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6 Athletic Migrant Religiosities and the Making of ‘Respectable Men’

Abstract: Brazilians comprise a “global football workforce” (Poli, Ravenel and Besson 2019) as the largest national group of migrant players in contemporary football. Previous ethnographic studies (Rial 2008, 2012) reveal that Brazilian athletes value the opportunity to move across borders. In constructing mobile aspirations, athletes from the Global South attempt to embody a form of respectable masculinity (Esson 2015a; Besnier, Guinness, Hann and Kovač 2018). Although their movement is advantageous to many parties, sports migrants are among the most visible and precarious nodes of sports industries. Athletes are regularly subjected to short-term contracts and premature career termination due to injuries (Roderick 2006). In this chapter, I will analyse how migrant Brazilian football and futsal players construct narratives about their careers, express masculinities and embody religious symbols in the Czech Republic, Lebanon, Austria, and Israel. My analysis is based on life-history interviews with migrant athletes, and informal conversations with one sports agent and one migrant futsal coach (Connell 2010; Butler 2005). Life-history interviews reveal not only how athletes use religious symbols in their everyday life, but also how race, gender, and class are articulated in sports migrants’ experiences. This chapter is inspired by my engagement with Talal Asad’s “anthropology of secularism” (1987, 2000, 2003) as well as Saba Mahmood’s (2001, 2005) analysis of a contemporary women’s religious movement in Cairo. I argue that Asad’s and Mahmood’s analyses of the relationship between religion, agency, pain, and suffering open paths to new understandings and interpretations of the subjective experiences of contemporary sport migrants.

Introduction

Rethinking the relationship between “agency” and “structure” has been one of the central concerns of sociology in the 20th century (Bourdieu 1998; Giddens 1984). In this sense, sports has gained prominence as an arena in which everyday acts of embodiment construct gender, race, and class. Sociologists Pierre Bourdieu (1978), Eric Dunning, and Norbert Elias have productively forged concepts and applied social theories to sports. Elias and Dunning’s (2008 [1986]) analysis of sports as a “male preserve” is especially important. These authors

found that as women demanded equality in the second half of the nineteenth century, men-only sports clubs were created as spaces in which men were allowed to express aggressiveness, homophobia and celebrate homosocial bonds (see also Sheard and Dunning 1973).

The analysis of sports as a male preserve was fruitfully expanded in the sociology of sports during the 1980s and 1990s (see Maguire 1986; Molnar, Amin and Kanemasu 2019), and contemporary sociological work on gender and sports has benefited from a critical perspective on masculinities (Kanemasu and Molnar 2013). However, a growing number of ethnographic works have been challenging the assumption that hegemonic masculinity is predominant in sport. This scholarship has raised issues such as the unpredictability of sports migration routes (Carter 2011; Kovač 2018), the precariousness of sports careers (Roderick 2006; Besnier, Guinness, Hann and Kovač 2018), the importance of family negotiations in sports migration processes (van der Meij and Darby 2017) and religious affiliations of sports migrants (Rial 2012; Guinness 2018).

This chapter thus responds to this paradox. On the one hand, sports has been analysed as a “platform of hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity” (Kanemasu and Molnar 2015, 2) while on the other hand, migrant athletes’ lives do not necessarily correspond to hegemonic forms of expressing masculinity. In this sense, I consider one of the most important claims of masculinity studies, which is that men do not constitute a monolithic category (Connell 2005 [1995]; Hearn 2015), and I try to understand the complex and at times contradictory relationship between religion, men’s athletic bodies, and disciplinary regimes in sports. In this chapter, I present an ethnographic account of Brazilian migrant futsal (a variation of football, usually played indoors) and football players in the Czech Republic, Israel, Lebanon, and Austria.

I will explore the paradox mentioned above by engaging with Talal Asad’s studies of “anthropology of secularism” (1987, 2000, 2003) and Saba Mahmood’s analysis of contemporary religious movements in Cairo (2001, 2005). My analysis will use the debates in religious studies initiated by Clifford Geertz and Asad to reinforce my argument that sees religion as an embodied form of practice (see also Scott and Hirschkind 2006).

Asad’s and Mahmood’s attempts to see religion as an embodied symbolic practice are pertinent to my fieldwork with Brazilian migrant athletes. Athletic careers are a form of high-skilled labour that resembles industrial work (Roderick 2006).¹ Athletic careers are also unusually short compared to other professions.

¹ Under the influence of Paul Darby (2013) and Alan Klein (1991), some sports migration scholars have focused on sports academies in the Global South. Sports academies are usually

Moreover, athletes tend to be subjected to public scrutiny of their performances, short-term contracts, uncertainty and the risk of injuries and premature career termination. In some cases, such as football, the constant availability of “talented players” pressures footballers to compete with team members for limited available positions (see Damo 2014; Esson 2015a).

Previous research conducted in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Fiji, Ghana, Senegal, Cameroon, and Brazil analysed the importance of sports careers to young people in the Global South. Sports careers are often conceived as a form of enacting a “respectable masculinity” (Besnier, Guinness, Hann and Kovač 2018; Esson 2015b; Hann 2018; Guinness 2018; Klein 1991). In sports migration studies, “respectable masculinity” is usually associated with the ability of athletes to provide for extended family members, through remittances. I, however, argue that material gains should be seen as one of the main elements of respectability, while a further analysis of players’ injuries and their negotiations with sports disciplinary regimes points to different meanings of respectability in athletes’ everyday lives.

Although there is a growing literature about sports migration and gender, most sports migration studies ignore the relationship between agency, injuries and pain. As I will argue, the absence of consideration of injuries disregards a vital part of athletes’ careers and hinders understanding of the various ways migrant players use religious symbols to both discipline their bodies and negotiate with secular medical discourses.² In this sense, an analysis of the relationship between secular scientific discourses and male athletes’ religiosities questions oppositions usually associated with “secularism” such as modern/traditional, East/West, and male/female, in which men are associated with “reason” and “modernity” and women with “tradition” and “religion”. Thus, an analysis of migrant athletes’ religiosities offers new ways to understand athletic masculinities.

understood as educational institutions in which children and adolescents are socialised, disciplined and constantly evaluated. Thus, these sports scholars tended to discuss sports as “labour”, and place sports labour in wider conceptual frameworks such as world-systems analysis, neoliberalism, and transnationalism. The concept of career has been given little space in sports migration scholarship. To discuss “careers”, I have found inspiration in Matthew Roderick’s (2006) works with footballers, and Howard Becker’s (1952, 1993, 2008) works with public school teachers and doctors. For Becker, careers connect individuals to social structures, institutions, and formal and informal networks while fusing the “subjective” and the “objective” in roles and statuses that are collectively recognised.

2 Mari Engh (2018) analysed transnational religious practices of Nigerian migrant women footballers in Scandinavia. Engh’s ethnographic account could be used to develop a transnational, gendered comparative analysis of athletes’ use of religious symbols in their migration processes. She, however, ignored injuries and pain in her analysis.

First, I will detail the methodological possibilities and limitations of my study of Brazilian athletic transnational migration. I will then examine how Asad constructed his perspective on religion and secularism and discuss more contemporary accounts of sports migration, situating these ethnographic accounts in relation to my current interpretations. Throughout this chapter, I seek to demonstrate the intimate connection between the use of religious symbols and the precariousness of sports careers.³

Data and Methodology

This chapter is based on an ongoing multi-sited ethnographic project (Marcus 1995; Hannerz 2003). The project's main goal is to understand the life-histories of Brazilian migrant male futsal and football players (Atkinson 1998; Connell 2010). The current chapter is based on 12 life-history interviews with futsal and football players, as well as informal conversations with one migrant futsal coach and one sports agent. All the interviews were conducted in Portuguese, and lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. The interviews were transcribed and coded manually.

While my current study might not be able to systematically compare futsal and football players' various experiences and life histories due to the methodological limitations I face, I argue that researchers should compare futsal and football because, as the athletes I interviewed and a futsal coach familiar with the football industry in Brazil confirmed, Brazilian athletes tend to practice both sports in their childhood and early adolescence. At around the ages of sixteen or seventeen, athletes must specialise in one of these categories.⁴

In this sense, futsal and football players participate in the same process of early athletic professionalisation. There is a *continuum* between these sports. However, these sports subject players to different market demands and imagined

³ The precariousness of athletic careers is not a “male preserve”. Research on migrant women footballers in Scandinavia analysed footballers' low salaries, precarious living conditions and short-term contracts. The racialised representations present in the world of women's football have also been examined (see Agergaard and Botelho 2011; Agergaard and Ungruhe 2016; Engh, Settler, and Agergaard 2017; Engh 2018).

⁴ While at first I thought about including women athletes in my current research, I soon understood that women's football has specific features. Women can play professionally only in around 20 countries, of those registered at FIFA (see Tiesler 2016). In this sense, women's football has produced a distinct political economy and geography. Comparisons of the migration of women and men athletes are still rare. For the beginning of such scholarship, see Agergaard and Ungruhe 2016.

geographies. While football's core leagues are still entrenched in Western Europe, futsal offers players a route to Central and Eastern European clubs, where there are leagues considered prestigious in the futsal world, such as those in Russia and Kazakhstan.

My access to both of these sports illustrates how unequally the world of sports is structured. To gain access to migrant futsal players, I would simply go to matches and wait until the crowd was gone, and players were still resting on the courts. I would then present myself as a Brazilian PhD student based in the Czech Republic, and ask to schedule interviews at breaks in the league schedule, and before or after training sessions.

Access to footballers was often mediated by club officials. I would usually email the clubs, and ask either that they send me players' personal contacts or to forward my emails to the players themselves. If a player was interested in participating in my study, he could contact me, and tell me when he would have time for an interview.

In fact, the main topics of this chapter; religion, injuries and pain, only gradually became worthy of pursuit during my fieldwork. The first football club I contacted responded to my request for an interview in an unexpected manner. A club official told me that the Brazilian player on their team, Joaquim,⁵ had returned to Brazil for surgery. I would have wait two months to interview him. It was the temporary impossibility to meet Joaquim that made me aware of the importance of injuries. When we finally met, the relationship between injuries and religion became clearer. In my subsequent meetings and life-history interviews with migrant athletes, I explicitly brought up the topics of injuries, religion and pain.⁶

Life-history interviews seemed appropriate for understanding athletes' migration and careers because I recognised that professional players, regardless of their gender, participate in a career that begins early in life, and each of the steps football and futsal players take are marked by clear rites of passage. However, as I will detail later, as the course of my fieldwork evolved, I found that young Brazilian men take unpredictable paths to become professional footballers.

⁵ I have changed the names of players and do not identify their clubs to protect the athletes' privacy. Athletes' privacy is also protected by the translation process involved in my study. I have translated the interview materials from Portuguese to English when writing my ethnographic account.

⁶ The importance of religion to professional athletes from the Global South is an emerging topic in sports migration scholarship, and recent ethnographic accounts have been building a bridge between sports studies and the global reach of religious symbols. For a detailed ethnographic account of migrant footballers' and rugby players' relationship with religion, see Rial 2012 and Guinness 2018.

Life-history interviews also allow researchers to understand how race, gender and class intersect, as people recount their stories. In interpreting life-histories, researchers should be attentive to the heterogeneity and contradictions of personal narratives (see Crenshaw 1991; Butler 2005; Connell 2010).

In the next section, I will analyse how Asad's perspectives on religion, agency and pain can be fruitful in the analysis of athletic migrant masculinities.

From Contemporary Debates in Religious Studies to Masculinities and Sports

The two most prominent approaches in sociology of religion try to see religion either on “its own terms” or as part of broader social and historical contexts. These approaches are based on two fundamentally difficult questions in the study of religion: How can one separate a “religious experience” from a “secular” one? What makes this possible?

Classical sociologists such as Émile Durkheim (1995 [1912]) and Max Weber (2009 [1905]) exemplify these different approaches. While Durkheim searched for an universal definition of religion, one that considers religious institutions to be responsible for the division between spheres of the sacred and the profane, Max Weber was more interested in the mutual reinforcement of religious discourses, institutions and the conduct of everyday life.⁷

The ideas of these two classical sociologists shared some key characteristics. Weber and Durkheim freed themselves from Enlightenment questioning of the “truth of religions” by looking for the various ways that religion is part of the social structure or by analysing how religious concepts travel to the secular world. Although these authors used radically different methodologies, both insisted on an evolutionary view that saw no place for religion in the contemporary world (see also Casanova 2011).

However, recent polemics in the anthropology of religion have also pointed to the theoretical and methodological difficulties researchers face when dealing with religious studies. Geertz's (1968, 2005) definition of religion as a “cultural system” and Asad's (1982, 1983, 2003) critique of Geertz's positions reveal the limits and possibilities researchers face when addressing religion as an object of study.

⁷ Asad's genealogy of the secular has dealt with both the Durkheimian and Weberian legacies. For a critical analysis of Durkheim's views on religion, see Asad (2003). In his most recent book, Asad (2018) criticised Weber's views on the relationship between Christianity and secularism.

For instance, Geertz (2000 [1973], 90) defines religion as:

(1) a system of symbols which act to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

Geertz understands symbols and meanings as public acts. In this sense, religious symbols could be observed and analysed not only in sacred places or religious celebrations but also in other areas of social life. Nevertheless, Geertz tends to emphasise the usual places in which religious meanings can be located: rituals, celebrations, beliefs.

However, unlike the classical sociologists, Geertz does not profess the “end of religion.” Far from it, he understands that the role of religion in a postcolonial world has never been more relevant (see also Meyer 2008). Constructing a comparative perspective of the two main sites where he wrote his ethnographic accounts during the Cold War, Morocco and Indonesia, Geertz (2005) was forced to affirm that religion was not dying in the contexts in which he worked.

As Geertz's definition of religion questioned the “secularisation thesis,” Asad (1982) contested this definition from a different standpoint. Asad argues that Geertz's definition of “religion” was ill-defined. Because Geertz was working with the concept of public meaning, he saw culture and religion as historically and interactively constructed symbolic systems, and affirmed that no clear differentiation exists between “symbols” and the “meanings” they convey. For Asad, however, “symbols” have no “meaning” in isolation. Asad proposes building a “genealogy of the secular”. Only a perspective that is historically grounded and attentive to power relations could go beyond Geertz's *sui generis* presentation of religious symbols (Asad 1983, 238–240).

In building this “genealogy of the secular”,⁸ Asad (1982, 2003) continued his criticism of Geertz for presenting a universalistic definition of religion. Religion, Asad contended, was embedded in historical contexts and no trans-historical definition of religion, even if provisional, as was Geertz's, could account for the changes in religious authority from the Middle Ages to the present.⁹ Asad focused on the questions, “how have we come to think the way we think about

⁸ Asad (2003, 36) argued that both secular and religious practices should be approached through a perspective on power (political economy), the disciplinary regimes involved, and an attentive eye to what “makes these practices conceptually possible, desirable, mandatory”.

⁹ In this debate, Geertz never answered Asad's critiques. Geertz (2005, 14) only mentions Asad's work in a footnote of his Sir James Frazer lecture at Cambridge University in 2004.

“the secular”? How did we develop a ‘secular sensibility’ to deal with the world?”, and made *power* a central feature of religion.

Asad (2009) does not provide any definition of secularism. However, in Asad’s work, secularism is subjected to a criticism that seeks to understand the exclusions and suppressions present in the very concept of the “secular”.¹⁰

Thus, we might ask, along with Asad, how religious athletes negotiate the secularised world of sports that surrounds them.

As I will discuss next, an answer to this question may be found in the precariousness of athletic careers. In this context, religion would help athletes face the risks associated with a career in sports and give them meaningful tools for dealing with the daily uncertainty associated with their professional careers.

I will illustrate the pertinence of Asad’s anthropology of secularism for analysing sports migration by focusing on a theme that permeates Asad’s works: agency and pain. Next, I will analyse two narratives about recovery from injury. The analysis of athletes’ narratives helps to understand how the use of religious symbols and players’ submission to pain provide them with specific forms of agency, opening a constant negotiation between players’ religiosities and secularised sports environments.

Agency and Pain

In contrast with the common view that sees pain as a condition that impedes agency and hinders reason, Asad (1997a) contends that the psychology of pain has taught us that resistance to pain is seen to take a wide variety of forms. Furthermore, Asad’s genealogy of the secular points to our secular sensibility as an impediment to seeing agency in pain (Asad 1987, 2000, 2003). Secular sensibilities associate pain and suffering with religious subjectivities, and antagonise pain, suffering and reason.

Pain, like competition, is not new to sports studies. Michael Messner (1992) analysed sports injuries as forms of self-inflicted violence. Athletes would have to abide to masculine codes of conduct and perform in pain. Daniel Guinness’ (2014) analysis of Fijian rugby migration, and Thomas Carter’s (2011) ethnographies with

10 Inspired by Asad’s genealogy of the secular, Joan Scott (2009) has shown that there were no ready-made connections between the ideals of the French revolutionaries and women’s demands to stand as equals in the eighteenth century. Scott’s reflection also draws upon Saba Mahmood’s ethnography to develop an analysis of the recent polemics concerning the ban of the headscarf in contemporary France.

hockey players are also constructed around the ubiquity of pain. However, none of these authors address the possible relationship between pain and religious symbols (see also Carter 2012). In my fieldwork, I found that pain is often taken as an unavoidable part of athletes' lives. In this sense, when Asad (2003, 91) examined the ways in which various religious "traditions use pain to create a space for moral action", he opened new ways for ethnographers to think about the relationship between pain,¹¹ religion and sports (see also Asad 1987).

Mahmood's (2001) ethnography of women's religious movements in Cairo has inspired researchers to reflect on different modalities of agency. Mahmood provides examples of contemporary Muslim women mobilising religious symbols to effect changes in their family lives and religious authority. Women analysed in Mahmood's ethnography do not mobilise explicit feminist discourses. In some instances, the ethics women express when dealing with both orthodox Islamic tradition and secularised places of work lead them to a sequence of practices that reinforces pious virtues. In this sense, Mahmood, building upon Asad's works, suggests that researchers should focus on understanding the specific grammar of people's actions (see also Mittermaier 2012). According to Mahmood, women enact Islamic virtues by training their bodies through a sequence of actions.

Mahmood urges researchers to avoid falling into analyses based on a binary relation between "compliance" and "resistance". In this sense, Mahmood's injunction to focus on different modalities of agency can be fruitfully applied to understanding Brazilian migrant athletes' dealings with injuries and pain. For instance, in my first meeting with a Brazilian futsal player in the Czech Republic, João, he told me:

Me: How did you end up here [in the Czech Republic]?

João: Well, I'm 36. I'm already an experienced player. I played in Azerbaijan, and Russia before playing here. And the first time I played here in the Czech Republic was because we were playing a UEFA Champions League match. Then I went back to Brazil because of an injury. And a coach from the Czech Republic called me, and asked if I would like to play here. At that time, there were three teams trying to hire me. But I made a deal with this coach, because he told me: 'You can trust me' And I replied: 'Yes, I trust you'. [he pauses] I am very grateful for all that futsal has given me . . .

¹¹ Asad (1997b, 303) argues that modern societies do not reject all forms of pain. Modernity addresses pain as long as it results from "appropriate actions" and "rests on a calculus". Sport constructs its relationship with pain as an expression of efforts to cope with both the inherent risks of intense physical activity and a maximising of players' productive capacities. The embodiment of religious symbols is based on diverse sources of authority and histories.

João continued to describe how he recovered from his injury in the Czech Republic, and the club's pressure for him to perform.

João: Well, you know, people in Europe like Brazilians [meaning Brazilian players], but there is a lot of pressure on us. You work, you know that people will always pressure you for results. In the first two matches we faced in this championship, we lost the first one and the second one was a draw. And all the time, people in the club were telling me to play. And I responded to them: 'I can't play now. I'm still in pain.' This is my third match here, and now I feel I can play".

João does not provide a full account of the risks faced in his futsal career, but his statement emphasises the constant pressure for results in professional sports. An injured player is usually regarded as unable to earn his place (Roderick 2006). However, in João's case, his injury and refusal to play in the first two matches mark a peculiar form of agency. While I could argue that João resisted the pressure to play, he does not articulate the narrative of his refusal to play as a form of "resistance". Instead, he focused on how he was hired, by a direct call from the club's coach, and the assurance that he was signing a contract based on trust. Trust here is an important feature because João's dealings with pain and his delay in performing could be interpreted as indicating he was not interested in the team's goals. Meanwhile, the pressure on him was mounting because in those first matches, there was no victory.

João's overcoming of pain also follows mainly from his relationship with the club's coach because most of the futsal clubs in the Czech context have minimal medical staff and often rely on the Czech public health care system to treat injured players.¹²

After João and I exchanged contacts, I noticed Biblical messages in his WhatsApp conversations, along with pictures of the match at which we met. Most of these messages addressed the ideal time to wait to return to play and the ability to have patience. In sharing these Biblical messages, João found the appropriate audience with whom to share his daily struggles with pain: his family and friends in Brazil.

João's history not only concerns his use of religious symbols and his inability to control pain in the first two matches in the Czech Republic. As in Asad's analysis, João mobilised religious symbols when dealing with "secular" medical

¹² It is important to note that the trust in João's story is not an analytical category. I interpret trust as an element of his overcoming of pain. Both Asad and Geertz were strongly influenced by Ludwig Wittgenstein who, in his *Philosophical Investigations*, argued that the expression of pain (to say "I am in pain") is a way to ask for social recognition (see Wittgenstein 1958, aphorisms 244–253).

discourses.¹³ When I asked João to detail his recovery process and his religious affiliation, he replied,

I went two weeks without training. I have my own physiotherapy equipment. So, I partially recovered with the help of a friend, a physiotherapist. I know that what I cannot do, Jesus does for me. He already cured me of much more serious injuries, like one to my pubis. At that time, I thought I would never play again. I have Christ as my strong pillar.

It seems to be common for football and futsal players who experience serious injuries to acquire at least some physiotherapy equipment to speed up their healing processes. João is not only referring to his personal equipment, and his physiotherapist friend as necessary conditions for recovery. Both the equipment and his friend's knowledge have clear limits in his view. In religious athletes' life-histories, injuries are portrayed as crisis moments that demand interventions from a higher power.

As I will show in the next part of this chapter, João's history also illustrates other aspects of athletic migration. In keeping with the precariousness of athletic careers, sports migrants face precarious living conditions. For instance, when I tried to contact João for another interview, he responded through WhatsApp that he was no longer in the Czech Republic. He was back in Brazil. He also told me that the club he was representing in the Czech futsal league had been dissolved. At first, unable to understand what had happened, I began to search online for news in the Czech sports press about the dissolution of this particular club. In fact, João's club officially stated that it had left the Czech futsal league to protest against corruption in the Czech Futsal Association.

In all my contacts with João or his wife, I noticed no hint of complaints about the treatment that he had received in the Czech Republic, in spite of the fact that his contract ended abruptly. Nevertheless, João's history of recovery from injury points to various ways athletes may use religious symbols not only to discipline themselves, but also to negotiate with various club officials and medical discourses.

In fact, only one year after the corruption charges were made public was I able to understand more about the Czech futsal club for which João played. Using social media, I located another Brazilian who had played on the same club, Jessé, who was playing in Lebanon at the time we talked. I invited him for an interview over WhatsApp, and asked him about the Czech club's official statement.

¹³ While views on how "secular" sports might differ, recent attempts to conceptualize sports as a "sacred phenomenon" share my concern to avoid conflating sports and religion. This chapter's use of Asad is close to what Shilling and Mellor (2014, 360–363) see as "the sporting secular sacred".

Jessé told me that the corruption charges were unfounded. The club's president could not meet players' payments on time, and the lodgings provided to migrant players often had the hot water turned off because the clubs had not paid its bills. He also told me he had not received his last payment in total. When the club was dissolved, Jessé was injured, and club officials only paid him half of his salary.

Futsal seasons last 8 to 10 months. Depending on players' migrant status, and family situation, after these periods, they are obliged to go back to Brazil. Players who go home must decide if they will take a job with a Brazilian team, or wait for their agents or their contacts to offer them a contract abroad.

In this sense, João's and Jessé's narratives illustrate the precariousness and fluidity of sports migration. João spent two weeks back in Brazil after he was released from the Czech club. He then went to Russia, on an even shorter and more precarious contract, to play in the UEFA Futsal Champions League. Jessé went back to Brazil to recover from an injury at a friend's clinic. After four months in Brazil, he went to Slovakia, and is now playing in Lebanon, also on a shorter and more precarious contract.

Researchers have analysed recent changes in capitalism, and the racialised and gendered regimes that constrain migrants into precarious lives (Lewis, Dwyer, Hodkinson and Waite 2015). While most of the Brazilian futsal players I met in the Czech Republic would consider themselves white, Jessé's complaints about the housing conditions and the unexpected cut in his last payment could be interpreted to indicate that his club's financial problems combined with a form of racialising Brazilian futsal players. Racialisation, in this case, deemed that some players were unworthy of adequate housing, and the previously agreed-upon payment (see also McIntyre and Nast 2011).

“Respectability”, Religion and Commodified Sports

“Respectability” is a concept that has been used to reflect on the motivations that drive young men to a career in sports. It refers to an athlete's ability to provide for their extended families,¹⁴ and to assert respectable masculinities. In Besnier's ethnographic works with Fijian migrant rugby players, they constantly

¹⁴ While football gives greater visibility and higher salaries to male athletes, providing for extended families is also expected from highly successful women footballers (see Tiesler 2016).

compare themselves with other migrant workers to assert that they can send more remittances back home (Besnier 2012, 2014, 2015; Besnier, Brownell and Carter 2017; Besnier, Guinness, Hann and Kovač 2018). These comparisons are one of the ways in which they strive to gain “respect”.

Other ethnographers have examined this process from different angles. Daniel Guinness (2018, 316) constructed his analysis around what he called “anthropologies of destiny” to analyse the various local discourses used by actors in the sports industry to legitimise the success of migrant Fijian rugby players. These discourses are often based on different and, at times, conflicting or complementary forms of authority. Some discourses are based on Pentecostalism,¹⁵ others are based on purely secular claims, such as the discourse of professionalism, and there are discourses that associate Fijian bodies to a certain “natural predisposition” to play rugby. I understand that both Guinness’s “anthropology of destiny” and Besnier’s reflections on athletic migrant “respectability” are efforts to analyse the same processes, namely the various ways that athletes construct career trajectories and migration as subjective experiences.

In the course of my fieldwork, I encountered situations that could be approximated to Guinness’s notion of anthropologies of destiny. But I cannot affirm that professional Brazilian migrant football and futsal players construct their narratives about themselves and their careers using notions of “destiny”. In some instances, I was reminded of footballers’ early promises to their parents that they would succeed at a career in sports, as if these promises constituted self-fulfilling prophecies. However, these promises were often followed by the unpredictable paths that footballers took to become professionals. Pedro, a Brazilian footballer currently working in Israel’s first division is one example. He told me,

I started playing futsal at my school. I always played on the school futsal team. When I was 11, we played Flamengo in the final match of a championship. We lost that game pretty badly. It was 5-1. But I played really well. I was competing for the most valuable player of the championship award. Then, the Flamengo staff invited me for a try out. I went, and I passed and they took me in to play futsal there. In my first year, it was only futsal, then in my second year I began training for football too. After my second year, I was playing futsal and football. And I played three years there. But it began to get in the way of school. School and training were at the same time. So I had to miss lots of classes. [. . .] Then I told my mother I was going to give up on football and start to study. I was going to take a test to become an air force sergeant. One day, a former physical education

15 Pentecostalism originated as a mixture between African-American spirituality and Methodism. Pentecostalism is said to have started at a prayer marathon in Los Angeles. Important features of Pentecostalism are an emphasis on a direct relationship with the Holy Spirit and the manifestation of spiritual gifts, such as speaking in tongues. Davis (2004) links Pentecostalism and global poverty.

teacher invited me to play at the “Favelas Cup”. I agreed. We came in third, but I was the top goal scorer of that “Favelas Cup”, and a football agent, who was there, scouted me. He came up with an offer, and I showed it to my parents. My mother then told me: “If you want to try again, go ahead and do it”.

As Nienke Van der Meij and Paul Darby (2017) note, the precariousness of athletic careers is also associated with different family negotiations and expectations about the career prospects of young men. In Pedro’s case, in a family composed of military men, a military career had always been posed as a possibility. We can see that Pedro’s family, especially his mother, whom he mentioned regularly in the interview, moved from being suspicious to encouraging because Pedro had finished high school when he met his current football agent.

His mother’s constant pressure for Pedro to at least finish high school meant that after school he could expand his career options. While Pedro’s story resembles Guinness’s analysis of Fijian rugby players in the sense that there is a constant interaction between Fijian military and sports careers, I cannot say that Pedro presented me with a fully developed narrative in which an “anthropology of destiny” appeared.

The fact that my work did not find a full “anthropology of destiny”, but greater focus on “respectability”, may be related to the methodological limitations I faced. The fact that I opted for interviews as the primary method of analysis created challenges and limitations. By looking for a lengthy career narrative, I adopted “how” questions, as Howard Becker (1952, 1993, 2008) recommends.

When researching doctors, Becker became increasingly aware that asking “why did you become a doctor?” is not an intriguing question. Doctors would usually find a straightforward answer to this question. In looking for a narrative, he had to ask “how did you become a doctor”? The shift to “how questions” propelled people to reflect on their trajectories and present them in a narrative form.

Pedro’s story also struck me because his family was connected to a neo-Pentecostal church, and he would often raise the possibility of becoming a pastor in the future. In this sense, there were moments in the interview when he would lament the isolation in which he was living in Northern Israel, far not only from his family and friends, but also from any Brazilian “evangelical” churches.

“Respectability”, in Pedro’s words, comes in the form of a definitive gift (Mauss 1990 [1950]) to his mother. Pedro gave me a full account of one of his major career goals in a form that resembles a long-term promise to his mother:

Pedro: My mother has a dream of owning her own home. I used to tell her “I’ll buy you a house, keep calm, and you’ll see”. [. . .] I have a celebration that I perform every time I score a goal. It’s like this [he joins his hands to form a triangle, like a roof]. It’s a roof. With each goal that I score a little brick goes into my mother’s house. Surely that will be

the best title that I can ever get in my career. If I do this [buy a house for his mother], I'll be happy with football.

In contrast, we can see that “destinies” in sports careers must be compared with different career trajectories in both football and futsal. On the one hand, futsal players tend to have longer careers, with shorter matches and less intensive training sessions than footballers. Some futsal athletes can play into their early 40s, which is very rare in football. On the other hand, futsal players do not expect footballers' high salaries. In this sense, investments in higher education are much more common among futsal players than footballers.

“Destinies” can also be contrasted with class (see Fuentes and Guinness 2019). Class has a decisive influence in sports career trajectories. More established middle-class families are able to place their children in the best training facilities and sports academies, presenting them with a more secure career path in sports. Miguel, who is currently working in Austria, told me,

Hmm . . . Career start . . . I mean I have always played football, that's the reality. Ever since I can remember I used to play on the street, wherever I was, I would play. Then I joined the São Paulo juniors' team, São Bento, a team that's close to my city in the state of São Paulo. After that I joined the Palmeiras base-team. And after that I joined Red Bull Brasil. This was the last club that I played for in my formative years. When I was 17, I signed a professional contract.

Miguel's story shows that sports migration can reinforce middle class family trajectories. After he established himself in Austria and later in Germany, he brought his brother to live with him for two years so he could learn German. Miguel also told me that his parents would drive him long distances across São Paulo state to find the most prestigious football academies for him. In this sense, Miguel constructs a middle-class masculinity that emphasises his family background, early professional incentives, and his current ability to be fully realised in his career. Contrary to lower-class footballers, he has not mentioned any special gift that he would like to give back to his family.

Class differences are vital to understanding athletes' diverse trajectories in both the futsal and football industries. However, class did not become salient when I asked migrant Brazilian players directly about religion. For these players, “being religious” carried widely different meanings. For some, there was an admission that their relative isolation made them more religious than in Brazil. In these cases, religion mostly functioned as a form of “community”, and particularly for practitioners of Pentecostal religions, Mahmood's (2005, 173) analysis that one can embody the highest virtuous behaviour through a strict bodily self-discipline was constantly expressed in their remarks. Religion was also often used to make sense of cultural differences and to contrast

Brazilian teams with European ones. Joaquim, a footballer in the Czech second division told me:

In Brazil, we are very united. Here [in the Czech Republic], players deceive each other for no reason. It's not good for the team. For instance, I play as left-back, and sometimes I need to attack. But I also need for the defenders to communicate with me. The guy that's playing with us now doesn't want to communicate. Even if he spoke Czech, I would understand, I know basic Czech. Today, I even saw the coach talking to him, telling him he needs to communicate with me. He [the coach] told the guy: "Speak Czech to him, he'll get you."

I made a literal translation of Joaquim's statement, "[i]n Brazil, we are very united", which he made to express that "in Brazil, we form a strong team". There is a strong sense of common identification among players in contrast with the Czech Republic. This sense of identification is tied with religious rituals before matches, such as praying together. As such, Joaquim pointed to an important distinction between himself, a religious player, and his Czech teammates. In his narrative, Joaquim contrasted different ways of being in the world, and playing football. He sees his way as being more ethical and team-oriented than that of the Czech players. Miguel also told me that praying before matches was not possible because "in Brazil, everyone is either Catholic or 'Evangelical', so they pray the same way and whole teams can pray together. But here [in Europe] there are lots of Muslim players, and they pray differently".

Thus, "a respectable masculinity" is not only connected to social mobility and the possibility to give something back to family members who had been supportive during one's initial attempts to build a career in sports. "Respectability" is also based on a constant negotiation with athletic disciplinary regimes,¹⁶ different cultures and the rationalised world of sports, as the examples of João and Jessé show (Connell 2005 [1995]).

In this sense, Mahmood's (2001, 838) view of the body as a "site of moral training and cultivation" points towards novel forms of understanding sports pedagogies, athletes' religiosities, gender, and migration. While previous interpretations of sports injuries (Messner 1992) argued that athletes' experiences with injuries and pain result from athletes' compliance with masculine codes of conduct in sports, Asad's (2003, 1986) and Mahmood's (2005) attempts to go beyond the binary of "compliance" and "resistance" by focusing on the grammar of different modalities of agency shifts our attention to the ways that

¹⁶ Guinness (2014, 160) has defined professional athletic discipline as regimes "of training, medical attention, and management of nutritional intake". These disciplinary regimes are an integral part of professionalism in contemporary sports.

religion, pain, and suffering might be enacted by diverse athletes at different circumstances in their careers.

The case of corruption analysed above illustrates a vital methodological difficulty found in sports migration studies. As the corruption accusations in Czech futsal demonstrate, researchers should not only explore topics that athletes feel comfortable talking about but also topics that often remain in the background. A geographical and temporal distance made Jessé more willing to share his story and discuss the precarious conditions he had faced in the Czech Republic. After I heard his story, I was able to confirm it with other former players on that team. In this sense, masculinity was present not only in stories such as João's, but also in what was hidden to me as an outsider – the highly precarious conditions of sports careers. In trying to account for athletic masculinities, researchers should be attentive to what athletes might hide in the stories they tell.

What Do these Narratives Tell Us? Some Final Remarks

In this chapter, using ideas developed by Asad and Mahmood, I have tried to show that religion is an embodied mode of being in the world. The relationship between religious symbols and embodiment practices become most visible in moments of pain, in which athletes' injuries risk their career prospects. These moments signal different possibilities of agency within sports disciplinary regimes.

I have also tried to show that a focus on the use of religious symbols must account for the various ways these symbols might be enacted in players' everyday embodiment practices, the various intersections articulated in athletes' narratives, and their transnational practices.

I argued that it is important to compare the migration processes in football and futsal. Although provisional, my ethnographic account points to a *continuum* between these sports. In Brazil, football and futsal players participate in the same process of early professionalisation, but their careers subject them to different migration routes and material expectations. Further studies with migrant Brazilian athletes could uncover hierarchies and power relations among men (Connell 2005 [1995]; Messner 1992), and the various ways migrant players might provide researchers the opportunity to question the concept of hegemonic masculinity.

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