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# 1

# SPORT, MIGRATION, AND GENDER IN THE NEOLIBERAL AGE

*Niko Besnier, Domenica Gisella Calabrò, and Daniel Guinness*

When Niko Besnier returned to Tonga in 2007, a small island country in the Southwest Pacific where he had been conducting fieldwork since the late 1970s, the society he encountered had experienced considerable change since he had last been there in the early 2000s. Particularly notable was the transformation of rugby from a form of leisure, in which boys and young men almost universally took part, to wage labour – in a context in which employment opportunities are very few and far between. But rugby labour was located elsewhere: many young men hoped to sign contracts in the sport labour markets in industrial countries such as New Zealand, Australia, Japan, France, and the United Kingdom, which promised scintillating careers, extraordinary salaries, and the ability to send remittances home and thus regain a productive masculinity that successive economic downturns had severely eroded. At home in Tonga, there is barely enough money to support the national team, whose members are for the most part employed by teams overseas, let alone a sport infrastructure. Whenever rugby recruiters were rumoured to visit from overseas to scout for new talent, a noticeable frisson ran over the neighbourhoods and villages of the country.

What young men hoped was to follow the example of some of their compatriots who had had successful rugby careers in foreign lands. Toetu'u Tāufa, for example, had won in the late 1990s a rugby scholarship at Nihon University, one of Japan's elite private universities, in the footsteps of other Tongan men who had followed similar routes since the mid-1980s. After graduation, he played for the Kintetsu Liners, a team in Japan's rugby Top League based at Hanazono Stadium in Osaka, until he retired from the game in 2018, and was picked for Japan's national team in 2011. He facilitated the recruitment of his younger brother Tafia by the Kintetsu Liners (another brother, Tēvita, was recruited in 2019 to play for a club in New Zealand, but was killed in a car accident on the eve of his departure from Tonga). A naturalized Japanese citizen, he still lives in Osaka with his Japanese wife and

children, working as a coach. While playing, he estimated that the remittances he sent to Tonga supported over 70 relatives in Tonga, transfiguring him into an incarnation of male adult success.

But the success of Tāufa's trajectory is counterweighted by the fate of the many other Tongan rugby athletes who remain, literally and metaphorically, on the sidelines, waiting for their chance to shine or adjusting to realities that only vaguely match the dreams that led them far away from their island nation. In 2018, for example, the tribulations of former flanker Sione Vaiomo'unga hit international sport headlines (*New Zealand Herald* 2017). After playing for Tonga in the 2011 World Cup in New Zealand and at the Hong Kong Sevens in the same year, Vaiomo'unga secured contracts first with a British team and then with the rugby club of Baia Mare in the hinterlands of Romania, on the periphery of world rugby. Kidney failure suddenly interrupted what had already become a less-than-idyllic experience. No longer able to play, he and his family were close to losing their residence permit in Romania, but returning to Tonga was out of the question as the country lacks dialysis equipment. The player went from sending remittances back home to depending on the generosity of distant relatives, fellow players, and locals. A crowd-funding initiative gathered a large sum, and a few months later a kidney became available for transplant. Vaiomo'unga was able to play again. He constantly tried to read his struggles in positive terms, helped by his strong Christian faith, the power of which was confirmed by the apparent happy ending.

While Toetu'u Tāufa's and Sione Vaiomo'unga's life trajectories can be thought of as representing two extremes, those of most migrant athletes from the Global South are closer to the latter than to the former. But Vaiomo'unga's vicissitudes have not discouraged other young Tongan men from pursuing overseas rugby careers at all costs, or from families from encouraging similar endeavours for their sons. Dreams of success in the global sports industries since the last decades of the twentieth century have transformed Tongan society, restructuring its economy, reconfiguring gender roles and relations, and transforming the meaning of the future. Similar dynamics have taken place in many countries of the Global South and impoverished regions and marginalized communities of the Global North.

At the same time, the global circulation of high-level athletes has had a considerable impact on many sports, particularly those that command greatest visibility. For example, while prior to the 1980s expatriate footballers constituted a relatively small minority, and most moved between contiguous countries (McGovern 2002; Taylor 2006), by 2018 migrant athletes accounted for more than 41% of players in top-division European football squads, 34.5% of whom hailed from outside Europe (Poli, Ravenel, and Besson 2018; these numbers are much higher in lower-division clubs). Migrations today contribute to many sports a national, ethnic, and racial diversity that did not exist before the 1980s. However, this diversity has not democratized sports in any sense of the term, as those who govern sports structurally or practically continue to be, for the most part, older white men of elite background.

The new migratory trajectories link most visibly the Global South with the Global North, as aspiring athletes from destitute regions of the world attempt in increasing numbers to reap some of the fabulous wealth which sport in regions of the Global North was seemingly awash in. But they also take place within the Global South and within the Global North, and occasionally follow a reverse direction, from the North to the South. Athletes in some sports migrate from marginal locations to central locations within both the Global North and the Global South (Haugen, this volume; Pietikäinen and Ojala, this volume), or move from and to locations that are not easily characterizable with these vague labels (Calabrò, this volume). Guyanese men move to Trinidad to play cricket, but hope to make enough connections in Trinidad to then move to Canada or the United States, whether to play cricket or to work in other domains, while footballers from sub-Saharan Africa move to Istanbul in hope that it will only be a transit point to Europe (Hossain, this volume; McManus, this volume). While colonial relations of yesteryears continue to inform people's trajectories, other structures of global inequality have since emerged, adding new layers to the world map. Countries like the United States have their own "internal" Global South, namely urban neighbourhoods plagued with abject poverty, which feed some of their sports, particularly American football and basketball, with heavily racialized talent (Hoberman 1987; Smith 2014). In the absence of alternatives in marginalized areas of the world and disadvantaged neighbourhoods in wealthy countries, youth are increasingly orienting their futures to sport.

## Contextualizing global sport migrations

In this book, we seek to embed these dynamics in a broad social, political, economic and ideological context. Media and other public representations typically frame migrant athletes' stories as individual endeavours, foregrounding the fact that they are a powerful expression of individual creativity and effort against all odds, a framing that only reflects the obsessive individualism that has become a signature feature of the contemporary moment, at the expense of the social (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007). Here, in contrast, we see them as unfolding in a much denser web of social relations. In addition to bearing witness to extraordinary talent and willpower, migrant athletes' careers are the result of the efforts and struggles of many individuals around them, who are in turn affected by their changing fortunes. Migration exposes these dynamics in whole new ways, nuancing our understanding of success, failure, and everything in between, as social relations, selfhood, and life perspectives are transformed by the hope and the reality of migrating for sport. In Tonga and other Pacific Island nations, why have young men sought to transform their rugby skills into migratory commodities only recently, even though they have been playing the sport with considerable talent and gusto for over a century? How and why have sport mobilities become such a visible aspect of the contemporary moment?

We can answer these questions by investigating how contemporary athlete migrations operate at the conjuncture of a number of dynamics taking place on different scales, which at first glance seem unrelated but which on closer inspection turn out to form an extraordinary web of interrelatedness. These include the collapse of many national economies of the Global South and local economies on the margins of the industrial world, and the havoc wreaked on economies and labour markets by the imposition or adoption of structural readjustment policies; the growth of South-North and rural-urban labour migrations; the transformation of major aspects of the world of sport into a corporate industry and of recruiting strategies that now encompass the entire globe; the widespread privatization of television in the 1980s in many parts of the Global North and the emergence of sport-only channels; the advent of satellite television technology, broadcasting images of sporting glory to the remotest corners of the world; and the growing importance of millenarian beliefs in miraculous economic success, cosmologies that echo the cruel optimism that the sport industries encourage. Athletes' mobility and attempted mobility complicate our understanding of the Global South and the Global North, as they both reinforce and challenge structures of global inequality.

At the core of these dynamics is the worldwide turn to neoliberalism, a reconfiguration of economies and lives that has gripped the world since the 1980s. In a nutshell, neoliberalism is constituted by the liberalization of economies, the deregulation of markets, and the withdrawal of the state from the responsibilities to the citizenry it had taken on in some countries in the second half of the twentieth century (Harvey 2005). Inspired by the economic theory of the early-twentieth-century Vienna School (Mirowski and Plehwe 2009), it was implemented in the Global North in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a fix to the economic crises of the early 1970s, which itself resulted from the unsustainability of maintaining both capitalist super-profit making and the welfare protection of workers (Bieler and Morton 2018, 165–166). In Western Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand, it resulted in the drastic rollback in the progressive welfare structures that the state had put in place after World War II to alleviate and prevent poverty.

While neoliberalism originated in the Global North, it has created a domino effect that now affects the entire world, and can only be understood in the context of global interconnections. In the Global South, starting in the 1980s, many economies collapsed as the result of the successive destructive power of colonialism and global neoliberalism. From roughly the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, colonial powers had restructured the economies of many colonies around the production of single commodities to serve their metropolitan interests (e.g., groundnut in Senegal, coffee in Côte d'Ivoire, copra in the Pacific Islands), diverting ordinary people's energy away from more diversified and locally advantageous production activities. Starting in the 1970s, global commodity prices were increasingly determined by new forms of financial speculation in the financial centres of the world, such as futures and derivatives trading, a turn widely referred to as

financialization, a central feature of neoliberalism, which introduced new forms of unpredictability and volatility. In the 1980s, countries in the Global North reduced or abolished preferential import tariffs on goods from their former colonies as part of the turn to neoliberalism. As a result, agricultural and other types of economies in the Global South were unable to compete on world markets and small producers were particularly affected, while large corporations were better able to weather price fluctuations.

To rescue the economies of postcolonial countries from bankruptcy, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and wealthy donor states stepped in with loans. But there were conditions: receiving governments had to implement structural adjustment policies, including wage freezes; the devaluation of currencies; the commoditization of government services such as education and healthcare; the radical reduction of bureaucracies, which had since independence served as a major source of employment; and the end of subsidies to small-scale producers of primary commodities. Unable to pay the interests on the loans, let alone their principals, many countries faced serious debt crises. This situation has led to what David Harvey (2003) has termed "accumulation by dispossession," whereby wealthy countries and wealthy elites in poorer countries deprive the poor of resources and of the means to generate them. In countries of the Global South, the real victims of the debt crisis are not the official debtors such as the states, banks, and corporations, but ordinary citizens (Federici 2018, 48). In the Global North, blue-collar work disappeared as corporations moved production to the Global South, where wages are cheaper and the state keeps labour under control, thus dramatically increasing the gap between the rich and the poor and between wealthy and destitute regions or neighbourhoods. These dynamics persist to this day.

Everywhere, ordinary citizens have had to develop new economic strategies that depended on their inventiveness, flexibility, and adaptability, precisely the qualities that are prized in the neoliberal order. Hustling, wheeling and dealing, and seizing every opportunity to extract meagre resources have become the norm, consuming all daylight hours and energies (e.g., Jeffrey 2010; Newell 2012; Thieme 2018). Young men, the group that was particularly affected by the shrinking of labour markets, were often the ones who were most likely to develop these new approaches. But these were rarely sufficient to provide for families and communities, and young men have been turning their attention in increasing numbers to the possibility of making it in the sport industries, even though the probability of success in this field is infinitesimal. Young men's dreams of sporting success are fuelled by their love of sport, but perhaps more urgently by their desire to fulfil what is expected of them, namely to provide for families and communities.

In the Global South, most countries are unable to support a sport infrastructure that could offer career opportunities to talented young men. This means that dreams of sporting success are always elsewhere, namely in the Global North, where one can actually make money as a professional athlete. Young men thus yearn to migrate to wealthy countries, but these yearnings are not limited to them. As countries of the Global South have experienced economic downturns, they

have increasingly become labour-exporting countries, making "mobile and migrant labor the dominant form of labor" (Federici 2018, 29) in our times. People now see emigrating to seek employment in the Global North as the only way out of their predicaments and are prepared to take enormous risks to do so, such as crossing the Mediterranean in unseaworthy vessels piloted by untrustworthy people, with the tragic consequences that are chronicled almost daily in the media. In many cases, migrations across borders have been preceded by internal migrations, as rural people sought to move to cities when subsistence agriculture and fishing or employment in logging and mining were no longer able to provide for their livelihood, or as they seek sport careers for which opportunities are much more abundant in urban centres (Pietikäinen and Ojala, this volume). Young men's desires to migrate to pursue sports careers are thus part of much larger migratory trends.

Other transformations that have taken place since the 1980s are at the roots of the dramatic increase in athlete migrations. In the most popular global sports (e.g., football, rugby union, cricket, basketball, boxing, track and field), neoliberal policies have turned clubs, teams, and governing bodies into corporations driven by competition for resources and the struggle for survival, and the sports themselves into commodities sold to consumers in the form of televised programmes, logo-bearing merchandise, and other products. Like other forms of popular culture, sport acts as a powerful mechanism that injects the ideologies of neoliberalism into ordinary people's lives (Silk and Andrews 2012).

Pivotal to the neoliberal corporatization and commoditization of these sports was the privatization of television that started in many countries of the world in the 1980s, as states that until then had held a monopoly on television broadcasting (i.e., in most countries outside of North America) sold television broadcasting bands to private interests as part of the implementation of neoliberal policies. These private companies then had to fill airtime with the cheapest kind of unscripted programming possible, and sport fit that bill. Very soon, however, sport governing bodies and clubs in the most popular sports began charging increasingly large sums from broadcasting corporations for the right to broadcast and corporate sponsors for the right to advertise during sports events, leading to an exponential increase in revenues from sport, in top-level athletes' incomes, and in the cost of advertisements. The very practice of sport has been reshaped by neoliberal capitalist interests, as sport events have had to adapt to the requirements of television broadcasting (Barnett 1990; Whannel 1992; Giulianotti and Robertson 2009; Evens, Iosifidis, and Smith 2013).

These radical changes have had a number of consequences that are relevant to the topic of this book. One of these is that sports teams and clubs, locked in a cutthroat competition with one another, have been recruiting athletes much more widely than ever before, searching the world for the next brilliant young football player, rugby player, or marathon runner, and recruit him when he is still cheap and has little experience with contractual negotiations. Some of these efforts are undergirded by racialized discourses about the alleged "natural" talent of sportsmen from this or that continent, which frequently come together with not-so-flattering

pronouncements about their limited intellectual capacity. Thus the push to emigrate from economically depressed regions of the world is matched by the pull that these agents exert on young athlete hopefuls in the Global South.

Television has played another role in encouraging young men in the Global South to think of sport as their ticket out of poverty. Satellite television, which became commercial in the early 1990s, now reaches even the most remote corners of the world (Williams 1994). It brings images of athletic glory to children and young people, who watch English Premier League and Australian rugby tournaments. People huddle around television sets in cafés, bars, and homes and no longer attend local games, which lack the spectacular qualities of sport made for global television (Akindes 2011), and dream of migrating, playing in front of global audiences, and earning enough money to support large numbers of people.

The neoliberal reorganization of the sport world has had important consequences for the lives of professional athletes, whether local or migrant. The vast majority of today's athletes (other than at the elite level) are expected to make do with short contracts, employment insecurity, and geographical uncertainty. More than ever before, they have to self-promote and "sell" their skills to agents and potential employers. These practices have trickled far from the centres of neoliberal economies, as in West and Central Africa, where young men seek every opportunity to upload videos of themselves playing football to YouTube and Facebook (Hann 2018, 139). These conditions echo those of workers in the neoliberal age in general, who are expected to be self-reliant and sovereign subjects on whose shoulders rests the responsibility of both success and failure (Rose and Miller 2008; Gershon 2011; Gershon and Alexy 2011; McGuigan 2014), but they are further compounded by the dramatic uncertainty of employment in the sports world even before the neoliberal turn.

Particular to sport, which showcases the body in salient fashion, is the increasingly biopolitical surveillance of athletes' bodies. Professional athletes' bodies are constantly measured, assessed, tested (for doping, as Henne [2015] documents, but in many other respects), and programmed through diet, exercise, sleep, and other minute features of the athlete's daily existence. These practices are controlled by physiotherapists, dieticians, coaches, medical professionals, and others with expertise in the "science" of sport, a vast cadre of specialists who today are as globally mobile as the athletes themselves. Daniel Guinness, who pursued a career in professional rugby for eight years prior to becoming an academic, experienced these dynamics firsthand, as well as the increasing self-surveillance of what one says, when one laughs, and how one presents oneself. Again, these new forms of biopolitical self-control trickle down to the Global South, where athletic hopefuls engage in personal projects of self-improvement that mirror the practices extant in professional sport, often with the help of local resources such as Pentecostalism or the mystical services of marabouts (Besnier, Guinness, Hann, and Kovač 2018; Guinness 2018; Hann, this volume; Kovač, this volume).

These dynamics also affect athletes who migrate within nation-states. For example, Finland is known as one of the world's major "hockey nations," where the

sport is firmly rooted in regional towns for recruitment, infrastructure, and support. However, many Finnish boys and young men who harbour hopes of working as professional hockey players skate on thin ice. At a time of economic uncertainty for the peripheral regions of the country, local teams struggle financially, making professional career possibilities few and far between and fiercely competitive. There, neoliberal discourses of masculinity and disciplined and flexible sport subjects create pressure for development of not only hockey skills but also the skilling of the self, ready and apt for precarious yet potentially lucrative hockey markets.

Unlike the circulation of underclass workers, sports migrations evoke 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. The resulting enchantment is illustrative of the magical emergence of wealth from nothing, which many see as a signature feature of the turn of the millennium (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000). While in reality only the lucky few from the Global South gain widespread recognition, the *possibility* of success in professional sports in the Global North informs the actions and haunts the dreams of countless others.

The increasing role of sport – notably football – in development projects targeting sub-Saharan Africa encourage youth to seek a future in the sport. European clubs and other entrepreneurial parties have opened numerous football academies (or "football farms") in West and Central Africa, designed to pre-select promising young athletes and offer varying levels of formal instruction in addition to football training. Boys, who rightly see little future in formal education, flock in large numbers to these institutions (Darby, Akindes, and Kirwin 2007; Esson 2013; Kovač, this volume). In the background, families, neighbourhoods, and communities also wager their hopes for a better life on the children, despite the misgiving that some may have about the boys turning away from education. In other contexts, countless nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the developing world and disadvantaged areas of the Global North promote sport with the promise that it will alleviate poverty, reduce violence, and build character, forming what has come to be called "sport for development and peace" (Collison 2016; Hartmann 2016; Besnier, Brownell, and Carter 2018, 234–239). These efforts are informed by underexamined neoliberal ideologies of self-reliance and "empowerment," and reinforce the illusion that sport will somehow solve structural problems.

Taken together, the constellation of macro-level changes has fundamentally transformed, at the micro-level, the lives of ordinary people all over the world. The chapters in this collection analyze and compare the transformations and their scalar dimension through a sustained ethnographic engagement in a broad variety of national contexts. As they pull the readers in the lives of athletes and people who surround them, the authors demonstrate how sport migrations can serve as a means to explore consequential questions about the world in the neoliberal age. These include local-global connections, the interconnections of dynamics on different scales, the changing meaning of the future and work, and the search for a better life in contexts where resources are more than ever lacking.

## Sport migrations, gender, and social relations

The most immediate effect of the macro-level changes we have described is a reorganization of gender in general and of masculinity in particular. Women's increased participation and visibility in sports, including those stereotypically seen as strongholds of masculinity like football and rugby, suggest a progressive erosion of gender boundaries. In the volume's contributions focusing on boxing in Ghana or rugby in Fijian contexts, increased female participation is evident (Hopkinson, this volume; Guinness and Hecht, this volume). In running, the prize money is the same for female and male athletes, and people's perception is that it is actually easier for women to make money because it is less competitive (Crawley, this volume). Kenyan female runners find their way to Japan as easily as male runners, which enables them to achieve some forms of economic and social empowerment (Peters, this volume). In Chinese tennis, female athletes have been much more successful than their male compatriots on the international stage, enabling them to seek autonomy from state control over their careers, pushing the Chinese Tennis Association to implement reforms infused with neoliberal principles (Haugen, this volume).

However, in most other sports, women athletes systematically earn less. Inequalities are also manifest in the media's at best limited interest in women athletes and in the marketing of women's sports that pales in comparison to the marketing of men's sports. Female athletes often have to reconcile the pursuit of sport careers with social pressure to become wives and mothers, in contexts where their recognition as women is still largely contingent on their ability to perform such roles. Thanks to their overseas pursuits, Kenyan female runners have acquired economic productivity and leadership positions that would have been unavailable in their home country; still, they tend to retire earlier than their male counterparts, often at the peak of their career, so that they can return home to focus on motherhood and family (Peters, this volume). In the case of Ethiopian female runners, these tensions have strenuous emotional and physical effects, in that families and society at large expect them to simultaneously bear children and develop the skills to run in races overseas (Borenstein, this volume). In both domains, the women's bodies play a key role, but the demands that local understandings of motherhood and the international athletics industry place on the Ethiopian female bodies are incommensurable; the former demand fat bodies to guarantee a healthy child, while the latter is predicated on a thin body to win races. Yet this incommensurability is largely invisible to both the sporting industry and many Ethiopians, which, unlike the female athletes, do not perceive motherhood as work or fail to see the sacrifices required by sport.

Male athletes have greater opportunities to transform their sporting skills into sources of income, and sport has become a privileged site for the production and recognition of their identities in contexts where other avenues for achieving masculine adulthood previously available to their forefathers have now been challenged (e.g., marriage, reproduction, education, traditional economic activities). For young

men from many poorer countries and disadvantaged areas of the industrial world who seek employment in the sport industries, sport looms large in the definition of the future. Dreams of sporting success provide them with the hope of achieving recognition and prestige, as well as the hope of providing for families and communities in ways still expected of them. In brief, while a few women manage to migrate to pursue athletic careers, the disproportionate number of athletic hopeful migrants are boys and young men, and expectations of men are being reconfigured around the realities of the sports industries.

In different contexts and sports, the male athletes may long for distinct forms of mobility. Some hope to migrate to specific areas, countries, or regions, others aim to become globally mobile, sometimes moving back and forward between local and international sporting scenes. However, all aspirations of mobility have a profound effect on the way masculinity is produced through the cultivation of a neoliberal subjectivity. This becomes particularly evident in the Senegalese young men's aspirations within two equally important sport industries, football and wrestling (Hann, this volume). These appear at first glance to be diametrically opposed in their orientations to mobility: while footballers aim to move to Europe to play in professional leagues, aspiring wrestlers focus on local competitions, with brief training sojourns overseas. The former engage with and respond to institutionalized disciplining practices, which sometimes contradict local Islamic understandings of their bodies. For the latter, "traditional" and "modern" means of investing in the body are hotly contested as neoliberal body projects are infused with magico-religious practices. Ultimately, both wrestlers and football players become neoliberal entrepreneurs of the self in their efforts to optimize their bodies for the demands of their respective sports.

As sport reshapes masculinities around dreams of mobility, new forms of relations between women and men on the one hand and men and men on the other develop. In Finland, young hockey players exclude their girlfriends from their hockey-related sociality, creating spaces for themselves only (Pietikäinen and Ojala, this volume). In Ethiopia, a common strategy for male runners who have not succeeded in securing a place in a race overseas is to work as a pacemaker for a more successful female athlete (Crawley, this volume). The relationships between Turkish agents and African footballers in Istanbul (McManus, this volume) or Trinidadian men and migrant Guyanese cricketers (Hossain, this volume) are characterized by tensions over recognition and productivity. Māori rugby players are ambivalent about Pacific Islander players: when they travel overseas, bonds of brotherhood may draw on constructions of shared kinship, but in New Zealand they compete with one another (Calabrò, this volume). In all instances, we encounter the production of hierarchies between and within migrant groups that also change over time and space, which mirror dynamics found among migrants in all contexts (Glick Schiller, Çağlar, and Guldbrandsen 2006; Çağlar 2016).

Yet new forms of cross-gender sociality can also emerge, as they do among female and male Kenyan runners, who develop non-gendered relations of "friendship,"

assisting each other to fulfil obligations back home and navigate immigration processes, although when male respect is at stake, male solidarity prevails, reproducing gender inequalities (Peters, this volume). The reorganization of gender coming into play in athletic migrations extends to social actors other than the athletes. For example, in their interactions with African footballers in Istanbul, Turkish agents reconfigure their own masculinities in the context of the football industry (McManus, this volume).

Boys, young men, and adult men are surrounded by women whose investment in athletes' dreams and careers is largely invisible. Such is the case of the wives and domestic partners of Fijian rugby players, whose unsung domestic and emotional labour plays an important role in underpinning the transnational sporting industries (Guinness and Hecht, this volume). They face consequential dilemmas: if they remain in Fiji to pursue sometimes successful professional careers of their own and bring children up, they worry about their husbands being surrounded with adoring female publics overseas; if in contrast they follow their husbands to countries like France, where their professional qualifications and symbolic capital is not be recognized and where they are not legally allowed to work, they end up spending their days staring at the walls of an apartment. They move between emerging gender norms in modern Fiji and an expectation that they will prioritize their husbands' careers, negotiating the demands of extended families while working to maintain new and old personal relationships, relying heavily on faith in their husbands and in God. The emerging transnational kinship system is profoundly influenced by the requirements and possibilities of the neoliberal global rugby industry, which offers men the hope of lucrative careers in exchange for uncertainty, mobility, and precarity, and which requires wives and partners to carry out most of the work of raising, caring for, and supporting men before, during, and after their careers. It is a system that challenges traditional family and gender norms of men and women even as it relies upon them.

The dramatic turn that Tongan player Sione Vaiomo'unga's life took highlights the importance of the role of spouses. When the athlete got the long-awaited kidney transplant, it was his wife Sala who interacted with journalists and described to the rugby world her husband's struggles and their urgency. Sala's arrival in Romania made a substantial difference to Sione's life, although that came at the cost of her ability to work. Smiling next to her ill husband prior to the transplant, she evoked the encouragement, warmth, and advice that silently sustains athletes' trajectories. Understanding migrant athletes' lives thus requires expanding one's focus to the social actors who surround them, sustaining as well as benefiting from the hope dynamics in which athletes and their aspirations for a better life are immersed. This expanded focus is only possible through sustained ethnography, which has rarely been the case in past works on the subject.

Indeed, the world of sport is rife with categories other than the athletes who labour on trails and fields and the people who watch them, such as agents, recruiters, traffickers, trainers, coaches, managers, and other kinds of specialists. In many sports, the equivocal figure of the agent looms large as a fundamental piece of the structure,

acting as a broker between athletes' hopes and the sporting industries' promises (Klein 2014). Turkish football agents capitalize in symbolic and economic terms on the dreams of African footballers who have migrated to Istanbul as they mediate the aspirations of the footballers, deploying Islam-inflected discourses of "hospitality" that can easily be suffused with racial prejudices and justify structures of domination over the players (McManus, this volume). To survive in the world of running, Ethiopian athletes must cultivate a moral economy of deservingness by displaying submission to the authority of the sub-agent who decides who goes overseas, negotiating between the public realm (the state-owned clubs that pay their monthly salaries) and the private realm of sub-agents and managers who may be their route to great wealth (Crawley, this volume). The agent sometimes doubles as coach or as manager of an academy, juggling these various roles despite the potential conflicts of interest (Kovač, this volume).

Agents are often former players themselves who have walked the hope route and forged successful sport careers, which gives them stature in the eyes of prospective athletes who revere them as the embodiment of their own aspirations, while also criticizing them for having become mere businessmen and having turned away from "traditional" values (Peters, this volume). Sport-related institutions and intermediaries interacting with prospective talent on the socioeconomic peripheries also partake – or at least try to – in the promises of neoliberalism, as their own interests are entwined with those of the sport industries. Like the players, intermediaries are often waiting for their life-changing moment, when they will "discover" a talented athlete and partake in the wealth and social recognition promised by neoliberal sport. Like the players again, they are caught in competitive relations with one another as they search for the athlete that will make them rich. In both Ethiopia and Cameroon, intermediaries are self-proclaimed business people. In the neoliberal sporting industries, there is plenty of space for hope, but none for philanthropy.

A complex array of new social relations emerges around the transnational structures of the sport industries. For example, for Guyanese cricket players, Trinidad represents a migratory node that opens up various other career possibilities both in and beyond Trinidad, connecting them to a larger Caribbean migrant community in the United States and Canada (Hossain, this volume). Their lives are entangled with various dynamics of mobility that conjure the complex interplay of connections (social, economic, political, and ideological) between disparate locations and demand a rethinking of the readymade adoption of an "ethnic lens" in works on athlete migrations (Çağlar 2013; Glick Schiller, Çağlar, and Guldbrandsen 2006). These experiences are accompanied by a noticeable shift in preexisting social relations, reconfiguring cultural formations such as gender, marriage, age hierarchies, and state systems. Simultaneously, subjectivities are being reconstituted, reoriented to navigate industries governed by neoliberal logics, resulting in changes to religion, life projects, ways of conceptualizing the future, ideas about what a good life is, and ways of being in the world. All these projects take place in a particular setting, which demands attention to how place and time shape people's experiences and subjectivities.

These changes in relations and subjectivities are embedded in the complexities of local contexts. In different locales, they affect categories such as religion, ethnicity, indigeneity, kinship, and class, and they colour how athletes and their communities view, experience, and desire sport mobility. People's understanding of the future changes as economies become increasingly dependent on remittances, especially life-changing contributions that are so impressively large that they transform understandings of how society is structured. Social structures such as kin networks and religious communities are reconfigured to foster athletic migration, just as new hierarchies develop, especially as some athlete migrants access resources and renown outside of traditional political and social structures, exemplified by the growth of new churches, new concepts of personal prestige, and new approaches to family obligations. Gender informs the interactions between different localized systems and neoliberalism, revealing how the local mediates the global. Situated in the interface between sport, mobility, and gender, this volume aims to illustrate how neoliberalism transforms the life projects of individuals and communities, and to ask what it can teach about larger questions in the social sciences.

## The future is now: new ways of being and relating

In Cameroon, the increasing number of young men who channel their aspirations into football prefer chasing the dream of a European contract over pursuing the possibility of securing a place in the national football league (Kovač, this volume). Ethiopian runners hire private agents to get them into a race in Europe at the same time as they take care not to jeopardize their place in the government-owned clubs on which their financial survival depends (Crawley, this volume). Kenyan runners enrolled in Japanese schools and universities train and study hard in hope of landing a contract in a Japanese corporation's team, but also do all they can to meet financial expectations back home (Peters, this volume). In Finland, boys devote their teen years to ice-hockey, moving from club to club within the country as they evaluate whether they will make it in the industry or be completely left out (Pietikäinen and Ojala, this volume). Chinese men submit themselves to complex negotiations in order to maintain a sense of cultural identity while attempting to achieve social and domestic mobility through tennis (Haugen, this volume). Situated in disparate parts of the world and diverse sociocultural and sporting contexts, all these examples illustrate athletes' struggles to invest in the possibility of a life-changing future in sports (Adams, Murphy, and Clarke 2009).

Hope strongly shapes the temporality and the structures in which people's daily lives unfold, acting as a catalyst for social action (Crapanzano 2003; Hage 2003; Appadurai 2004; Miyazaki 2004). On many occasions, hope of a better life translates into projects where the future is located elsewhere (Narotzky and Besnier 2014; Pine 2014). Sport is a particularly dramatic example of these dynamics, as individual and collective hopes for a good life construct geographical mobility to the epicentres of sport as the passage to grand opportunities. Athletes believe that if they commit to their passion and cultivate their talent, they will be rewarded with

wealth, glory, and glamour within a short period of time. Framed within neoliberalism and its millennial promises of miraculous success, sport promises make the actions of the athletes almost messianic, in a context where athleticism itself has a spiritual quality, as the growing importance of Pentecostalism and other charismatic and millennial faiths in the world of sport attests (Besnier, Guinness, Hann, and Kovač 2018).

Driven by these promises, athletes sometimes neglect less profitable but more secure opportunities at home, devoting their youth and early adult life instead to the pursuit of potentially life-changing projects, making multiple compromises and deploying diverse strategies to navigate the sport industries and the realities which they move to and through as they attempt to concretize these projects. Tears and sweat are no longer mere metaphors as they strive to become and remain professional athletes. Yet these struggles seem to become bearable as athletes are moulded into neoliberal subjects. Mental endurance and strategic approaches become distinctive features of the selves produced around the different sports. Materialized in muscles and actions on the field, they enable athletes to deal with challenges, such as honouring demands from relatives, paying off debts contracted to pursue their dreams, ensuring their own survival, dealing with financial, geographical, and contractual instability, negotiating identities, and navigating their relations of dependence with agents and other people. Cameroon football academies train budding athletes to deal with precarity to the extent that they enter into a logic of suffering (Kovač, this volume). Senegalese footballers and Ghanaian boxers cultivate "athlete selves" defined by their ability to set themselves into neoliberal practices and values while building upon their own localized practices and values (Hann, this volume; Hopkinson, this volume).

In neoliberal sport, work tends to lose its association with labour and duty and is redefined as a matter of passion and talent. While demanding entrepreneurship and creativity of its subjects, neoliberalism concurrently encourages them to cultivate their passions and gifts and to think that they can do what they enjoy if they have the "right" attitude, obscuring the enormous sacrifices that are needed to do so. For example, Māori rugby players and Finnish ice-hockey players both emphasize the fact that they are pursuing their passion as they discuss what motivates them to pursue a sport career (Calabrò, this volume; Pietikäinen and Ojala, this volume). While people around the athlete, particularly family members, may be ambivalent about the pursuit of athletic dreams, the athlete's perseverance is not simply a matter of hope but also an expression of desire. Athletes embrace a neoliberal understanding of the relationship between work and passion and of the achievement of one's dream as being desirable, profitable, and possible. However, this new understanding of work diverts attention from the economic conditions that underpin athletes' migration and from the physical and emotional price they have to pay.

As athletes chase their dreams, a whole structure of hope sustains and encourages them within and beyond the sporting arena. In places like Tonga, the whole nation has invested in rugby bodies as an export commodity (Besnier 2012). Among

aspiring athletes in many places is a sense of "skipping" the present by being proactive and strategic, working hard towards the future, thus essentially living in the future. Yet prospective athletes can end up in a protracted state of waiting, occasionally interrupted by feverish activity, as is the case of Ethiopian runners (Crawley, this volume).

Temporality plays another role in athletes' lives, in that athletic careers in virtually all sports (with a few exceptions like shooting and archery) place limits on age. People in their mid-twenties are no longer able to launch credible athletic careers, which means that most prospective athletes must decide on a sport career (and have access to relevant resources) when they are legally minors. In addition, professional sport careers are very short, as the deterioration of the body, injuries, and other factors render the ageing athlete become increasingly unemployable in a highly competitive neoliberal market. Many athletes whom contributors to this volume have encountered seemed oblivious to these limitations. A recurrent issue is the lack of a long-term vision as athletes neglect education and other resources to dedicate exclusively to sport, finding themselves at the end of sport careers with few marketable skills, a problem that is compounded in the case of migrant athletes, who often lack the social and cultural capital to fend for themselves at career's end.

The presentism of professional athletes' lives has other dimensions. Particularly when they are successful, many athletes have difficulties administering their material resources. Migrant athletes are often under extreme pressure to send remittances to relatives, whose expectations are often disproportionate to the athletes' actual income. The pressure to give is also self-generated, as athletes want to demonstrate their productivity in sociocultural contexts in which the gift plays a central role, but they must operate across different and often conflicting economic regimes. For example, Kenyan runners employed in Japanese corporations or on sport scholarships in educational institutions see their endeavours as an economic and sociocultural investment in a life back in Kenya (Peters, this volume). Families, friends, and many others expect them to deliver instant and miraculous social and economic transformations, while their supervisors and coaches in Japan encourage them to be frugal and focus on building a stable nuclear family.

The unfortunate fate of Rupeni Caucaunibuca, a top-level Fijian rugby player with a distinguished (if tortuous) career in French rugby and one of the first Fijians to gain global recognition, is chronicled in a documentary that showed him living in Fiji, unemployed and bankrupt (Pacific Rugby Players' Welfare 2019). In the film, the ageing athlete teaches a life lesson to his migrant compatriots, encouraging them to save money for post-rugby life rather than spending it on immediate pleasure or distributing it, and to seek better life-skills support during their careers.

In contrast, Māori rugby athletes distinguish themselves for their focus on long-term projects, which may involve coaching or business ventures that deploy the neoliberal logics and values with which they became familiar in the rugby scene, sometimes capitalizing on their indigeneity (Calabrò, this volume). However, when they move overseas, players have to negotiate new forms of Othering than those they face in their homeland, Aotearoa New Zealand, where their Indigenous status

confer them *mana* but where they nevertheless suffer from discrimination and marginalization. Overseas, they have to engage with rugby industries and audiences whose understanding of the politics of indigeneity in Aotearoa New Zealand is limited at best.

In many other cases, the future materializes as desire and hope in the athletes' embodied sacrifices and efforts, but never actually becomes the present. Hope becomes the mother of precarity rather than a response to it. The story of Julius, one of the many Kenyan runners who obtained a sports scholarship to study in Japan, is a classic case of a missed future (Peters, this volume). His early achievements and his dreams are pitted against the ship containers that he has converted into a house and office for the small tourist company he now works for in Japan. Located in a parking lot in a new affluent residential neighbourhood, it offers a constant view onto a future that never eventuated. Julius' life also contrasts starkly with that of the Kenyan coach and agent who initially supported him and whom he blames for his predicament; unlike Julius, the coach was able to bargain his running achievements for a new career as coach and agent.

Yet Julius keeps foregrounding the positive. The good-mornings he exchanges with the Japanese inhabitants of the affluent neighbourhood, which Peters describes as the only bridge to the world he ran for, acquire distinct connotations if we think of them as bridges that still exist in Julius' mind. Similarly, Ghanaian boxer Daniel, who has never displayed the skills necessary for high-level competitions, keeps asserting that he can still make it and promotes himself with the self-selected moniker T.B.E. ("The Best Ever"), which he has appropriated from world champion Floyd Mayweather's nickname (Hopkinson, this volume). As athletes persevere in keeping the flame of hope alive, we are redirected to the notion of desire. Julius and Daniel seem aware that the splendid future promised by their sport industry will not materialize for them. But they remain attached to their hopes as their very identity is defined by the desires that have shaped their approach to their future. More than any other context, sport is a site of cruel optimism, where athletes and the people who surround them get sometimes so attached to fantasies of a splendid future that they in fact bypass the good life.

## Conclusion: sport, migration, and gender in the neoliberal age

Many of the chapters in this book were written in the context of a five-year project titled "Globalization, Sport, and the Precarity of Masculinity" (2012–17) directed by the first author of this introduction. The project sought to understand the topics addressed in this book through long-term ethnographic fieldwork in a variety of locations around the world in five sports, namely football, rugby union, cricket, marathon running, and Senegalese wrestling. A few of the chapter authors who were not directly involved in the project (Hannah Borenstein, Michael Crawley, Matt Haugen, John McManus, Sari Pietikäinen, and Anna-Liisa Ojala) were invited to contribute chapters because their research provides valuable perspectives on the relationships among sport, mobility, and gender.

While the global mobility (or immobility) of athletes and prospective athletes involves very few people compared to the vast numbers who migrate to escape poverty, environmental degradation, or violence, it occurs at the conjuncture of consequential global phenomena and thus shed light on these phenomena. Ethnographic methods play a crucial role in this process, as they enabled the authors to go beyond simplistic explanations and to uncover the important role played by certain factors that have escaped the attention of other observers or have often been over-simplified. Through ethnography, the authors demonstrate how athlete migrations in the neoliberal age bring together micro-level factors, such as people's aspirations, their understanding of time, and their relationships to those who surround them, with macro-level factors, such as changes in global economies, the development of new technologies, and the large-scale mobility of people around the world. This book documents how people's lives in local settings are inextricably intertwined with the reconfiguration of the global in the neoliberal age.

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