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Sports Mobilities Across Borders: Postcolonial Perspectives

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The circulation of mobile professional athletes, a phenomenon whose visibility increased exponentially in the last couple of decades of the twentieth century, poses important questions for postcolonial approaches to the human condition. At first glance, the orientation of entire segments of the population in some countries in the global South to the possibility of migrating to sport careers in the global North seems to reproduce patterns of economic dependence of the world's peripheries on the world's centres, with the latter obtaining resources from the former in non-reciprocal fashion. A more nuanced approach, however, demands that these dynamics be framed in a broader context of multiple power relations that are at once local and global, material and ideational, and rooted in complex histories that have somewhat obscured colonial relations of yesteryears. This approach is illustrated here with materials about migration-oriented football academies in West Africa and the transnational circulation of Pacific Island rugby players.

Keywords: athlete migrations; postcolonialism; football academies; West Africa; Pacific Islands

Among aspects of sport in the contemporary world that raise the most pressing questions about postcolonialism, the international mobility of athletes must surely occupy a privileged place. From the long history of entanglement of sports with various colonial projects, to the objectification in the global North of athletes' bodies from the global South, the nationalist anxieties that these bodies' athletic prowess provoke in post-industrial countries, and the enormously important role that these athletes' sporting successes play in global sport industries, sport mobilities in the twenty-first century are centre stage among the contexts that appear to prolong colonial relations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As such, they demand to be examined critically from an angle that questions enduring colonial relations and the continued hegemony of Western epistemologies. At the same time, an analysis of these mobilities that goes beyond easy clichés demands that we explore the transformations that have tested colonial relations over the past half-century, and finally place postcolonialism itself under analytic scrutiny.

Throughout their history, modern sports have travelled, and have done so in a number of ways. From its very inception in the middle of the nineteenth century, the very idea of sport quickly spread to all four corners of the globe, to the extent that one can consider the phenomenon to be one of the first manifestations of what we have learned to call in the last few decades 'globalization'.¹ But almost from this foundational historical moment, athletes themselves also began moving, crossing national borders, and often acting as vectors for the early global diffusion of sports.² For a long time, however, the circulation of athletes who migrated specifically to pursue a career in sport was confined to

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movements between neighbouring countries, for the simple reason that club officials and other gatekeepers felt most at ease recruiting foreign athletes emanating from countries which they regarded as having linguistic and religious affinities to their own, or where they had personal connections.³

In the last couple of decades of the twentieth century, as is well documented, sport mobility took a new turn. The increasingly commercialized, mediatized, and corporatized nature of the major professional sports has fundamentally transformed the recruitment of athlete.⁴ Sport teams and clubs have gradually been transformed into corporations that compete with one another for scarce resources, including talent, and before the turn of the millennium many began to look much further than ever before for promising young athletes, with the intent of recruiting them at the cheapest moment in their career, often with an eye on reselling them as soon as they have acquired sufficient sporting capital. These historical junctures have led to a remarkable increase in the number of foreign-born or ethnically marked athletes employed in athletic workplaces in the industrial world, particularly those emerging from developing countries. In Western European professional soccer-football, non-Europeans today constitute more than 50% of foreign players. The racially or ethnically marked composition of many prominent sports teams is another symptom of these dramatic changes.⁵

What I will suggest here, however, is that these changes in the very architecture of sport have taken place as geopolitical changes have had a profound effect on the lives of ordinary people in the global South, and that these changes must be addressed seriously if one seeks to understand sport mobilities, their seemingly ever increasing importance, and their significance for athletes, their families, their countrymen, and the nations that produce them. At the same time, these global transformations are in many cases intertwined with local sociocultural dynamics that are responses to global changes as much as they are rooted in the long-standing constitution of local contexts.

Dreams of Athletic Glory

As is amply documented, local economies in many developing countries today have little to offer to large segments of the population in terms of employment opportunities or other ways of accessing resources. 'Traditional' forms of productive activity, such as agriculture or blue-collar work in mines and factories, have in many places been eroded by free-market competition, economic downturns, and the feminization of the global post-Fordist labour market.⁶ The economic crisis that had gripped industrial nations since 2007 (or earlier, as is the case of Japan) has had ripple effects that have compounded economic decline; even in countries like the BRICS, where primary industries are supposed to have turned the economy around, they have in reality only further enriched the already rich.⁷ In many places, farming, which has long constituted the most reliable form of labour, has lost its prestige and profitability, often as a result of national policies promoting agriculture for export, which is not only vulnerable to stock market speculations taking place, far away from farmers, in the major capitals of the world, but also impoverishes the land, the environment, and the farmers that depend on them.

For example, in Tonga, a small island country of the South Pacific, whose economy until the mid-twentieth century revolved around subsistence agriculture, a series of national ventures encouraged farmers to engage in monocropping for export, all of which successively collapsed because of importing countries' abandonment of preferential tariffs, small countries' inability to compete with larger economies, the vagaries of world markets, and the ravages that the uncontrolled use of inorganic chemicals has wrought on

the environment. Today, agriculture in this island country has lost the enormous prestige it used to have half a century ago, leaving a large proportion of the population, particularly the younger men who in the past supplied the bulk of agricultural labour, either idle or waiting for an elusive chance to migrate overseas.⁸

Of all social groups, it is particularly younger men who have suffered most from changing labour conditions in many societies, while at the same time they have, ironically, borne the brunt of the blame for economic downturns. As a result, youthful masculinity has become the site of increasingly strident intergenerational tensions: with surprising consistency across the world's societies, older people blame younger men for the ills of society, denouncing them as lazy, uncooperative, disrespectful, and irresponsible. Unable to provide for families and communities, unable to find in local economies anything that will help them make a material contribution or maintain a modicum of dignity, men, particularly the young and unskilled, are now the dispensable subjects of the world economy. In both rural and urban areas, young men's lack of opportunities to become productive prevents them from reproducing the sociality and the sense of belonging that guided their fathers through life, generating a malaise that affects equally and interchangeably masculinity, youth, and economic life in general.⁹

Paradoxically, the young in marginal regions of the world are simultaneously embedded in global dynamics of consumption, hope, and self-expression. Whether they partake in hip-hop culture, Pentecostal or Islamic revival, or political mobilization, youth seek to claim a sense of belonging in global forms of community. Young men in particular tap into images of new and sometimes extreme forms of masculinity (e.g. gangsta rap, hoop dreams, ghetto outfits). These efforts are not devoid of problems, as their legitimacy is often contested and the promise of revolution (or just self-esteem) thwarted by poverty and immobility.¹⁰

It is in the context of these tensions that we must seek to understand the role of sport migrations in the lives of young men, particularly in the global South. Marketed as men's culture and as a hyper-masculine spectacle for global consumption, the sport industries epitomize masculinity.¹¹ For young men in impoverished countries, they represent at once hope for survival, a spectacular form of participation in the production of global images of male success, and the resolution of the contradiction between local exclusion and global inclusion. This resolution can be variously enacted: by wearing the right brand of sneakers, adulating the same sport stars as other youth elsewhere, or aspiring to become a world-class athlete. The latter possibility is embedded in a gendered logic in two ways: it foregrounds masculine prowess in its most extreme forms; and it reclaims what remains, ideologically at least, the classic site of masculinity worldwide, namely the ability to provide for others. It is thus no wonder that sports occupy the lives and minds of not only youth, but also their families, communities, and nations.

Athletes on the Move

For young men in the global South, the dreams of economic and other forms of success that sport engenders almost inevitably imply migrating to countries of the global North, that is to say Europe for sports like football, North America for baseball or basketball, or Europe, Australia, and New Zealand for the rugby codes (the 'North' being used here a metaphor). In many cases, these dreams occur in a context where the future and exile are already synonymous.¹² They also coexist with the reality lived by most migrant citizens who, often undocumented, work in miserable conditions in the rural and urban regions of industrial countries, whether picking tomatoes in Calabria, cleaning rooms in seedy Paris

hotels, or looking after the elderly in Arizona or Florida. As a result, today, for young men in many parts of the South, the possibility of emigrating to a career in the sports industries in wealthy areas of the world mobilizes a huge amount of energy. While in reality only the lucky few gain widespread recognition, the *possibility* of success in professional sports in the Global North informs the actions and haunts the dreams of countless others, eclipsing the *probability* of success.¹³

Unlike the circulation of underclass workers that perpetrates former colonial relations, which in many cases takes place alongside that of athletes, sports mobility evokes millenarian images of sudden success and unimagined prosperity, affording young men the fantasy of redistributing untold wealth, often in preference to keeping it for themselves, and thus reclaiming male productive citizenship. For example, one of the research participants during my fieldwork among Tongan rugby players in Japan estimated that about 70 people in Tonga were materially dependent on the remittances that he regularly sent back home, earmarked from the middle-class salary that he earns playing for a Japanese corporate team.¹⁴ In other prominently visible cases, athletes who have reached the zenith of their trade (such as household names like Usain Bolt) are celebrated for the funds they provide to schools, churches, mosques, and charities, and are welcomed like heroes upon their visits home. But, for most, the enchantment of ‘fabled futures’ that sport migrations engender is illustrative of a ‘casino capitalism’, the magical emergence of wealth from nothing, which many see as a signature feature of the turn of the millennium.¹⁵

Like the circulation of underclass workers, sports migrations are precarious, unpredictable, and often disappointing. At the very least, the mobility of athletes operates within a dialectic of flow and closure, hampered by serious constraints (e.g. the tightening of laws governing residence permits and work visas) as easily as they are enabled by emergent possibilities (e.g. the loosening of citizenship restrictions by sport regulating authorities).¹⁶ The brevity of youthful masculine vigour, the spectre of injury, the capricious nature of corporate interests, the precariousness of adoptive forms of belonging, and the unforgiving responses of publics all bestow upon athletic careers a profoundly fragile quality. Many come to an abrupt end because of poor health, substance abuse, scandal, or simply rapidly declining performance. They operate within an industry in which mainstream middle-class men control the labour of under-educated non-white workers. While these features characterize all athletic careers, for athletes from the global South, the fall is particularly dramatic, given the investment of so many others in their success and their heightened vulnerability to exploitation by teams, agents, and other stakeholders.

While the most celebrated athletes are at the forefront of a global industry of extraordinary public visibility, sport is the only sector of the global labour market in which workers, and more specifically their bodies, can be bought and sold – and, as soon as the body’s performance begins to decline, unceremoniously let go of. This situation is already problematic for most athletes who play ‘at home’, but it is doubly so for migrants, who are often left at the end of their careers with few local resources while also having to answer to the unreasonable expectations of families and villages in their homeland. The global sport industries are thus dependent on a labour market whose resemblance to the slavery on which the colonial edifice has rested for centuries is obvious. The analogy has often been drawn, particularly in the numerous news articles that purport to critically uncover the sordid realities under seductive stories of the lightning success of a few high-profile athletes and the huge remunerations they command. To cite only one example, New Zealand journalist Michael Field recently characterized the circulation of rugby players

from the Pacific Islands (primarily Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa) as ‘modern blackbirding’, using for dramatic effect a term that refers to the slave trade in the Pacific Islands in the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁷ More than ever in the course of history, sports migrations appear to have the effect of perpetuating and reinforcing colonial relations between wealthy metropolises and an impoverished neocolonial world that is nevertheless endowed with a seemingly inexhaustible supply of sporting talent to be offered to the sports industries of the industrial world.

However, these apparently straightforward comparisons deserve closer inspection. Several questions arise. How do the inequalities between the centres that acquire talent and the peripheries that provide it operate? How do postcolonial relations between centre and periphery articulate with the growing inequalities within the societies in question? In societies that produce sport talent for export, what effect do the relationships between generations, gender categories, and social classes have in local contexts? What role do state policies play in orienting ordinary citizens to sport mobilities in developing countries? And, generally, what are the benefits and limitations of a postcolonial critique for an understanding of sports migration in the twenty-first century?

Postcolonial Critique or Critique of Postcoloniality?

The most straightforward limitation of the application of the concept of postcolonialism to athlete mobilities is the well-known fact that, while they may have done so in earlier times, sport migrations no longer fit in any simple way the well-trodden paths between former colony and former metropole, or even between periphery and centre. As the small but growing corpus of ethnographic works on sport migrations has demonstrated, sport mobilities can follow extraordinarily unpredictable trajectories, leading aspiring athletes to locations that they did not know existed and often stranding them in circumstances where they have to create a life, on the margin of legality, in societies that can easily turn hostile against them.¹⁸ For example, in Ljubljana, Slovenia, an unofficial amateur football club known as Afroscorpions FC Slovenia brings together footballers from Nigeria, Ghana, and other West African nations. Some have meandered across Central and Eastern Europe, playing in various low-level leagues before landing in Slovenia, a member of the EU but one that has comparatively lax immigration laws, while others still hope to attract the attention of recruiters and agents. Others originally came to Europe to play and defected, claiming political asylum. Clubs like Afroscorpions operate in other cities of the European periphery.¹⁹

Among the most dramatic manifestations of the enduring nature of colonialism in the global sport industries figure the ‘baseball farms’ in the Dominican Republic that Alan Klein’s pioneering work documented and the ‘football farms’ that European clubs and other entities have established in West and Southern Africa.²⁰ In Ghana, millenarian dreams of following in the footsteps of an Abedi Pele or an Asamoah Gyan and supporting family, village, church or mosque, and the entire country prompt boys to flock to these institutions, of which new ones open their doors everyday, in the hope of being noticed by recruiters from overseas, often at the expense of regular schooling. Of course, football academies come under many guises, from institutions that nurture responsibly their young charges, from which European clubs seek to recruit the most talented at the cheapest moment of their sporting careers, to fly-by-night ventures that promise a great deal and deliver little. At worst, they expose young hopefuls to exploitation, in the form of, among other things, human trafficking of various kinds (e.g. clandestine border crossing, procurement of faked documents, deceitful promises of employment). In all cases, they

appear to be prime examples of the perpetuation of postcolonial relations in which the former colonial powers help themselves to the resources of the former colonies.

Yet, when examined more closely, the situation immediately becomes more complicated than the image commonly presented in the media. As James Esson recently documented, football academies in Ghana have emerged at a specific historical juncture, constituted by the convergence of global and local dynamics and operating equally on material and ideational levels.²¹ The socialist idealism in the impetuous years following the country's independence in 1957, under the charismatic leadership of the father of the nation Kwame Nkrumah, raised the development of education to the status of national priority. This is no longer the case today: the neoliberal economic policies of structural adjustment imposed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund have undermined the state and especially the bureaucracy, which was the most important source of employment for graduates. No longer guaranteeing a place in a labour market now saturated with qualified candidates, formal education has lost its appeal, especially for boys, who are turning in increasing numbers to football academies, leaving education to girls and women. Boys today idealize a masculinity characterized by an 'X lifestyle' (conspicuous consumption, fame, bad-boy reputation, etc.), an image that is associated in particular with Ghanaian footballers who play overseas. The gap between women's and men's priorities is thus progressively widening and the gendering of life opportunities increasing. Similar dynamics are operative in other ethnographic contexts, such as in Madagascar, for example, where women are more adept than men to use the tools at their disposal, such as transnational Internet dating for marriage and emigration.²²

We must therefore understand the remarkable efflorescence of football academies and their popularity among boys in the context of both historical dynamics of a political economic nature and sociocultural dynamics, including the adulation of particular manifestations of masculinity, changing gender relations, and the emergence in societies like Ghana of an understanding of success as necessarily involving migration, what Barak Kalir aptly terms a 'migratory disposition'.²³ But one can also further enlarge the geopolitical context of the emergence of these economic and cultural changes. In Togo, one of Ghana's neighbouring countries, the society is currently orienting itself wholesale towards mass emigration, and an entire economy has emerged around the so-called US 'green cards' lottery, in which a million Togolese had participated by 2010, including the procurement of false documents and rehearsals of consular interviews, a vast system of duplicity and fraud and an 'enormously inventive, entrepreneurial border practice, which has generated its own scales of value and pricing, and has produced far-reaching networks of debt, rank, and clientage'.²⁴ But we only begin to understand these dynamics when framing them in the effect that the end of the Cold War had produced on this formerly pivotal country in the geopolitical balance of the region: while in 1990 the USA poured US \$50M a year in development aid into Togo (enriching a cadre of officials and politicians at the expense of the rest of the country), this assistance today amounts to a paltry \$10,000 a year. The end of the Cold War, as well as the imposition of structural adjustments, the rise of NGOs to fill the void left by the shrinking of the state and overseas assistance, and the shifts in the definition of state power all emerge as events that have reconstituted the relations of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, which were definitely of a postcolonial nature, into relations that are much less clearly postcolonial.

In Pacific Island societies that are the major exporters of rugby talent, sport migrations and the hopes that they engender are also framed by economic inequalities that render emigration *de rigueur* for young men. In these societies (especially of Samoa and Tonga as well as, increasingly, Fiji), a migratory disposition has gradually developed since the

middle of the twentieth century as migrating to industrial countries has become part and parcel of the definition of life success. People talk of emigrating because they 'love' their parents, spouses, and children, invoking a foundational cultural concept that variously translates as 'love, empathy, pity' (Tongan *'ofa*, Samoan *alofa*, Fijian *loloma*): by emigrating, one sacrifices one's own comfort and security to go out in search of resources to be sent back to one's family members so they not have to worry about their life necessities, their dignity in the eyes of others, and their future. Despite the fact that legal migration is extremely difficult, the passports of those countries being viewed with great suspicion by the immigration authorities of industrial countries, migration in these countries colours all aspects of life, including of course economic life: in the case of Samoa and Tonga in particular, the productive economy is virtually non-existent, and the entire nation depends on remittances from relatives working in New Zealand, Australia, and the USA. It is, in this general context, generated by the conjuncture of global and local dynamics, that the possibility of emigrating to a professional athletic career captures the dreams of young men. In Fiji, Indigenous Fijian men who lack the talent necessary to play on the international scene or who are not in the right place at the right time to be scouted and recruited in an overseas rugby team may seek a career path in the Fiji Military Force or the British military, which until recently hired Fijian men (and, to a much lesser extent, women). Strong cultural and political links in fact exist between rugby and the armed forces.²⁵

In Tonga, the state itself is complicit in encouraging the emigration of athletes, seeing in the phenomenon an enormous potential. Encouraging people to emigrate articulates well with its neoliberal policies that have eroded what little state structures existed (e.g. the bureaucracy) while shifting the burden of providing for the future onto the citizenry. Because little is available locally in terms of employment or other resource-generating activities, labour migrations become the solution, and if labour can be exported to markets other than low-level service industry or blue-collar labour markets, everyone benefits.²⁶ Here is thus an extract from the five-year development plan of the Kingdom of Tonga's Ministry of Training, Employment, Youth and Sport that was in effect during my last fieldwork in the country:

It is clear that Tongans are good sportsmen and sportswomen and if they are coached properly they could excel in their chosen sport. It is expected that aid assistance will be secured to build the appropriate facilities and infrastructure, reinforce skills development and encouraging [*sic*] participation and access to sports. Sporting talent could be exported through agents in overseas countries.²⁷

These policies are being pushed forward with little or no attention paid to their potential consequences, notably in reference to gender relations, despite the lip service paid to gender in the quotation, but also in reference to the fragility, brevity, and cost of athletic careers.

But there are other, considerably more local and cultural, forces that come into play. In villages of island countries, young boys receive lessons in the performance of masculinity from their older brothers and cousins, and the informal and unstructured rugby games that they play on a daily basis on village greens are a prime site where this socialization to gender takes place. In Tongan and Samoan villages, for example, informal rugby games valorize the ruggedness, controlled aggression, and other orientation that constitute local ideals of masculinity, while also allowing boys to demonstrate their individual resourcefulness and skills in confounding opponents, qualities of youthful masculinity that are covertly valued.²⁸ They provide important lessons in how to be gendered and function as loci of peer socialization, with younger boys playing alongside

older ones while learning the tricks of the trade. In Fijian villages and probably elsewhere in the region, boys watch in rapt attention on television overseas rugby games in which international Fijian players display their skills in this hyper-masculine sport, thus sealing the link among local definitions of masculinity, sport achievements, and geographical mobility.²⁹

More generally, what I have argued is that understanding athletic mobilities as the perpetuation of colonial relationships between centre and periphery misses out on the complexities of the context in which they take place. The trajectory of many sport migrations follows patterns that disregard colonial histories; athletes often migrate in contexts in which a migratory disposition is already deeply engrained in people's lifeways; athletic mobilities are based on not only material necessities but also cultural forms that give them meaning on multiple levels; and this meaning is located at once in the local context and in global structures. If, in the context of sport, one of the major aims of postcolonial method is 'emphasizing aspects of colonial relations between the colonizer and the colonized',³⁰ what I have shown here is that the power relations that inform athlete mobilities are those that are not only calqued against former relations between colonizer and colonized, but also based on considerably more complex patterns of inequality. Of course, unravelling these patterns requires one to adopt a bottom-up approach that pays attention to the complexities of the local.

Enduring Colonial Stereotypes

Where colonial dynamics continue to be resiliently operative is in the stereotyping of racially marked migrant athletes. I will not deal here with the more egregious examples, illustrated by such deeply racist acts as bananas thrown at black players on European football pitches. Instead, I will concentrate on more subtle cases, in which agency and structure articulate with one another to shape images and nurture stereotypes in ways that are not always intended by the agents concerned. But then 'unanticipated consequences of purposive social action' have a well-established genealogy in sociology and other social sciences.³¹

One of the most visible features of Pacific Island rugby masculinities are the so-called pre-game 'war dances' that Tongan, Fijian, and Samoan teams perform when playing overseas, aggressive challenges addressed to the opposing team and ostensibly designed to intimidate them. (That this effect works is attested by television cameras often focussing on the consternated features of opposing team members caught by surprise.) The original idea of these performances is the well-known rugby *haka* that the New Zealand All Blacks appropriated and turned into their signature feature, widely appreciated by international publics who for the most part are oblivious to the deeply controversial background of the performance in New Zealand.³² Less controversial because they do not emanate from the same kind of tense politics of identity as the *haka* does, the crowd-pleasing Fijian *cibi*, Tongan *sipi tau*, and Samoan *siva tau* all present the athletes as fierce 'warriors' descended from a hypothetical past when islanders were allegedly feared for their bellicosity – presumably young men only, although this is never spelled out explicitly.

These unreconstructed images have undeniable traction on publics, as well as recruiters and other agents, in that they foreground a hyper-masculine power that comes in handy in a game of rugby and thus help athletes 'sell' themselves on the international rugby market or, perhaps more accurately, they help the players' go-betweens sell them to clubs and teams. In the islands, one finds positive echoes of this 'warriorhood' in multiple other contexts; for example, t-shirts worn throughout the islands depict 'island warriors'

sporting hyper-developed musculatures and decked out in 'traditional' weaponry, which often ends up being mishmashes of cultural icons of various provenances and associations (including Hawaiian and Māori, where they are common symbols of indigenous resistance).³³ These images are thus as much the product of self-representation as an answer to the expectations of others, including international publics demanding dramatic entertainment.

This is precisely where these performances constitute a double-edged sword. It goes without saying that the 'warrior nature' of islanders derives directly from colonial discourses of yesteryears and neocolonial discourses of today, in which the 'warrior' is easily substituted for the 'savage'. But here is the dilemma: while the image conforms to what Pacific Island young men find desirable, it can easily backfire, as the warrior may be a powerful presence on the rugby pitch (and thus invariably placed in key positions in the team), but he is unreliable as a team member, unmanageable during training and unable to follow the terms of a contract.³⁴ We thus find here the classic image of the non-white athlete as 'raw talent' who lacks discipline and method. Thus, during my recent fieldwork in the south-west of France, where Pacific Islanders are increasingly visible on the rugby scene and thus in the public sphere (in a region where rugby holds a great deal of importance), I was regaled repeatedly with stories about Rupeni ('Rups') Caucaunibuca, a Fijian player of remarkable talent who had played for Agen and then Toulouse, and whose hyper-exotic name the vast majority of French speakers already find impossible to pronounce. After having been involved in several car accidents and a number of other peccadillos, according to the mythology, Caucaunibuca left one day for a short holiday back in Fiji, from which he failed to return as scheduled. Three months later, the club allegedly had to send out a journalist to Fiji, where he found the athlete in his village, it is said, as he was returning from fishing (several versions of this story coexist, each more sensational than the other). Islanders are thus powerful rugby players full of 'natural' talent, they are happy and friendly (until they start drinking, that is), they play guitar and attend church, they respect hierarchy, but they have no sense of responsibility, are unpredictable, and place family and village before their careers. In short, they are good savages, who like other savages are after all just children.

Colonial images endure. But, like all stereotypes, they are also the by-products of multiple forms of agentive action. Some are useful to those whom the stereotypes depict, but they can just as easily backfire. They are the legacy of a colonial past but they continue to be reinforced through quotidian forms of action, such as children watching television in remote island villages, the images stencilled on t-shirts, the expectations of global publics, and the self-representations emanating from the pre-game performance of 'war dances' on foreign soils.

Rethinking Postcoloniality in Sport Migrations

Given the profound historical entanglement of sport with colonial projects around the world, there is no doubt that a postcolonial critique of this history and its modern consequences is essential to our understanding of the global circulation of professional athletes. Beyond this basic recognition, however, one must also exert caution against over-privileging the explanatory power of an analysis that centralizes the relations between colonizer and colonized in the colonial past and between centre and periphery in the contemporary moment. Indeed, what I have illustrated in this article is the fact that power relations have multiple manifestations that transect the boundary between the local and the global; that the colonial relations of yesteryears are in fact poor predictors of athletes'

migratory trajectories on the contemporary scene; that seemingly resistant, assertive, and celebratory actions can have positive consequences, such as providing much needed visibility to people from regions of the world that are largely deemed irrelevant, as easily as they can be turned around, rekindling old colonial stereotypes, and marginalizing those who are the object of these stereotypes.

Postcolonial theory has been particularly useful in recognizing and valorizing cultural mixing, hybridity and mimesis in contrast to the fetishization of traditional purity and the erasure of colonial politics. What we need to engage with is the fact that, today perhaps more than in the decolonization era, power relations in the postcolonial world are complex, with the emergence, for example, of new elites that have slipped into the roles formerly occupied by colonizers (the 'New Whites', as they are called in various parts of Africa), a phenomenon that Franz Fanon himself had predicted in his foundational theoretical work on postcolonialism.³⁵ Sport may indeed be involved in troubling myths of purity and exposing inequalities inherited from the colonial past, but it can just as easily affirm new inequalities and structures of exclusion. In Fiji, for example, rugby has very strong associations with the indigenous Fijian population, on the one hand, and, on the other, military and police power, the chiefly system, and the established churches; these associations have had the effect of promoting the sport as a prime marker of the exclusion of the Indo-Fijian minority population from state power, particularly in the aftermaths of a succession of political coups with strong ethnic undertones.³⁶ Cases such as these demonstrate that a focus on hybridity and mixing in sporting practices must be balanced with attention to ways in which sport is utilized to affirm traditional purity and patterns of exclusion.

We must thus understand dynamics of inequality, exploitation, and oppression between centres and peripheries, in sport as well as other aspects of life, as articulating in complex and often ill-understood ways with other power relations on a local scale, including those that relate the state to the nation, among others. Power relations on a local scale and the relations between different scales operate in not only social and cultural spheres but also political ones, and it is precisely in these complexities that power hides in what appears to simply be social and cultural formations. In fact, sensitivity to the ravages of the colonial past on the colonized demands that we pay attention to all power relations and their consequences.

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Notes on Contributor

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edited, University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), and *Crisis, Value, and Hope: Rethinking the Economy* (co-edited special issue of *Current Anthropology*, 2014).

Notes

1. Sébastien Darbon, *Diffusion des sports et impérialisme anglo-saxon* (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 2008); Gerald R. Gems, *The Athletic Crusade: Sport and American Cultural Imperialism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); Richard Giulianotti and Roland Robertson, *Globalization and Football* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009); Allen Guttman, *Games and Empire: Modern Sports and Cultural Imperialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); and John J. Macaloon, *Muscular Christianity and the Colonial and Post-Colonial World* (London: Routledge, 2007), among many others.
2. Sine Agergaard and Nina Clara Tiesler (eds), *Women, Soccer and Transnational Migration* (London: Routledge, 2014); John Bale and Joseph Maguire, *The Global Sports Arena: Athletic Talent Migration in an Interdependent World* (London: Routledge, 1994); Richard Elliott and John Harris (eds), *Football and Migration: Perspectives, Places, Players* (London: Routledge, 2014); and Pierre Lanfranchi and Matthew Taylor, *Moving with the Ball: The Migration of Professional Footballers* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), among many others.
3. Patrick McGovern, 'Globalization or Internationalization? Foreign Footballers in the English League, 1946–95', *Sociology* 36 (2002), 23–42; Matthew Taylor, 'Global Players? Football, Migration and Globalization, c1930–2000', *Historical Social Research* 31 (2006), 7–30.
4. I am confining my remarks to team sports, although similar historical patterns characterize many individual sports.
5. The ethnic diversity of important teams has featured as a deeply divisive issue playing in the hands of various political positions; for example, on the political affects engendered by the French national football team at various moments in recent history, see Stéphane Beaud, *Traîtres à la nation? Un autre regard sur la grève des Bleus en Afrique du Sud* (Paris: La Découverte, 2011); Paul A. Silverstein, 'Sporting Faith: Islam, Soccer, and the French Nation-State', *Social Text* 18 (2000), 25–53.
6. James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Charles Piot, *Nostalgia for the Future: West Africa after the Cold War* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
7. BRICS is an acronym commonly used to refer to the so-called 'emerging economies' of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.
8. Niko Besnier, *On the Edge of the Global: Modern Anxieties in a Pacific Island Nation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 55–63.
9. Anne Allison, *Precarious Japan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); Sasha Newell, *The Modernity Bluff: Crime, Consumption, and Citizenship in Côte d'Ivoire* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Caroline Osella and Filippo Osella, *Men and Masculinities in South India* (London: Anthem Press, 2004); and Brad Weiss, *Street Dreams and Hip Hop Barbershops: Global Fantasy in Urban Tanzania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).
10. Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, 'Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming', *Public Culture* 12 (2000), 291–343.
11. Varda Burstyn, *The Rites of Men: Manhood, Politics, and the Culture of Sport* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).
12. Besnier, *On the Edge of the Global*; Francis Nyamnjoh, 'Cameroonian Bushfalling: Negotiation of Identity and Belonging in Fiction and Ethnography', *American Ethnologist* 38 (2011), 701–13; and Piot, *Nostalgia for the Future*.
13. D. Stanley Eitzen, 'Upward Mobility through Sport? Myths and Realities', in D. Stanley Eitzen (ed.), *Sport in Contemporary Society: An Anthology*, 8th ed. (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2009), 249–56; Christina Kwauk, '"No Longer Just a Pastime": Sport for Development in Times of Change', *The Contemporary Pacific* 26 (2014), 303–23; and Fa'anofa Lisaclaire Uperesa and Tom Mountjoy, 'Global Sport in the Pacific: A Brief Overview', *The Contemporary Pacific* 26 (2014), 263–79.
14. Niko Besnier, 'The Athlete's Body and the Global Condition: Tongan Rugby Players in Japan', *American Ethnologist* 39 (2012), 491–510.

15. Comaroff and Comaroff, 'Millennial Capitalism'; Susan Strange, *Casino Capitalism* (London: Blackwell, 1986); Fa'anofo Lisaclaire Uperesa, 'Fabled Futures: Migration and Mobility for Samoans in American Football', *The Contemporary Pacific* 26 (2014), 281–301.
16. Birgit Meyer and Peter Geschiere, 'Globalization and Identity: Dialectics of Flow and Closure', in Birgit Meyer and Peter Geschiere (eds), *Globalization and Identity: Dialectics of Flow and Closure* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1999), 1–15; Anna Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).
17. Michael Field, 'Professional Sport: The New Blackbirding?' *Radio New Zealand* 1, <http://www.michaelfield.org/sport.htm> (accessed 6 June 2013).
18. Besnier, 'The Athlete's Body and the Global Condition'; Thomas F. Carter, *The Quality of Home Runs: The Passion, Politics, and Language of Cuban Baseball* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Thomas F. Carter, *In Foreign Fields: The Politics and Experiences of Transnational Sport Migration* (London: Pluto, 2011); and Alan M. Klein, *Sugarball: The American Game, the Dominican Dream* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991).
19. Douglas Kwaw Koi Thompson, 'Success and Failure on the Borga Path: Ghanaian and Nigerian Football Migrants in Eastern and Central Europe' (unpublished fieldwork plan, GLOBALSPORT ERC project, University of Amsterdam, 2014).
20. On the Dominican Republic, Alan M. Klein, *Dominican Baseball: New Pride, Old Prejudice* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2014); Rob Ruck, *The Tropic of Baseball: Baseball in the Dominican Republic*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); on West Africa, Paul Darby, 'The New Scramble for Africa: African Football Labour Migration to Europe', *European Sports History Review* 32 (2000), 217–44; Paul Darby, Gerard Akindes, and Matthew Kirwin, 'Football Academies and the Migration of African Football Labor to Europe', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 31 (2007), 143–61; and Raffaele Poli, *Les migrations internationales des footballeurs: Trajectoires de joueurs camerounais en Suisse* (Neuchâtel: Éditions CIES, 2004).
21. James Esson, 'A Body and a Dream at a Vital Conjuncture: Ghanaian Youth, Uncertainty and the Allure of Football', *Geoforum* 47 (2013), 84–92.
22. On Madagascar, Jennifer Cole, *Sex and Salvation: Imagining the Future in Madagascar* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010); more generally, Nicole Constable, *Romance on a Global Stage: Pen Pals, Virtual Ethnography and 'Mail Order' Marriages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
23. Barak Kalir, 'The Development of a Migratory Disposition: Explaining the "New Emigration"', *International Migration* 43 (2005), 167–96. Similarly, James Esson, 'Better Off at Home? Rethinking Responses to Trafficked West African Footballers in Europe', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41 (2014), 512–30, demonstrates that this understanding leads one to exert caution in labelling irregular football migration 'human trafficking', a scepticism that echoes similar analyses of human trafficking in other contexts (e.g. Elizabeth Bernstein, ' Militarized Humanitarianism Meets Carceral Feminism: The Politics of Sex, Rights, and Freedom in Contemporary Antitrafficking Campaigns', *Signs* 36 (2010), 45–71).
24. Piot, *Nostalgia for the Future*, 78.
25. Teresia K. Teaiwa, 'Articulated Cultures: Militarism and Masculinities in Fiji during the Mid-1990s', *Fijian Studies* 3 (2005), 201–22; Teresia K. Teaiwa, 'On Women and "Indians": The Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion in Militarized Fiji', in Barbara Sutton, Sandra Morgen, and John Novkov (eds), *Security Disarmed: Gender, Race, and Militarization* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 111–35; and Niko Besnier, 'Pacific Island Rugby: Histories, Mobilities, Comparisons', in Yoko Kanematsu and Gyoza Molnar (eds), *Playing on the Global Periphery: Social Scientific Explorations of Rugby in the Pacific Islands*, special issue of *Asia Pacific Journal of Sport and Social Science* 3 (2014), 268–76.
26. The state in other parts of the world is similarly involved in encouraging and brokering skilled labour migration, the best documented example being the Philippines, for example Kale Bantigue Fajardo, *Filipino Crosscurrents: Oceanographies of Seafaring, Masculinities, and Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Robyn Magalit Rodríguez, *Migrants for Export: How the Philippine State Brokers Labor to the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); and Rhacel Parreñas, *The Force of Domesticity: Filipina Migrants and Globalization* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

27. Ministry of Training, Employment, Youth, and Sports, 'Corporate Plan 2007–2012', Typescript, 2007.
28. Besnier, 'The Athlete's Body and the Global Condition'; Julien Clément, *Cultures physiques: Le rugby à Samoa* (Paris: Presses de l'École normale supérieure, 2014), 95–112.
29. Karen L. Brison, *Our Wealth Is Loving Each Other: Self and Society in Fiji* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2007), 127–28.
30. John Bale and Mike Cronin, 'Introduction: Sport and Postcolonialism', in John Bale and Mike Cronin (eds), *Sport and Postcolonialism* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 1–13, 7.
31. Robert K. Merton, 'The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action', *American Sociological Review* 1 (1936), 894–904.
32. The appropriation of the performance from the indigenous Māori minority in New Zealand has been the subject of heated debate in the national sphere, as well as of a lawsuit filed by a Māori tribe alleging indigenous intellectual property infringement; see Brendan Hokowhitu, 'Māori Physicality: Stereotypes, Sport and the "Physical Education" of New Zealand Māori', *Culture, Sport, Society* 6 (2003), 192–218; Brendan Hokowhitu, 'Tackling Māori Masculinity: Genealogy of Savagery and Sport', *The Contemporary Pacific* 16 (2004), 259–84; Steven J. Jackson and Brendan Hokowhitu, 'Sport, Tribes, and Technology: The New Zealand All Blacks Haka and the Politics of Identity', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 26 (2002), 125–39; and Greg Ryan (ed.), *Tackling Rugby Myths: Rugby and New Zealand Society, 1854–2004* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2005); more generally, see Michael Goldsmith, 'Who Owns Native Nature? Discourses of Rights to Land, Culture, and Knowledge in New Zealand', *International Journal of Cultural Property* 16 (2009), 325–39.
33. See discussion and illustrations in Besnier, *On the Edge of the Global*, 197–200.
34. The arguments I am developing here owe much to the work of Brendan Hokowhitu in reference to the different but not unrelated situation of Māori youth in New Zealand society; see Hokowhitu, 'Māori Physicality' and 'Tackling Māori Masculinity'.
35. Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, [1961] 2005); for a discussion of 'New Whites', see, for example, Peter Geschiere, *Village Communities and the State: Changing Relations among the Maka of South-Eastern Cameroon since the Colonial Conquest* (London: Kegan Paul, 1982), 321.
36. Geir Henning Presterudstuen, 'The Mimicry of Men: Rugby and Masculinities in Post-Colonial Fiji', *Global Studies Journal* 3 (2010), 237–48; Besnier, 'Pacific Island Rugby'.