an emerging urban bourgeoisie rather than rural elites. Senegal’s agricultural crisis was compounded by the ravages of the Sahel drought (Oya 2007) and a resulting rural exodus as well as increased transnational migration. Dakar, already the economic and trading hub of the country, became the destination for a massive influx of rural migrants, especially from those regions affected by the drought. Many of them sought work in the informal economy, for example as street traders. This gave rise to terms such as *Baol Baol* and *modou modou*, which are commonly used to describe street traders and informal entrepreneurs, associating them with rural (and in particular, Wolof and Murid) backgrounds (Riccio 2001, 2005).

The agricultural crisis of the late 1970s coincided with the beginning of the structural adjustment era in Senegal, as spiralling levels of external debt and falling groundnut prices on the global market led to large-scale economic restructuring imposed by multilateral lending agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Delgado and Jammeh 1991; Somerville 1997). The government was forced to implement significant cuts, scaling down its sizeable bureau-

cracy, removing subsidies and more generally withdrawing from public life – a common phenomenon in postcolonial Africa (Piot 2010). Further policies linked to structural adjustments involved privatization, deregulation and decentralization of business, and in 1994 the devaluation of the West African CFA currency had a major impact on purchasing power. One major consequence of these shifts was the rise of informal economic activity (Stoller 1996; Scheld 2007; Hann 2013; Prothmann 2018), in particular petty trade. Another consequence was an acceleration of transnational migration, and an increasing recognition that it was a viable means of gaining success. The transnational migrant, once considered emblematic of rural desperation, gradually became seen as a figure of success – replacing previous aspirational figures such as that of the government bureaucrat.

However, migration and mobility, in various forms, have been a feature of economic life in Senegambia for a long time. The region's peoples have long and complex histories of migration that predate the colonial period. Systematic forms of labour migration date back to at least the mid-nineteenth century, when seasonal migrants from the Senegal river valley would come to work in the then newly established groundnut basin in central Senegal (David 1980; Manchuelle 1989). The relationship with the French colonizers also established patterns of migration: many Senegalese served as sailors in the French navy, as *tirailleurs* or infantrymen in the French army (who served extensively and suffered heavy casualties in both World Wars and numerous other conflicts) (Echenberg 2009) and to a lesser extent as students in France. Many stayed in France after their service or studies; other Senegalese migrated during post-Second World War recruitment drives for the French automobile industry. The numbers of Senegalese (and other West African) labourers arriving in France was such that it necessitated the establishment of an entire network of *foyers de travailleurs migrants* or migrant hostels (Mbodj-Pouye 2016).

Senegalese migration was not only targeted towards the former colonial metropole. Indeed, Senegal has long been implicated in flows of migration within the African continent, with significant numbers of Senegalese migrating to work in Côte d'Ivoire (Bredeloup 1995; Blion and Bredeloup 1997), Cameroon (Ba 1997), Morocco (Fall 2004) and Gabon (Fall 1999), among other destinations. Currently, Senegal is a destination for migrants from Guinea, who often work as shopkeepers and taxi drivers. Dakar in particular is also a hub for migrants from other parts of Africa, who seek to use the city as a springboard from which to 'restart' migration projects (Zuluaga 2015), or to settle there,

study or start businesses. In my own fieldwork experience in Dakar I met residents who originated from Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Togo, Mali, Gambia, Cameroon, Rwanda, Chad, Burkina Faso, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Mauritania and Ghana. Senegal is also home to a significant 'expat' community of international professionals and (mostly French) retirees along the Petite Côte stretch of coastline south of Dakar, as well as a long-established Lebanese community that is heavily involved in business in downtown Dakar.

In recent decades, the primary destinations for Senegalese migrants (alongside France) have been Italy and the USA. Migration to Italy from the 1980s onwards has been concentrated around the northern part of the country, where Senegalese work in factories and also have a visible presence as street vendors (Riccio 2005, 2008; Grillo and Riccio 2004; Sinatti 2006). Also in the 1980s, the United States of America emerged as a new 'promised land' for mostly rural Wolof immigrants (Perry 1997; Stoller 2002) who worked as street peddlers and set up transnational trade networks between Manhattan and Dakar (although a community of Halpulaar merchants was already established at the time). The extent of Senegalese informal street trading around Fifth Avenue was such that even local business owner Donald Trump complained about a 'street-peddler plague infecting the entire city' (Blauner 1987). The informal economies in which they are engaged – focused around 'Little Senegal' near 125th Street in Harlem – exist largely outside official licensing and taxation systems. Meanwhile, the presence of religious institutions – especially *dahiras* or Islamic schools – plays an important role in forming a distinct urban transnational culture (Babou 2002). More recently, other destinations have started appearing on the radar of Senegalese migrants; these include Brazil, Argentina, Greece, Turkey, the Gulf countries and China.

Migration has gained a new significance in the decades since structural adjustment policies commenced. As state provisions shrink, migrant remittances have become an increasingly large portion of the Senegalese economy. Most families have one or several members living abroad who contribute significantly to living expenses, school fees, medical bills and other costs. They are also heavily involved in the construction and financing of residential buildings and other infrastructure (Melly 2010). As a result, the figure of the transnational migrant – once somewhat scorned and stereotyped as a rural and uneducated *modou modou* street vendor – has undergone a certain transformation. Now, the migrant is often cast as a heroic and aspirational figure whose courage, entrepreneurial spirit and willingness to endure hardship can

lift entire families out of poverty (Ricchio 2005; Bredeloup 2008; Melly 2011).

Football in Senegal

It is tempting to view Senegalese football and wrestling in terms of an opposition between the modern and traditional, or between the colonial and the indigenous sport, and this is often how it is represented locally. But these oppositions play a specific role in conceptualizing the relationship between sport and the nation. While football was indeed introduced to what was then French West Africa by the colonial powers, it was subsequently adapted and changed to serve local needs. Here, it is perhaps useful to return to MacAloon's concept of sport being an 'empty form' that can be 'filled' with cultural meanings. In Senegal, as in other parts of Africa, this may be – for example – the prominent use of occult or witchcraft-like practices to influence outcomes of matches, or the deployment of traditional drumming by fans at the stadium. The 'empty form' model can also be used to understand the particular techniques of the body that develop in certain contexts, as well as how a sport is used by governments towards sociopolitical ends.

In Senegal, a significant moment in the development of football was the *navétanes* movement starting in the 1950s and gaining in popularity and influence over the following decades. Originally conceived of as a set of sportive and cultural activities taking place during the summer holidays (the Wolof term *nawet* refers to the rainy season, which takes place from July to September), the *navétanes* interdistrict championship involved teams from Dakar, Saint Louis, Gorée, Thiès and Rufisque, and soon emerged as an important site of the post-independence government's control over urban districts, and specifically youth movements (Baller 2010). In addition to the *navétanes* championships, the Senegalese Football Federation (FSF) has maintained league and cup championship formats since the 1960s, with two professional divisions in operation since the 2008/9 season. Despite professionalization, the Senegalese *championnat* is often poorly regarded by fans, and player salaries remain low even by comparison to many other African leagues. For this reason, talented players are not generally attracted by the local game, and actively seek opportunities to play abroad. Starting in the 1990s with the establishment of the Aldo Gentina academy in Dakar, a collaborative initiative between the Senegalese Football Federation and AS Monaco, football became associated with the possibility of moving

abroad (Darby, Akindes and Kirwin 2007). Additional academies were subsequently established, with varying degrees of success: currently, the most prominent include the Diambars academy in Saly, founded by notable former players Saer Seck (who is also president of the Senegalese Football Association), Patrick Vieira, Bernard Lama and Jimmy Adjovi-Boco; and the *Génération Foot* academy near Dakar, which is affiliated to the French club FC Metz.

A further notable development in the history of Senegalese football was the national team's successful showing at the 2002 World Cup in Japan and Korea, which included a hugely symbolic and widely celebrated victory in the opening game over France, the former colonial rulers – who also happened to be the reigning world champions at the time (Baller 2012; Rowe 2003). This impressive performance at the country's first ever World Cup participation confirmed football's importance as a vector of national pride on the international stage, and also cemented the reputation of Senegalese players as potentially valuable assets for European clubs. In the immediate aftermath of the 2002 World Cup, a number of players on the Senegalese squad – many of whom already played in France – joined elite clubs in Europe, notably in the English Premier League. In 2017, Senegal was ranked seventeenth on the list of football player-exporting countries, with a total of 176 players registered in the ninety-three national championships included in an International Centre for Sports Studies (CIES) report in May 2017 (Poli et al. 2017). Among African countries, Senegal is consistently among the most represented in European leagues, along with Nigeria, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana.

Although the glorious era of the 2002 World Cup was followed by years of disappointment and poor performances on the pitch, recent years have seen a resurgence of Senegalese football, led by top international players including Sadio Mané, Kalidou Koulibaly, Ismaila Sarr and Nicolas Jackson. Successive qualifications for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups resulted in respectable though unspectacular performances, and in 2022, the national team won its first ever African Cup of Nations, defeating Egypt in the final on penalties. This golden era of Senegalese football has been led by the manager Aliou Cissé, a veteran of the famous 2002 team. Senegal's capacity to field consistently strong teams owes much to the foundations laid by performance-oriented academy clubs in the country over the past decades, most notably the aforementioned Diambars and *Génération Foot*. The team is further reinforced by the recruitment of French-born players who have elected to represent their parents' country internationally.

Wrestling in Senegal

The history of wrestling in Senegal and the development of its current forms are closely linked to processes of urbanization. Oral and historical accounts, such as an exhibition that covered an entire floor of Dakar's Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (IFAN) museum³ in 2015, trace wrestling as a rural activity practised to celebrate the harvest. A number of my interlocutors regularly evoked the sport's rural origins in their endeavours to provide me with a historical overview of the discipline, including coaches, television commentators and senior members of the Comité National de la Gestion de la Lutte (CNGL, the national wrestling steering committee). Wrestling is alternatively explained to have originated as a martial practice designed to test young men for battle (Faye 2002). Some form of wrestling is practised among all the major ethnic groups in the region, a fact that is often touted to emphasize its national character and its status as a unifying feature of all Senegal, even though traditional styles vary between groups; however, it is particularly associated with the Joola, Sereer, Wolof, Tukuloor and Lebu (Badji 1982; Bidiar 1990; Faye 1984). With the establishment and growth of the French settlement of Dakar on the Cap-Vert peninsula (previously the site of the Lebu villages of Ouakam, Yoff, Ngor and Hann), wrestling gradually became a popular urban sport.

It was towards the end of the nineteenth century that wrestling emerged as a cultural and leisure activity, setting the groundwork for its development into the commercial sport it is today. Initially, it was an elite martial practice designed to test the strength and courage of young men, and practitioners were selected on the basis of their moral and athletic virtues (Wane 2012). Wrestlers travelled all over the region to face the champions of each locality, attracting large crowds and achieving fame and renown. Wrestling with punches first emerged in Dakar with the arrival of three notable champions from the regions of Baol and Cayor: Médoune Khoulé, Sanor Dieng and Diéry Sadio, the latter of whom refused to fight without punches. Each of these wrestlers brought to Dakar a particular style of dress, *bàkk* (see glossary), choreography and other forms of cultural performance that distinguished their ethnic origin (ibid.).

French cinema entrepreneur Maurice Jacquin is credited with organizing the first spectacles of wrestling with punches in the 1920s. He initiated the first wrestling arenas in Dakar, paving the way for the contemporary sporting subdiscipline of *lutte avec frappe*. Spectators had to pay admission to the event and the wrestlers were remunerated. As the

spectacle became increasingly lucrative, these wrestling events moved out of cramped cinemas and into vacant lots, makeshift arenas and eventually stadiums. Promoters and wrestlers negotiated fees freely, and the sums of money involved increased rapidly. For instance, for a 1931 fight, Ousmane Sène and Babacar Thiaw received a total of CFA 25,000 (€38 in today's money), with the winner receiving CFA 15,000 (€22) thereof; on 8 June 1940, Fanlang Ndiaye was paid CFA 130,000 (€198) to face Modou Diakhaté of Rufisque – a ninefold increase in the space of nine years (Wane 2012). Today, star wrestlers can earn sums of up to CFA 150 million (€230,000) per fight, although in recent seasons these figures have stagnated and even declined.

Today, licensed wrestlers from all *écuries* may compete in the two disciplines of *lutte avec frappe* and *lutte sans frappe*. The former is organized on a model similar to boxing: promoters contract pairs of wrestlers who they believe will attract a public. In *lutte avec frappe*, wrestlers usually only have one or two major fights per season (and sometimes none at all), and a typical event will be limited to ten combats. *Lutte sans frappe* is organized in the form of knockout tournaments in which large numbers of wrestlers may take part (the number was recently limited to sixty-four in one arena, to improve security measures). The champions win a cash prize, or goods such as livestock, cars or bags of rice and cement (depending on the prestige of the tournament). The boundaries between the two disciplines are porous in that some wrestlers may compete in both formats, although *lutte sans frappe* is often considered as a stepping stone to a career in the more lucrative *lutte avec frappe*. A third form of wrestling, Olympic freestyle, is also practised, although there are no local competition formats, and interest is minimal outside the Olympic Games. Olympic wrestling is the only discipline in which women can formally compete.

In Dakar, and indeed much of Senegal, *lutte avec frappe* is everywhere. It enjoys extensive coverage on television and radio, and takes up much of the space on the newspaper back pages. An entire daily newspaper, *Sunu Lamb*, is devoted to it, in addition to multiple websites. Billboards across the city draw the public's attention to upcoming fights or display the image of popular wrestlers to advertise products ranging from fruit drinks to toothpaste. Riding in taxis or *car rapides* (the brightly painted ancient Renault minivans that are the most frequently used local transport), one is likely to see pictures and posters of the driver's favourite wrestler next to images of Sufi spiritual guides. Wrestling is also a popular topic of gossip and rumour, with even the most minor scandal involving a wrestler ending up in the tabloid press. During the

most important combats of the wrestling season, traffic in the city comes to a standstill, as entire families gather around the television to watch the show.

Wrestling is not only a combat sport, but also an aesthetic and poetic practice, an art of corporeal self-expression that refers to an entire symbolic, social and spiritual system. As an art of the body, wrestling combines particular techniques of the body, tactical and strategic knowledge (much as is the case of the other martial arts from which it borrows elements, namely boxing, judo and other forms of wrestling), a spiritual-mystical dimension in which invisible forces come to the fore, and the deployment of an agonistic poetics in the form of the *bàkk* or self-praise singing (Chevé et al. 2014).

Although wrestling is considered a ‘traditional’ sport (and, indeed, often locally referred to as such: *lutte traditionnelle avec frappe*), it is also a lucrative business in which vast sums of money circulate. The wrestling economy incorporates complex networks of athletes, managers, agents, promoters, sponsors, media, marabouts or spiritual advisors, and numerous other participants. Wrestling is also a means of gaining political or economic influence, as major politicians, businesspeople and celebrities pay to have their names attached to fights as patrons. The increasing media coverage, and in particular television, has helped to further popularize and monetize the sport, leading to an exponential increase in its popularity (Wane 2012). With the introduction of private television in Senegal since the 1990s and the associated opportunities for sponsorship and advertising, wrestling experienced a major influx of capital. In the ensuing decades, it underwent a shift from a somewhat old-fashioned sport popular primarily among older men to a commercial juggernaut capturing the attention of all segments of the population.

In addition to being popular among spectators and consumers, wrestling is also increasingly seen as a career choice for young men, in an economic climate characterized by seemingly permanent stagnation. Despite the relatively slim chances of financial success in the arena, wrestling at least offers a tangible and entrepreneurial path towards material rewards that appears to hinge upon training, skill and hard work – and not exclusively on relationships of patronage, as is frequently the case in other areas of life in Senegal. Young men consider the sport to be a viable alternative to education, which they often see as fruitless given the scarcity of salaried jobs, and as preferable to the gruelling apprenticeships and irregular employment in the informal sector that are sometimes the only other option. Wrestling has evolved into a significant source of hope and earnings in particular in Dakar’s *banlieue*, where it represents one of the few pathways towards social mobility (Harvey 2005). With iconic wres-

tlers such as Modou Lô, Balla Gaye 2 and Bombardier demanding fees of over €100,000 to enter the arena, wrestling emerges as a source of millenarian hope offering its practitioners rewards of fantastical proportions. The increasing commercialization of the sport has also led to an increase in professionalism, with most major stars spending long periods training abroad in the United States or France (see Chapter 5).

In recent years, the commercial viability of *lutte avec frappe* has been under threat, as many of the main sponsors and promoters have withdrawn from the sport, often citing rising costs of organizing events and a lack of suitable infrastructure. The primary venue for major wrestling events was until recently the Demba Diop football stadium in Dakar, the site of a tragedy in 2017 when a wall collapsed, killing eight people and injuring many more in the resulting stampede. The lack of adequate infrastructure was addressed by the unveiling of a new national wrestling arena in the Dakar suburb of Pikine in 2018 (Xue et al. 2019). Financed by China and ceremonially opened under the watchful gaze of Xi Jinping and then Senegalese president Macky Sall, the stadium highlighted both the central role of wrestling in Senegalese politics and the increasing role of sports in international diplomacy. Despite this boost, the Covid-19 pandemic plunged the world of wrestling into an even deeper crisis, as public gatherings such as wrestling events were postponed for a year and wrestlers – in common with so many other precarious workers – were unable to obtain earnings by competing. While the wrestling arenas resumed service again in 2021, it was far from business as usual, with a distinct lack of major fights between the top athletes. In 2023 and 2024, social unrest and protests sparked by the conviction of opposition leader Ousmane Sonko led to further cancellations and delays in the sporting calendar, prolonging the sport's difficulties.

Fieldwork and Methodology

Between August 2014 and August 2015 I conducted almost twelve months of fieldwork in Dakar, Senegal. Following the end of this main period of fieldwork, I kept in touch with many of my key interlocutors via social media and telephone, continuing to follow their trajectories over a long period of time. I also returned to Senegal three more times for shorter spells in December 2015, February 2017 and December 2018, combining participation at conferences held in Dakar with the opportunity to conduct follow-up fieldwork with interlocutors both new and old. This also enabled me to remain up-to-date with developments in the sport world as well as Senegalese society more generally.

During my initial fieldwork period as well as my subsequent visits, I lived with a family in the mixed-income neighbourhood of Parcelles Assainies, located in the *banlieue* of Dakar but with relatively good access to most other areas of the city. Living as part of a family household enabled me to experience everyday life and social relations in ways that would otherwise not have been possible for an outsider. It was also a tremendous resource in terms of meeting interlocutors and gaining access to the worlds of football and wrestling. Many of the most valuable contacts I made, including Pape and Modou, were met within the context of the family. And many of my most profound ethnographic insights into life in Senegal also occurred within this privileged space.

Much of my fieldwork took place in locations dedicated to sport, scattered all over the Dakar region, but mostly in the suburban neighbourhoods of Pikine, Guédiawaye and Parcelles. These included football pitches and training centres, wrestling *écuries*, gyms and the city's beaches, which were always filled with young men working out. I occasionally participated in informal football matches at the beach or in the streets of Parcelles, but my level of performance was vastly inferior to that of Pape and the other young players I spent time with. Needless to say, my wrestling abilities were even less developed; my direct participation in this discipline was largely limited to being tossed around on the sand by Modou and his wrestler friends. In addition to attending training sessions, I regularly spent time with athletes in their leisure time, for example at their homes or at social occasions, and I travelled with my interlocutors outside Dakar on multiple occasions.

I also accompanied athletes to the football stadium or wrestling arena when they were competing, as well as attending events such as international football matches and major fights between celebrity wrestlers. These occasions, which are detailed throughout the book, were often rich in ethnographic observations. Sometimes, I was able to take on the role of photographer, film-maker or journalist in order to gain better access to proceedings. This was in part made possible by my privileged position as a white European *toubab* with semi-professional equipment, but also by relentless networking, phone calls and favours from friends. It was a similar dynamic that enabled me to occasionally move in illustrious circles of influential figures within both sports, notably the senior members of the CNGL (the wrestling steering committee).

My status as a comparatively wealthy, white outsider brought with it many privileges, but also posed some problems. In some instances, my presence was undesirable or awkward as it brought unwanted attention to my interlocutors; in other cases, I was mistaken for a talent scout or an agent. On more than one occasion, my presence was associated with

disruptive magical forces, and I was asked to leave. I became accustomed to having to give small speeches explaining my research and justifying my presence, especially in the highly secretive world of wrestling.

Indeed, over the course of my research, it became apparent that the role of anthropologist was not a familiar one to many of my interlocutors, nor was it easy to explain. By contrast, journalists and especially photographers were welcome, as their presence was not only familiar, but also implied a degree of fame and significance. During the final months of my fieldwork, I therefore decided to make an ethnographic film about my research subjects. I worked together with a Senegalese documentary director, Mamadou Khouma Gueye, whom I had met by chance on a trip to Kédougou in the south-east of Senegal. Collaborating with an experienced director who had intimate knowledge of the research setting, as well as being immersed in the community in which large parts of the film were shot, changed the dynamics of my fieldwork. Although the presence of the camera undoubtedly injected an element of artifice into some of the scenes we shot, it also facilitated my access to people immeasurably. People who had thus far been shy or reluctant to talk suddenly became eager to give lengthy interviews and performances on camera. The collaboration resulted in a documentary film entitled *Yëngël Gësëm*, which has since been shown at numerous film screenings, conferences and seminars both in Senegal and in Europe. While I treat the film and this book as separate projects, there is no doubt that the research described here was significantly aided by the filming process.

Chapters

In Chapter 1, I sketch the ambiguous relationship between sport and work, and the ambivalent nature of sport as work. While both wrestlers and football players tend to see their athletic pursuits as a form of labour for which they should be paid, in reality the vast majority of athletes are barely or not at all compensated. This leads to a sense of injustice, exploitation, frustration and resignation. It also requires them to construct professional identities, which are meticulously cultivated and maintained in various ways. I describe this process as the emergence of the ‘athlete self’ – a neoliberal conception of personhood in which individuals behave, present themselves and act upon themselves in ways that make them suitable for the sport market they hope to enter. In the case of the football school that Pape attended, the athlete self was inculcated via an institutional disciplinary regime drawing upon sport science, pedagogy and psychology of self-improvement. Various sets of rules regard-

ing physical training and general behaviour were prescribed verbally or in written form on lists that decorated the walls of the training ground. The core tenets were hard work, discipline and respect; players were encouraged to police their own and each other's conduct.

In the case of wrestling, the situation is somewhat different, as the *écurie* tends to be a much looser, less formalized institution than the football school. Wrestlers become athlete selves through massive investments in the body, the creation of individual brands and a highly entrepreneurial approach to their athletic careers. The discrepancy between the formation of athlete selves in the two sports can be explained by the different requirements of each sport: while football demands a docile, disciplined, hard-working team player, wrestling stardom tends to require individual charisma, flair and personality alongside mere sporting talent. Nonetheless, both sports necessitate a reflexive commitment to self-improvement and self-presentation in the formation of professional identities. The development of these identities often precedes material or economic gains – raising questions about the usual understanding that a professional athlete is one who receives payment for their sporting endeavours.

Chapter 2 builds upon the concept of the athlete self proposed in the previous chapter, and examines it in its embodied form. One striking observation is the increased attention given to men's bodies, both within the world of sport and beyond. Generally speaking, sports have become more and more focused on physical performance and capability, as athletes strive to gain advantages in an increasingly competitive environment where much is at stake. Incremental improvements in physical attributes such as size, strength or speed are vital, and new forms of training and body surveillance mean that athletes' bodies are under more scrutiny than ever. Although in Senegalese sport, this type of institutional surveillance is limited compared to the hyper-medicalized sports industries of the Global North, the ethos of body improvement and optimization has taken hold. Wrestlers and footballers alike spend hours in the gym, at the beach or on the dunes, sculpting their muscles, taking protein powders and paying attention to their diets. At the same time, they are attentive to producing a particular appearance, with an emphasis on exaggeratedly masculine features such as massive chest and arm muscles. This aesthetic – which is not only limited to aspiring athletes but is widespread among young men – is informed in part by the introduction of bodybuilding and gym culture, but also by the desire to embody supposedly masculine values of strength, courage and self-discipline. Athletes invest in and care for their bodies, which are central to their hopes of success and therefore to the way in which they expe-

rience the world. However, their bodies are also subject to assessment within broader social configurations over which they have little control. For instance, wrestlers' heavily muscled bodies are frequently linked to crime, a lack of education and being poor role models for children. Meanwhile, footballers are judged by scouts – and by themselves – in relation to globally produced archetypes of what 'African players' are like. The entrepreneurial spirit of neoliberalism produces an obsession with fashioning a strong and capable body – but these bodies are also the site of vulnerability and precarity, and ultimately an attempt to salvage a masculinity in crisis.

In Chapter 3, I turn my attention to the complex and manifold religious, magical and spiritual worlds that Senegalese athletes inhabit. Here, the seemingly opposite attitudes towards occult forces in the two sports lend themselves to a comparative approach. Wrestling is totally saturated in a variety of traditional magico-religious and mystical practices, which are in many ways as important to the sport as the physical combat itself. The media representation of wrestling draws heavily on discourses and representations of the occult, and spiritual factors are regularly cited as decisive in determining victory or defeat. The figure of the marabout, a guardian of mystical knowledge and practice, is a vital part of any wrestler's entourage. Indeed, in recent years maraboutic practices have become increasingly ostentatious and commodified, with wrestlers publicly competing over who has spent the most money on them.

In football, meanwhile, the governing body announced a ban on all occult activities around the sport, associating them with backwardness and violence. However, this official ban does not reflect the persistence of various mystical and religious practices among many football players, teams and coaches, in particular in the interdistrict competitions known as *navétanes*, where marabouts continue to play a significant role. Aspiring wrestlers and football players engaged with the spiritual world in a variety of ways, often seemingly strategically related to their own career aspirations: wrestlers invested ostentatiously in *mystique* or magico-religious practice, whereas footballers distanced themselves from it, aligning themselves with the 'rational' and scientific discourses within football. In both cases, young athletes seemed to approach the spiritual world in a market-like fashion, choosing to invest in the way that would yield the best results.

Chapter 4 addresses the relationship between sport and ethnicity, with an emphasis on how wrestlers engage with ethnic belonging and identity. In this chapter, football is conspicuous largely in its absence. This is because ethnicity seems to play a lesser role in that sport, a logic

that follows from its international reach. The debates and discourses surrounding football players take place at the level of the nation, that is to say whether certain diasporic players were Senegalese or (in most cases) French. Football can therefore be seen to reinforce the idea of the nation in relation to other nations. Wrestling, meanwhile, takes place within the boundaries of the nation; competition is therefore between the different regions and ethnic groups of Senegal. However, although these ethnic categories often formed the historical basis for organization into *écuries*, ethnic identities are diffuse and fluid, and affected by processes of urbanization – especially in Dakar.

Through wrestling, young men with otherwise plural urban identities re-engage with their parents' ethnicity and claim affiliation to those groups considered to have the strongest traditions of both wrestling and magic. This is heavily influenced by the persistence of ethnic logics and argumentation in the build-up to major fights. Wrestling superstars evoke their ethnic heritage in order to assert their superiority over rivals, strategically forge allegiances with other wrestlers, access supporters or benefit from spiritual support. Although Senegal prides itself on peaceful multi-ethnic coexistence, the wrestling arena is one of the few public spaces in which ethnic differences make themselves known. However, the various customs and traditions are often represented in the shape of an all-encompassing national tradition. In this sense, wrestling can be understood as a vehicle of nation-building. Within this framework, young wrestlers use ethnicity and regional affiliation as a marker of identity and a resource of individual spiritual power to promote their own personal brands. Under neoliberalism, therefore, ethnicity is reshaped from its origins as a marker of group belonging to become a symbol of individual power.

The fifth and final chapter follows the protagonists Pape and Modou in their attempts to seek a better future outside Senegal, and in doing so addresses the wider relationship between sport and the desire for international mobility. This desire is present in both sports, although it is articulated differently. For footballers, the dream of a professional career is almost without exception synonymous with the dream of playing in the European leagues, or other lucrative competitions abroad. This is largely due to the fact that the few opportunities available in the local championships do not offer much in the way of salary, prestige or exposure. Footballers therefore attempt to follow a given path towards success, which usually involves joining one of the more prestigious football academies or schools in the country, playing in trial matches in front of (mostly) European scouts and hoping that these will lead to further opportunities such as a call-up to the international team, a trial

in Europe or a sport scholarship in the United States. Wrestling – in particular the popular *lutte avec frappe* variant – is considered to be very much a local, traditional and national sport, in which competition almost exclusively takes place within the boundaries of Senegal. However, wrestlers seek to travel and be connected internationally for various reasons: participation in international tournaments (particularly in the disciplines of traditional African wrestling and Olympic freestyle), recent opportunities to compete in related sports such as MMA and the desire to access better training and preparation conditions in Europe or the USA.

The global and local structures of wrestling and football therefore shape aspirations of mobility in different ways, creating distinct narratives that are reproduced by young athletes. Underpinning these narratives, however, is a wider social drive towards emigration among young Senegalese, and men in particular, due to the perceived and real lack of employment and opportunities within the country. The success of transnational Senegalese merchants and trade associations abroad has cast the migrant as a figure of success, albeit a controversial one in some respects. Like sport, transnational migration is understood to be an entrepreneurial pathway towards wealth and respect, whereby young men with few means or qualifications can make something of themselves. The two pathways – that of the athlete, and that of the migrant – often converge in the figure of the migrant athlete. Although athletic migration has often been studied as a distinct and elite mode of transnational circulation, the case of Senegalese athletes shows that the boundaries between the two categories (of migrant and athlete) are blurred. The dream of a sports career can embellish or mask the less glamorous desire to simply leave the country and attempt to make a living abroad.

Notes

1. Most names have been changed to preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of my interlocutors. Exceptions to this are famous athletes and other well-known figures whose degree of celebrity precludes anonymization.
2. Broadly speaking, Senegalese wrestling can be divided into two major forms: with and without punches. Wrestling with punches (*lutte avec frappe* in French or *bère door* in Wolof) is generally the more commercial and therefore more lucrative form, taking place in large arenas usually in the capital, and attracts the lion's share of sponsors and media coverage. Its major stars can earn vast sums of money from fighting and from associated sponsorship deals. Wrestling without punches (*lutte sans frappe* or *lutte simple* in French) may also take place in Dakar's arenas, but is practised extensively in villages and suburbs. It usually takes the form of a tournament in which the winning wrestler takes home cash

prizes or goods, commonly livestock. *Lutte sans frappe* is often associated with younger or novice wrestlers.

3. A research institute founded in 1938 as part of the French colonial project, today the IFAN is integrated into Dakar's Université Cheikh Anta Diop and is one of the world's foremost research centres on African culture.