

Sporting Frenchness: Nationality, Race, and Gender at Play

by

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Abstract

Concerned with modern sports in French culture since 1870, this dissertation explores how gender, class, and race, as well as local identity, shape and are shaped through interpretations of cultural events, through literature, and through images that are imbricated with sports. Primarily through literary analysis but also employing postcolonial theory, cultural studies, and feminist theory, it will examine sports' entanglement with postcoloniality, commercialization, and immigration.

Chapter one looks at the construction and performance of masculinity in three short stories about rugby published in a 1961 collection by Henri Garcia, *Les Contes du rugby*. I argue that the prevailing cultural climate combined with rugby culture to foster a localized interpretation of masculinity in Southwest France that permitted certain classed variations of gender roles within its own confines.

In contrast, chapter two examines the more contemporary Dieux du Stade commercial ventures of the Stade Français rugby team and details the impact of professionalization and globalization on rugby's particular brands of masculinity. Players' masculinities have become more homogeneous as market demands push the men to train more and play more internationally. Their bodies have become, in addition to the tools of their trade, commodities to be traded and flaunted. The Dieux du Stade calendars exemplify these phenomena, as players transform their already marketed and marketable

bodies into differently consumable objects and rupture the traditional rivalries among different rugby teams and different sports.

Finally, chapter three focuses on soccer, a sport whose long history of professionalism contrasts with rugby's recent shift from amateurism. The salaries earned by the sport's stars as well as those stars' diversity have contributed to soccer's construction as a meritocratic vehicle for upward social mobility, but in readings of two recent novels involving soccer, race, and immigration (*Banlieue noire* by Thomté Ryam and *Le ventre de l'Atlantique* by Fatou Diome), I argue that these books demystify certain perceptions of the game's power to help individuals transcend social marginalization. Taken together, these three chapters examine questions of Frenchness and sports' roles in defining nationality, class, race, and gender, proposing sports as a new site for thinking through intersectionality.

Introduction:
Un coup de boule comme coup d'envoi

During the final game of the 2006 Fédération Internationale de Football Association World Cup in Germany on July 9, a single action threatened to overshadow the match and its result.¹ France and Italy had played to a tie in regulation time and were still in a draw in extra time at the 110th minute when Zinedine Zidane, star and captain of the French team, head-butted Marco Materazzi in the chest, knocking the Italian defender to the ground.² Zidane was shown a red card and ejected from the game. Because he had already decided to retire from soccer following the World Cup, the *coup de boule*—head butt—became his final moment ever on the pitch. Debate immediately raged about what Materazzi could have said to provoke Zidane to such violence, especially since his expulsion gave Italy the edge to go on to win in the penalty shootout.³

British paper *Daily Mail* summoned an expert lip reader who could “lip read foreign languages phonetically and translate with the aid of an Italian interpreter” and who claimed to discover that, “First Marco Matterazzi [sic] called the French star the equivalent of ‘n*****,’ and then insulted both his mother and his Muslim background by

¹ Associated Press sports journalist Robert Millward was at least one writer of this opinion, titling his article, “Italian triumph merely a sideshow.”

² In soccer, the clock counts up. Soccer matches consist of two halves of 45 minutes, the end of which is called full time. In tournament play, if the teams are tied at full time, they play two additional fifteen-minute periods. If the game is still tied after extra time, each team selects five players from those on the field at the end of extra time to take penalty kicks and these players alternate shots on the opposing team’s goalkeeper. The team with the most goals after the five rounds of kicks wins.

³ Despite the popular image of Zidane in France as a quiet, gentle man, he had, in addition to other infractions, already incurred a five-match ban in 2000 for headbutting an opponent during a Champions League game when he played for Juventus in Italy (Hale and Allen; May; Pugmire).

saying he is the ‘son of a terrorist whore’” (Hale and Allen).⁴ French defender William Gallas, who played alongside Zidane, asserted, “The Italians did everything they could to provoke Zidane” (qtd. in Pugmire). The French anti-racism advocacy group SOS-Racisme issued a communiqué asking for an investigation into Zidane’s ejection, stating, “Selon plusieurs sources très bien informées dans le monde du football, il semblerait que le joueur italien Marco Materazzi ait traité Zinedine Zidane de ‘sale terroriste’” (“SOS Racisme demande une enquête”). [According to several very well informed sources from the football world, it would seem that the Italian player Marco Materazzi called Zidane a “dirty terrorist.”]⁵ For his part, Materazzi denied calling Zidane a terrorist and went so far as to claim he did not even know what an “Islamic terrorist” was (“Zidane: Quand on touche à la maman;” Moore).

In France discussion about Zidane’s action was all consuming for several days, if not weeks.⁶ Was he justified in his retaliation? Should he have taken the law into his own hands in such a way? Did he still merit the Golden Ball? Was his departure really shameful? Much of the debate hinged on guesses of what Materazzi might have said and thus to what extent, depending on the utterance, Zidane was or was not in the right to react physically. Some cited Zidane’s Algerian Berber heritage to argue that culturally he was impelled to defend the honor of his mother and/or sister—the alleged target(s) of Materazzi’s jibe—or to argue that his background encouraged the use of violence. Some went so far as to say that Zidane’s ethno-cultural lineage was to blame for his temper in the first place: in his long career, he had received 13 other red cards for aggressive

⁴ Zidane understands Italian thanks to his years playing for Juventus in Italy. Benoît Vitkine’s article provides a transcription of the supposed Zidane-Materazzi exchange in Italian with a French translation.

⁵ Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

⁶ Benoît Vitkine surveys some of the myriad websites devoted to the debate in his article “Le Web se saisit de l’affaire Zidane.”

actions, including one for stomping on a Saudi Arabian player's groin during the 1998 World Cup. Others interpreted Zidane's gesture as a blow for pride and dignity, whether for those from poor neighborhoods in Marseille (such as La Castellane, where Zidane grew up), for children of Algerian immigrants, for Muslims (Amanullah), or for the French in general, as did François Sureau who claimed that for the French, "[d]'un heureux coup de tête, [Zidane] a ressuscité notre belle réputation d'insolence" [through a happy headbutt, Zidane resuscitated our beautiful reputation for insolence]. Others saw in the events simply "defeat and the disgrace of Zinédine Zidane, the national hero," and claimed that "the captain and symbol of France's moral revival" had caused widespread disappointment through his actions (Bremner). Those who felt that "Zidane and his men had pulled France out of its cycle of gloom over the past few years" were, according to that same journalist, filled with a "sense of denial" (Bremner). He also stated that,

amid the exaltation of a second French World Cup final in eight years, [Zidane] has also served to remind France of its failure to bring into the mainstream the children of immigrants from its former colonies. Unlike in 1998, when the World Cup victory of France's multi-ethnic team was celebrated as proof that the Republic had embraced its Arab and black citizens as equals, the euphoria of 2006 has tweaked a guilty conscience. [...] Residents of the ghettos say that nothing changed after the 1998 cheering about racial harmony. (Bremner)⁷

His rather condescending tone and pessimism do not negate his point, however, that despite all the rhetoric of integration in 1998, little had changed by 2006. While not reacting specifically to this article, some journalists reacted to other journalist's reporting of the Zidane affair by accusing them of cynicism and selective memory (Ducoin).

⁷ Importantly, Zidane is not, strictly speaking, Arab but Berber, a member of the population that inhabited Algeria prior to Arab conquest and Islamicization.

Even after Zidane went on television to explain himself on July 12, 2006, the maelstrom persisted. He still refused to disclose exactly what Materazzi had said to him, remarking only that “[i]l a [...] dit des mots très durs, des mots qui touchaient au plus profond de moi. C’était très grave et très personnel. Cela concernait ma mère et ma soeur” (qtd. in Sérisier). [He said some really hard words, words that reached the deepest part of me. It was very serious and very personal. It concerned my mother and my sister.] He apologized to his television audience and to the children of the world who witnessed his actions, explaining that he had known everything was happening ten minutes from the end of his career during a World Cup final and that he should not have done what he did. However, he continued, “Mais je ne suis qu’un homme et rien d’autre. En revanche, je ne peux pas regretter ce geste car sinon cela voudrait dire que Materazzi a eu raison de dire ce qu’il a dit” (qtd. in Sérisier). [But I am only a man and nothing more. On the other hand, I can not regret the action because except for that, that would mean that Materazzi was right to say what he said.] Zidane’s somewhat mixed message and ambiguous apology added fuel to the furor.

Yet for some, Zidane’s head butt and explanations served to help him “[regain] his status as French hero. No longer a superhero, to be sure, but a heroic common man” (Sachs). Sports psychologist Makis Chamalidis, interviewed by *L’Equipe*, said about Zidane, “He’s not a god, but simply a hero who has not always handled very well his basic internal conflict, which is his sensitivity to injustice” (qtd. in Sachs). In this analysis again, Zidane’s reaction was about pride and preserving it for himself, for other so-called *beurs*, and for other immigrant neighborhoods: “In the final score, Zidane became for some the embodiment of a quality admired in more than a few French circles:

the willingness to sacrifice victory for pride” (Sachs).⁸ However, in the paper *France Soir*, Patrick Lozes, the president of CRAN—the Conseil Représentatif des Associations Noires, an umbrella group of black associations—drew a parallel between Zidane’s headbutt and violence in the *banlieues*, saying that “the headbutt was unacceptable but sprang from a similar sense of exasperation” with racism and social marginalization (Sandford). He asked why people were willing to understand Zidane but not the young people in France’s poor suburbs (Sandford).

The existence of such polemic swirling around Zidane and ethno-racial issues in French international soccer was not new in 2006. When Zidane captained a diverse side to the semi-finals of the 1996 European Championship, the far-right politician and leader of the Front National party Jean-Marie Le Pen derisively commented about the “artificiality” of bringing “foreign” players onto the French team (Marks 50). After *les Bleus’* victory in the 1998 World Cup, Le Pen was quieter but still attempted to “undermine praise for the multiracial team” (Dauncey and Hare, “Conclusion” 215), and in 2006 he stated that the multi-ethnic French squad was unrepresentative of France (“Far-right politician Le Pen;” Forcari). However, as John Marks points out, the phenomenon of “immigrants”⁹ and other racized people playing for French soccer teams,

⁸ The term *beur* is usually used to refer to the children of immigrants from North Africa. See Durmelat and Begag and Chaouite for a discussion of this appellation including the positive and negative aspects of employing it; see Durmelat for references to other articles on the topic.

⁹ I put the word in quotation marks because, in France, often even those born on French soil of immigrant parents are considered—culturally and socially, if not legally—“immigrants” themselves. Indeed, “[t]wo-thirds of those who are called immigrants today are French citizens, either born in France or having opted for French nationality before they reached their majority” (Ben Jelloun, *French Hospitality* 13). This is partly due to France’s complex citizenship laws that change frequently. In general there are three categories involved in French statistics on immigration: French by birth, which “includes the offspring of French citizens who were born either in France or abroad”; French by acquisition, which involves “individuals who have acquired French [sic] by naturalization after moving to France, by declaration (as with children born in France of immigrant parents), and some others”; and foreigners, who are “individuals who were born abroad as well as children, under the age of 18, who were born in France of immigrant

and especially for the French national team, is not recent.¹⁰ Instead, Marks argues, the general perception of this diversity has changed: mainstream journalists in France have supposedly moved from seeing the national soccer team less as a negative “Russian salad,” as it was characterized in 1958 when it included the sons of Polish, Italian, and Spanish citizens and immigrants, and more as a positive “cultural mosaic,” as the 1998 group of champions was described (Marks 47, 52). Yet, the negativity surrounding Zidane’s headbutt seems to betray the fact that animosity towards minorities and those seen as somehow less or not French still lingers.¹¹

That eleven men running around in shorts after a ball could be heralded as markers of national identity shifts indicates the extent to which sports and athletes can be inscribed with meanings that reflect tellingly on national cultures, and the hubbub resulting from Zidane’s red card shows how seriously people sometimes take these constructed meanings. The *coup de boule* incident and the ensuing rhetoric are prime examples of the entanglement of race, gender, and class in perceptions of sports. Comparing Zidane to Antigone, one journalist claimed that both had chosen to follow laws they felt trumped society’s; in Zidane’s case the personal imperative was “une question d’honneur” (Dugué). Such a juxtaposition of a classical character with a modern sports star brings to mind the rhetoric about “tradition versus modernity” often intoned in discussions about Africa or the Islamic world and contributes to an all-too-

parents. It also includes any individual born in France of foreign parents who chooses not to adopt French nationality at the age of 18” (Hamilton, Simon, and Veniard 3).

¹⁰ “To racize” is the preferred translation of the French term *raciser*, used by French social scientist Colette Guillaumin as well as by Pierre-André Taguieff. As differentiated from the term “to racialize,” which serves as a marker of the adjective in making “racism,” to racize the Other is to “discursively [make] into a racial grouping and discursively [separate] from the dominant group. [...Racialization] is the *effect* of an exclusionary discourse” (Melehy x, emphasis mine).

¹¹ Racism in soccer is certainly not limited to France. For the 2006 FIFA World Cup, hosted by Germany, FIFA and the European Union launched anti-racism campaigns (Brand), but black players still complained of monkey chants directed at them by fans (“First Taint”).

prevalent perception of Muslims as unassimilable to “European” or “Western” cultures (as if the entities are separable to begin with). The argument also highlights assumptions about cultural family and gender roles, with the brother and son obliged to defend the “honor” of his sister and mother to preserve his own, ultimately perpetuating patriarchal order. Finally, by linking Zidane to a female character, the comparison feminizes a man whose heritage is from a formerly colonized culture just as colonizing powers often feminized colonized men to make them seem less of a threat.

Along class lines, it was noted that Zidane may have left his tough neighborhood, but, according to one young resident of that community, “son coup de tête, c’est un vieux reste de la Castellane” (Kessous, “Zidane”). [His head butt is a remnant of Castellane.] Another journalist with a literary bent linked Zidane’s act to Meursault’s in Camus’s *L’Etranger*. He argued that, while most people believe a successful soccer player about to end his long career should end it happily, “Zidane, raised in the harsh Marseille suburb of La Castellane, told the world what he thought of happy endings” by finishing his career with a violent act (Cohen). Life in the lower classes is thus tied to absurdity and precludes the possibility of happy endings, a tie implying that those from the *banlieue* are destined to fail. Other groups argued that Zidane no longer deserved to be idolized because there should be no double standard for those who commit acts of violence, be they kids in the *banlieue* or sports celebrities (“Pardon à Zidane”). Some sought to use the media blitz to point out that Zidane was, after all, only a footballer and that “la tyrannie exercée par le sport sur la société moderne” [the tyranny exercised by sports over modern society] was out of hand, even to the point of overshadowing the hundredth anniversary of Alfred Dreyfus’s rehabilitation (Thread). Here, once minorities or

racized individuals are on top of the game, the game gets discounted, but there is also a distinctly elitist tone to dismissing sports in favor of remembering nineteenth-century history.

This general negativity and criticism seems a far cry from the national jubilation after France successfully hosted and won the 1998 FIFA World Cup. Then, an outpouring of national pride, effusive praise for France's success at integrating diverse populations, and boasts that France was now a happy, multicultural entity created a joyous cacophony in the national press to which few initially dared add dissenting voices.¹² France's shameful early exit in the 2002 World Cup and Zidane's overshadowing headbutt in 2006 as well as public reactions to both these events betray lingering reservations and even outright hostility about France's changing national identity, however.

In this dissertation, I would like to examine how French national identity and its components are expressed, constructed, or challenged by literary and cultural texts involving sports. Concerned with modern sports in French culture since 1870, I explore how identities shape and are shaped by interpretations of cultural events such as the above-discussed head-butt of Marco Materazzi by Zinédine Zidane. The resulting discussions in the press and on national television about Zidane's actions—whether they were justified, what motivated them, and what the appropriate punishments would be and for whom—clearly brought to the fore issues of identities and Frenchness in a postcolonial context and demonstrated that these identities are imbricated with sports, commercialization, gender, class, and race and immigration. The reporting on Zidane explicitly linked sports with class, race, and immigration, revealing deeply held

¹² These events will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

convictions about both professional sports and qualifications for Frenchness, and thereby contradicting the view of sports narratives as transparent, straightforward retellings of events.

The discourse surrounding Zidane's actions serves as the launching point for my analyses due to its importance as an instance in which particular language and rhetoric surrounding issues of identity clearly construct specific understandings of a moment. Taking careful account of such discourse and how it shapes understandings is one of the ways in which I provide a unique perspective on sports studies by bringing my skills and sensibility as a literary and cultural critic to bear on narratives about sports, but it also means that I am concerned with representation more than intention. I examine, in my first chapter, the construction and performance of masculinity in three short stories about rugby that were published in a 1961 collection by Henri Garcia, *Les Contes du rugby*. I argue that the prevailing cultural climate combined with the game of rugby to foster a localized interpretation of masculinity in Southwest France that permitted certain variations of gender roles within its own confines. In contrast, in my second chapter, I use the more contemporary Dieux du Stade commercial ventures of the Stade Français rugby team to detail the impact of professionalization and globalization on rugby's particular brands of masculinity. Players' masculinities have become more homogeneous as they are pushed to train more and play more internationally by markets' demands. Their bodies have become, in addition to the tools of their trade, commodities to be traded and flaunted. The Dieux du Stade calendars exemplify these phenomena, as players receive 5,000 Euros for posing nude with both teammates and men from other clubs and even other sports, transforming their already marketed and marketable bodies

into differently consumable objects and rupturing the traditional rivalries among different rugby teams and different sports.

In my third chapter I switch my focus to soccer, a sport whose long history of professionalism contrasts with rugby's recent shift from amateurism. The salaries earned by the sport's stars as well as those stars' diversity have contributed to soccer's construction as a meritocratic vehicle for upward social mobility, but in my readings of two recent novels involving soccer, race, and immigration (*Banlieue noire* by Thomté Ryam and *Le ventre de l'Atlantique* by Fatou Diome), I argue that these books demystify certain perceptions of the game's power to help individuals transcend social marginalization. Taken together, these three chapters examine questions of Frenchness and sports' roles in defining nationality, class, race, and gender, proposing sports as a new site for thinking through intersectionality.

For issues of gender, however, I have chosen to focus on men and masculinity. In doing so, I do not wish to reinforce the all too frequent marginalization of women in the sports world. Instead, I wish to integrate a feminist perspective and methodology—by deconstructing gender, looking at how it is produced, and critiquing compulsive heterosexuality—that will benefit people of all genders by breaking down stereotypes and expectations for gender performance and embodiment in sports. I employ feminist theory to look at the power issues at play in this specific context, and to try to understand instances of Frenchness and gender as important components of an identity produced in and through, specifically, rugby union. Unfortunately, there is less French-language literature involving women's sports and women's sports are not as visible in popular

culture, but investigating or excavating what exists of literature about women in sports could be a useful and rewarding project for the future.¹³

In addition to feminist scholarship, this dissertation draws on sociology, history, postcolonial theory, and cultural studies while being rooted firmly in literary studies. A critical view of nation-states and the continuing influences of the colonial past, both elements of postcolonial studies, serve as useful tools in examining the impact of sports on French culture. From a historical standpoint, however, this project may play with chronology, but this can be explained by my attempt to engage with materials thematically more than along a strict timeline of events. Furthermore, each sport that I deal with has its own particular history, so that the events of the last ten or fifteen years that anchor some of my analyses require different historical information for context in order to attempt to understand why they are significant or represent significant changes.¹⁴

In the case of Zidane, however, the history of French soccer shows that his inclusion as someone of Algerian descent in the national team was not groundbreaking, nor was his stardom. Neither were the ways in which his personal trajectory, his talent and leadership on the pitch, and his image were used to construct or represent specific iterations of Frenchness by commentators and analysts from across the political spectrum. Instead, it was the specificity of those interpretations to the historical moment that was different: in 1998 there was hope for overcoming some social issues, by 2006 there was

¹³ There is already a sizeable known body of women who write about sports, reaching back to Colette and forward to Fatou Diome and her novel involving soccer, which I will examine in my third chapter. There seems to be less writing about female athletes, although Henri de Montherlant described women runners and I have come across more recent stories about female fencers and swimmers. However, many of these are instances of men writing about women, which could be an interesting twist for interpretation. Garrett R. Heysel has written an interesting article examining “the public tension between athleticism and femininity” (111) that could provide a useful starting point for further discussion of representations of female athletes in French culture.

¹⁴ For a broad historical overview of sports in France since the Second World War, including administration, participation, and physical education in schools, see Greaves.

concern and disappointment about the persistence of many of these same issues.

Zidane's actions in both years contributed to the social and political atmosphere of society in France and were interpreted as symptomatic of it. This kind of simultaneous reflection and production of meanings will first be explored in relation to rugby union in Southwestern France.

Chapter One: A Game for Barbarians

I. Introduction

*Rugby is a game for barbarians, played by gentlemen.
Football is a game for gentlemen, played by barbarians.*¹

Rugby union's class-conscious English roots are illustrated by the above aphorism. Originally developed in elite boarding schools, the rough-and-tumble sport of rugby remained primarily the province of Britain's upper classes for well over a century after the codification of its laws, indeed until the game's official worldwide professionalization in 1995. Its violent nature was seen as a valuable tool to shape future leaders, build their character, and chisel their bodies—in short, to permit barbaric acts on the pitch while preserving and enhancing the young men's social status.² Football, on the other hand, was also developed in the elite schools but was less violent; however, its relatively quick professionalization led to the game's infiltration by money-hungry hordes (Weber, "Gymnastics" 86), while rugby retained its aristocratic ethos. Or so go the usual understandings of the British histories of the sports.

Rugby union in France, however, took a rather different tack from its English counterpart, and southwestern French rugby culture has occasionally sought to reinvent

¹ In this case, football refers to association football, or what Americans call soccer. The quotation itself, though largely attributed to Oscar Wilde, is also occasionally attributed to Rudyard Kipling, but one researcher claims the saying does not appear in print until 1953 when a Chancellor of Cambridge University was asked by *The Times* of London to "sum up a debate on Association and Rugby" (Fagan).

² For an in-depth analysis of how rugby's development in British boarding schools was intertwined with changing social class demographics of the schools' pupils, teachers, and headmasters as well as with shifting class dynamics in Britain at large, see Dunning and Sheard.

the sport's mythology. Whereas in much of anglophone rugby lore,³ the sport's genesis is traced to 1823 and the Rugby School in Warwickshire, England, where William Webb Ellis, "with a fine disregard for the rules of football as played in his time, first took the ball in his arms and ran with it,"⁴ French journalist Jean Lacouture places rugby's roots in the medieval French games of *soule* and *barrette*.⁵ While not overtly denying that *le ballon ovale* crossed the Channel from north to south, he argues that the young Frenchmen who embraced rugby in the 1880s were nevertheless predisposed to do so by "une triple tradition" involving the formerly occupying Romans' love of ball games, the Western provinces' predilection for *soule* over five or six centuries, and continuing participation in *barrette* in the Center and the Midi (*Le Rugby* 22-23).

Historian Richard Holt likewise traces the origins of football codes in France to *soule*, "the old game of village football, frequently involving hundreds of players in what was little more than a public affray" (*Sport and Society* 62), which was falling out of favor at the end of the nineteenth century due to its unregulated nature. According to Holt, the old game's inherent violence, however, carried over into the modernized game. He notes the violence common in early crowds and adds, "Violent behavior was by no means confined to the crowd. The 1920s witnessed a rapid increase in flagrant fouling and viciousness on the field of play itself. Fierce competition amongst the clubs of the

³ According to Lacouture, some Scots claim one Jim Mackie invented the game (*Voyous* 17), and Dunning and Sheard concede there may be a germ of truth in this myth (77); some Irish advocate that their traditional game, called *cad*, was actually Webb Ellis's inspiration via some of his cousins from Galway (Lacouture, *Voyous* 17).

⁴ So reads the text of the commemorative plaque set into the Headmaster's Wall at the Rugby School in 1900 (Dine, *French Rugby Football* 20). Dunning and Sheard firmly dispute this version of rugby's founding, calling the Webb Ellis story a "reductionist origin myth" (52-53).

⁵ Cultural historian Philip Dine, in his article "Du collégien à l'homme," uses the term *barrette* merely to refer to touch rugby (81), and in Thierry Terret's description of Dr. Philippe Tissié, that evangelist of English sports, Tissié's advocacy of *la barrette* rests on the game's status as "football without violence" (76). *Soule*, however, was quite violent and involved an unlimited number of players (usually as many men and boys as a village could muster) on an uncircumscribed playing field, where any physical affront was legal in the effort to get a ball from one designated place to another (Lacouture, *Voyous* 45-46).

south-west was aggravated by age-old ethnic animosities and local rivalries” (136). Such violence, especially the faction-fighting labeled hooliganism by Holt due to the participants’ enjoyment of fighting for its own sake, had been regarded in the eighteenth and long into the nineteenth centuries as “an adolescent rite of passage [...] a step on the road towards acceptance into full male society” (Holt 132). While some blamed such behavior on the commercialization of sport and its new role in mass culture, which supposedly fostered a competitive spirit that got out of control—such an attitude is clearly demonstrated by Georges Duhamel in his ripping condemnation of American football in the late 1920s—Holt draws on the history of violence as sport in southwestern France to argue that

[t]raditional rites of violence and modern commercial influences should not be regarded as alternative explanations when in fact they are complementary. What seems to have happened is this: violent local patriotism shifted from the declining *fête patronale* and fixed itself on new phenomena, notably the growing sport of rugby [...]. In town and country, youths who had formerly faced each other in open combat in the fields and market places began to congregate in the local stadium with broadly similar ends in view. [...In] many instances the rivalries of new sports clubs based in particular towns or villages were coterminous with more ancient traditions of local antagonism. (Holt 138)⁶

Holt’s contention ties together local pride, violence, and rugby and sets up an overview of how *esprit de clocher* was associated with violence that was eventually channeled through rugby. Holt also links violence to masculinity through his claim of fighting being a rite of passage into male society. The imbrication of these values—local pride, physicality, and masculinity—in French rugby, and even to an extent in early British

⁶ Eugene Weber details some of these “ancient traditions” in his chapter on violence in *Peasants Into Frenchmen*.

rugby as discussed above, has contributed to the complexity of rugby union culture.

Thierry Terret argues similarly that, as rugby took root in these provinces, it was seen to go “hand-in-glove with other aspects of regional life, such as bullfighting, hunting, festivals [...] and the love of good food” (73). Bullfighting and hunting fit with the violence Holt highlighted while the love of good food fits with the rugby tradition of the third half, or social. The history of the sport and its implantation in France clearly demonstrate the complex intersections among class, gender, and bodily practices both on local and larger levels.

If modern ball games developed in elite British boarding schools during the nineteenth century, disagreements arose among institutions as to the place of violence on the playing field.⁷ Disagreements also involved the question of who could dictate games’ rules and which schools were worthy of being engaged on the sports field. Rugby School was seen for at least the first half of the nineteenth century as a rather unworthy opponent because only a small proportion—between five and seven percent—of its students were from titled families; in contrast, the percentage of the student population from titled families at Eton ranged between eighteen and twenty-two (Dunning and Sheard 65). The differing class make-up of the schools led to different definitions of masculinity or manliness. For example, boys at Rugby

were recruited principally from a class in which a physical concept of “manliness” prevailed. More of them were dependant on an academic education than was the case, for

⁷ Links between sports, violence, and social class are present in the British history of the game, even before it arrived in France. In their landmark study of the game of rugby, sociologists Eric Dunning and Kenneth Sheard analyze “the relationship between the development of Rugby and that of British society, particularly its class structure” (xvii) with special regard to Norbert Elias’s theory of the civilizing process. One component of Elias’s theory has to do with changes in the control and containment of violence in society, and Dunning and Sheard tie this strand of Elias’s thought to rugby by showing how decreasing acceptance of violence can be seen in increasing levels of regulation for games, eventually leading to modernization and the formation of league and international sporting structures.

example, at Eton but, nevertheless, their parents did not simply require for their sons a training oriented towards performance in a future career. On the contrary, they wanted an education that would help to make them, in terms of current standards, “men,” i.e. give them a stable and secure identity which would enable them to hold their own in a class which was the principal reservoir from which the country’s military leadership was recruited and whose values, correspondingly, stressed virtues such as strength, courage and physical prowess. (Dunning and Sheard 73)

Historically, then, rugby football developed in a milieu whose class situation dictated specific ideas about male gender. The emphasis on physicality as a necessity for masculinity greatly influenced the development of the game, and the equation of physicality with manliness has lingered in rugby union culture to this day.

Regardless of class differences, by the 1860s, other elite schools had accepted Rugby as one of their peers (Dunning and Sheard 89), but the Rugby School’s history continued to shape its culture and its sports. Indeed, one of the important moments in the differentiation of football codes⁸ came in 1863, when the rules of the games came to a vote at a meeting of the recently formed Football Association over the issue of hacking.⁹ Supporters of the Rugby School’s game opposed “the abolition of hacking and running with the ball,” a measure they saw as “the emasculating and diluting of their game” due to its regulation of violence (Chandler 22). Once again, manliness is equated with

⁸ In the beginning, almost every boarding school in England had its own rules for its own version of a ball game. Eventually, these sets of rules came into conflict as boys from different schools played against each other, and it was not terribly long before these were games split into the two major football codes of association football (soccer) and rugby football. Variations in the rugby codes include rugby union—which is the focus of this essay—rugby league (played with 13 players per side and lacking scrums, mauls, and effectively rucks), sevens (played with seven players per side), and Australian Rules.

⁹ “Hacking came in two varieties—hacking and hacking over. Hacking in the scrummages involved kicking opponents on the shins and was a fairly violent practice. Hacking over, on the other hand, was not necessarily a violent proceeding, it might be scientific, consisting of a gentle kick given to the runner’s back leg when in the air, so as to knock it behind the other leg, with the result of at once bringing the runner to the ground: but it might consist of a violent hack at either leg” (Chandler 19).

physicality, and a violent version of bodily engagement at that. The Rugby School's position on the matter of hacking led directly to the split between what have come to be known as association football (soccer) and rugby football. While hacking and other "barbarous acts" were eventually banned when the Rugby Football Union was formed and the game's laws were officially drafted in January 1871 (Chandler 27), the violent image and ethos of the Rugby School's game stuck. Nevertheless, as rugby continued to grow in popularity and its rules were refined, it continued to attract as players the kind of upper-crust young men who had founded the sport, as schoolboys discovered it at their own institutions and propagated it through Old Boy networks.¹⁰ Furthermore, this was the class bracket that had the leisure time to participate in such recreational pursuits, and players and organizers reinforced the game's class divisions by insisting on keeping the sport amateur. In Britain, this attitude led to the splitting off of rugby league as professional early in the twentieth century—as players from poorer areas fought to be recompensed for missing work in order to play for more competitive teams—and thereby shaped the landscape of football codes in terms of class participation for the rest of the century.

While rugby was developing in England, France was thrown into turmoil by the upheavals of four political regimes between 1815 and 1870.¹¹ The Prussian invasion of 1870 and loss of the Alsace and Lorraine provinces provoked not merely a crisis of nationalism but also what was seen as a crisis of masculinity, with the weakness of the French State blamed on the meager quality of French male stock and on their poor

¹⁰ Even today, anglophone university alumni teams or even members of older age-division sides of clubs are frequently known as "Old Boys," a tradition handed down from the English public school system.

¹¹ See Dalisson for an overview of how these political changes affected traditional games and *fêtes* and coincided with shifting standards and practices of gender.

military performance (Nye, *Masculinity*). Indeed, rampant fears of decadence and degeneration, partially linked to a fall in birth rates and widely blamed on young men of the times, persisted through the Third Republic and into the twentieth century.¹² These concerns were also largely linked to class, which led hygiene and purity groups from the 1890s through the First World War to combat degeneration in part by targeting “the organic and moral diseases of the lower orders” (Nye, “Degeneration” 57). Neurasthenia, on the other hand, “struck primarily professionals, young adults, and overworked students, that is, precisely those whom well-bred French men and women regarded as the future leaders of the nation” (ibid 58).¹³ Few, it seemed to some at the time, were truly healthy.

For upper-class French anglophiles, England and its empire were looked to as a healthy, successful alternative to the supposedly flailing French state. Baron Pierre de Coubertin—who would go on to found the modern Olympics—and others searching for a solution to this perceived French degeneration visited English boarding schools, including Rugby, in order to discover the secrets to British success. Rugby headmaster Thomas Arnold’s model of monkish study paired with rigorous sporting activity seemed to fit the bill. Indeed, Coubertin’s 1883 tour of England “persuaded him that the whole English system was built on sport, particularly on team sports, and that it was impossible to achieve the same end by any other means” (Weber, “Pierre de Coubertin” 6). As a result, Coubertin and other anglophiles sought to import the English public school model

¹² For purposes of comparison, Nye notes that in France “during the period 1872 to 1911 the population grew at an average of only 89,700 per year while the German population grew at an annual rate of 600,000, increasing in size by 58 percent to France’s 10 percent” (“Degeneration” 54).

¹³ For ties between degeneration and masculinity in France, see Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor*, especially chapter five.

of education and sports to France to counteract the perceived pernicious effects of French-style schooling and the low reputation of ball games in France. Holt explains:

After generations of regarding street football or *jeu-de-ballon* as distasteful and plebeian, the sons of the Parisian bourgeoisie of the 1880s and 1890s suddenly became ardent *footballeurs* and *rugbymen*. From its former status as a hectic, violent, sprawling village pastime, football had been refined in English public schools such as Rugby; football was now a vigorous and morally uplifting form of exercise designed to prepare a new ruling élite for “the struggle for life.” (62)

Ball games had thus been transformed from lower- to upper-class recreation in accordance with their transformation from pre-modern, unorganized, uncodified, general recreation to modern, organized, sports with consistent rules and regulations.¹⁴ In accordance with rugby’s new upper-class standing, the Racing Club de France of the early 1880s “accepted only amateurs, as defined [...] in a formula that banned professionalism or the possibility of gain, stressed the fact that an amateur is a ‘gentleman,’ and excluded ‘mechanics, laborers and artisans’” (Weber, “Gymnastics” 86). In addition to Coubertin’s and others’ efforts, the adoption of the so-called English sports, including rugby, was happening organically, as French boys returned from study in England with a love for the games, and English expatriates introduced the games to friends and colleagues.

In fact, the first rugby club founded on French soil was established at Le Havre in 1872 solely by Englishmen who supposedly established their colors as the dark and light

¹⁴ Holt defines modern sports as activities that are carefully controlled, “uniform, national and highly organized” (4). Specialized roles, secularization, bureaucracy and the measurement of physical performance with scientific precision also mark modern sports, as well as the idea that sports are “a form of commercial entertainment” and “an item of mass consumption” (Holt 5). Finally, “Modern sport involve[s] the gratuitous expenditure of energy in the name of exercise” (Holt 9). Markovits and Hellerman explain some of the attributes of modern sports and their inextricable relationship to modernization and industrialization in their first chapter, especially pages 13-14 and 23-34.

blues of Oxford and Cambridge (Weber, “Gymnastics” 84; Lacouture, *Voyous* 48).¹⁵

Less than five years later, the club called the English-Taylors was founded in Paris, again by Englishmen, but who this time deigned to allow some members of the Parisian *gratin* to join them (Lacouture, *Voyous* 48-49). In the 1890s still, “[le] chapitre parisien de cette histoire ovale¹⁶ relève de Proust ou de Giraudoux plutôt que de Céline. Le rugbyman parisien répugne à « mettre la tête dans l’herbe », *a fortiori* dans la boue” (Lacouture, *Voyous* 54). [The Parisian chapter of this ovaloid history recalls Proust or Giraudoux more than Céline. The Parisian rugbyman is loathe to put his face in the grass, *a fortiori* in the mud.] Bodis notes the participation in France of “jeunes gens issus de la meilleure société, mais surtout des bourgeois” (220). [Young people from the best society, but above all from the bourgeoisie.]

Thus although the social class who played the new game of rugby initially remained consistent from the British Isles to the Continent, the behaviors expected of those players varied according to location. As opposed to the workhorse, forward-play heavy, and methodically physical English version, the dominant style of play found in early French rugby prized creativity and flair (Dine, *French Rugby* 6-7). Part of this love of flair, meaning the more stylish passing and running game as opposed to emphasis on scrums and slower-moving forward play, could originally be linked to the French haute bourgeoisie’s dislike of physical contact and desire for individual recognition (Terret 67-68), but the tendency to embrace a running game eventually marked the French national style of play.¹⁷ Terret hypothesizes:

¹⁵ Bodis dismisses the legend of the uniforms’ colors as myth, noting that the British institutions had yet to even choose their colors (218).

¹⁶ “Ovale” refers to the oblong shape of a rugby ball, as opposed to a perfectly round soccer ball.

¹⁷ Lacouture especially insists on this mode of play as superior (*Le rugby*).

The style of play seemed distant from that observed in England, most likely because the masculine ideal was different on the two sides of the Channel. Anglophiles such as de Coubertin and Paschal Grousset tried unsuccessfully to promote the English example and introduce it in French high schools, but the French rugby player had not yet broken with the dandy of the *belle époque*. When men wished to impress, they were likely to choose elegance over masculine strength. (68)¹⁸

The different ways in which rugby was played in the two countries thus reflect different definitions of masculinity. As stated earlier, for the class of English boys playing the game, physicality was a necessary part of masculine performance; for the *fin de siècle* Frenchman of the upper-class, elegance and grace were key aspects of masculinity. Both groups use the game to perform gender, but their understandings of the scripts for gender vary by location. Terret goes on to link such behavior to a desire to break with childhood and with patriarchal authority (68). His argument is perhaps bolstered by Weber's contention that rugby in France was spread largely by schoolboys and played mainly by *lycéens* and university students in the first years of the twentieth century ("Gymnastics" 85, 87), and both authors' observations hint at the social class and educational levels of players.

Nevertheless, this particular characterization of rugby as an elegant game played by young men of means adheres primarily to the way in which the game was perceived around the turn of the century in Paris. There, it was upper class and bourgeois young men who embraced rugby and their style of play reflected their gender and class values.

¹⁸ The *belle époque* stretched from 1890 to 1914, overlapping with rugby's early years in France.

Indeed, the Rugby Football Union's emphasis on amateurism was largely a function of its players' social status.¹⁹ Pierre Bourdieu explains:

The theory of amateurism is in fact one dimension of an aristocratic philosophy of sport as a disinterested practice, a finality without an end, analogous to artistic practice, but even more suitable than art [...] for affirming the manly virtues of future leaders: sport is conceived as a training in courage and manliness, "forming the character" and inculcating the "will to win" which is the mark of the true leader, but a will to win within the rules. This is "fair play," conceived as an aristocratic disposition utterly opposed to the plebian pursuit of victory at all costs. (824-25)

Thus the use of the body for sporting pleasure and for the affirmation of certain values marked rugby as a sport, at least in its early days, for young men from the Parisian *gratin*.

When rugby spread into the provinces from Bordeaux, where there was a large population of expatriate English involved in the wine trade who either brought the game with them to France or encouraged its implantation, the sport developed different connotations from the Parisian model. In a way, it was an entirely different game, no longer the province of wealthy anglophiles or boys schooled in England, but an entity that became synonymous with the very soil of the region.²⁰ While in England rugby retained its image of a sport for barbarians played by gentlemen, in France—though rugby remained inspired by the English ethos of the sport—the game was quickly taken over from Parisians and those of the upper classes by rural, lower-middle and working

¹⁹ This is in opposition to rugby league, or *le rugby à treize*, which went professional very early on and was codified as such in 1904 in France.

²⁰ Upon rugby's importation by colonizers to South Africa and New Zealand, the sport's values also mutated according to locale although concerns with race, gender, and class were constant. For the case of New Zealand, see MacLean, Nauright and Black, Jock Phillips, and Murray Phillips; for the case of South Africa, see Morrell, Nauright "Colonial Manhood," and Nauright "Rugby, Carnival, Masculinity." For how rugby identities in South Africa changed after apartheid ended, see Booth and Carlin.

class men from the southwest.²¹ Such a shift caused tension between the national rugby boards with regards not only to violence, which was associated with lower classes and a tendency for which on the part of the French national team resulted in their isolation from international rugby from 1931 to 1939 (Dine, *French Rugby Football* 85), but also about amateurism, as the French were rebuked for “shamateurism,” a system that cultivated the appearance of amateurism despite the reality of the semi-professionalization that was often necessary for working class players and that led to the split in Britain between rugby union and rugby league.²² The tense state of affairs created by French rule-bending regarding professionalism lasted much of the century until the International Rugby Board finally decreed rugby union to be professional in the summer of 1995. This conflict over professionalism is testament to southwestern France’s re-working of rugby in less aristocratic terms and a more specifically local idiom. The introduction of issues of local pride and their accompanying violence figured into these changes, as did the values of more agricultural, working class players.

Another twist of terms is manifest in how, as the sport spread out from Bordeaux prior to the First World War, provincial players and fans established Parisian rugby as the enemy. Terret explains:

There are historical explanations for the rivalry between certain regions and the capital that some people attribute to the invasion of the “Barons of the north,” in the case of the south-west, but that more likely had its origins in the revolutionary period. The centralist position of the Parisian bourgeoisie who overthrew the monarchy in 1789 was in

²¹ This situation persisted at least until professionalization in 1995, as a survey of education levels and employment among rugby’s elite players demonstrates (Fleuriel 26-27).

²² As mentioned on page 6, the split in rugby, institutionalized in Britain in 1895, was precipitated by the desire on the part of some to professionalize the game. In addition to the issue of money, rugby league, unlike rugby union, has only thirteen players per team, lacks the rucks and mauls of rugby union, and assigns different point values to the methods of scoring than union. Dunning and Sheard devote their eighth chapter to detailing the splitting off of league from union.

direct opposition to the notion of decentralized power which was advocated by Bordeaux. The contradictions between the Jacobin and Girondist would subsequently engender intense hostility. (71)

One could just as well link the animosity to the massacre of the Cathars in the south, or to the ancient cultural and linguistic split between the north and the south immortalized in the appellation of regions of the south as the Languedoc, or the language of Oc (Dine, *French Rugby* 67). Whatever the root cause, feelings on the subject remain strong. Jean Lacouture, journalist for *Le Monde* and also de Gaulle's biographer, imagines rugby as the national sport of a France that is south of an imaginary frontier running from the Charente to the Jura regions (*Le Rugby* 22), in other words, a France without Paris and the ruling classes. Lacouture is not alone in his fantasy: many have imagined the south as a separate country to be called "l'Ovalie," a territory south and west of the Loire river and named in honor of its sport.

Divisions such as these between Paris and the rest of France played out on the pitch as, beginning in 1899, the USFSA's championship pitted the best team from Paris against the best club from the provinces (Terret 70):²³

Provincial honour was at the centre of the dispute, along with its cortège of symbolic figures. The male values expressed by rugby were, in this case, values of resistance: a true man rebels in order to be free. The player embodied man's athletic ability, in a cultural and symbolic sense, to resist central authority and to be his own master. Rugby was thus seen as cultural revenge for the political domination that Paris imposed on the provinces, especially in those provinces most sensitive about their identity. (Terret 72)

²³ USFSA stands for Union des Sociétés Françaises de Sports Athlétiques. The group was founded in 1887 by, among others, the Baron Pierre de Coubertin, and they organized a variety of sports including cycling, fencing, and swimming. The USFSA was also the principal governing body of soccer and rugby union until it was supplanted by the French Football Federation and the French Rugby Federation.

Of course, this description involves some of the idealized gendering that occurs in sports, the baggage of ideology weighing down the significations of the athlete's body.

Nevertheless, the village-centered, strong-man style of rugby clashed continually with the style of play professed by the Parisian urban intellectuals in a contribution to, as well as a reflection and reinforcement of, their competing masculine and class-based ideals:

“Rugby was a way peasant men could overcome their inferiority complex and take advantage of the morphological and muscular capital they had developed through work” (Terret 73). Playing rugby helped create and construct these sorts of masculine, locale-based ideals and encouraged the provinces-Paris rivalry, especially in an arena where the provinces could win. A glance at the list of French club championship winners from 1892 to 2000 confirms the dominance of the south after 1904, with the exceptions of wins by Stade Français in 1908, 1998, and 2000 and Racing Club de France's wins in 1959 and 1990 (Dine, *French Rugby* 213-215). This southern version of rugby and its ethos is the one that has become legendary in France, celebrated in literature, and dominant on the pitch.²⁴

The preceding brief history shows that rugby, class definitions, and masculinity in France were anything but uniform and static during that period. Despite the fact that various groups of men were playing by the same laws of the game, what this game meant to each group varied greatly. In the provinces, especially in the Southwest, rugby was resistance to the capital and affirmation of working class ideals. In the capital, at least in the beginning, rugby was an assertion of upper class ideals. At a national level, rugby symbolized a suddenly unified French identity against the rest of the world. Thus the meanings of the game tended to both contribute to and reflect upon the social status—

²⁴ Dominant, that is, until the Parisian team Stade Français rose again in the late 1990s. See chapter two.

class, gender, and geographical location—of those playing and watching. However, rugby also constructed values, or at least made them visible—values such as violent physicality—and furthermore, produced specific iterations of masculinity that intersected with class and geography.

Along these same lines of intersecting values and identities, Pierre Bourdieu states that social definitions of sport are “part of the larger field of struggles over the definition of the *legitimate body* and the *legitimate use of the body*” that are in turn part of the “struggles between the fractions of the dominant class and also between the social classes” (826, italics in original). He argues further that “it is the relation to one’s own body, a fundamental aspect of the habitus, which distinguishes the working classes from the privileged classes” (826). Though Bourdieu focuses on social class in his analysis of sporting bodies, I would argue, using Robert W. Connell’s and Judith Butler’s theories about gender, that the differences in relationships to their bodies that Bourdieu argues for among different social classes produces differing ideals of masculinity, and these definitions and ideals will be spelled out over the course of this chapter. As discussed above, the early aristocratic ethos of rugby insisted on the game as cultivating character. Bourdieu claims that the “[g]lorification of sport as the training-ground of character, etc., always implies a certain anti-intellectualism” that recalls how “the dominant fractions of the dominant class always tend to conceive their relation to the dominated fraction—‘intellectuals,’ ‘artists,’ ‘professors’—in terms of the opposition between the male and the female, the virile and the effeminate” (826). Here, gender figures dominance and the uses of the body in sports map these onto the body. In Bourdieu’s view, achievements by the dominant classes on the playing field produce a masculinity that prizes education,

character, willpower, and sport; whereas the “strictly scholastic hierarchy” in the educational universe favors instruction, intelligence, and culture (825). These latter values are the ones recognized by what Bourdieu calls “the intellectual fractions of the petty-bourgeoisie and the ‘sons of schoolteachers’” (826). For Bourdieu, the values associated with masculinity intersect with class values, but I believe both of these vectors are complicated by the demands placed on one’s body in sports and the performances of class and gender that are then produced. In turn, these performances take on, or are made to take on, occasionally different values when represented in journalism and literature.

Bourdieu does acknowledge that in French rugby, the boundaries between classes and among behaviors and values are not always so neatly constructed, however: “The exaltation of ‘manliness’ and the cult of ‘team spirit’ that are associated with playing rugby—not to mention the aristocratic ideal of ‘fair play’—have a very different meaning and function for bourgeois or aristocratic adolescents in English public schools and for the sons of peasants or shopkeepers in south-west France” (832).²⁵ Part of this variance in meaning is attributable to class difference and the desired outcome of sports participation. For the French working class, sporting success is “one of the few paths of upward mobility” and

the working-class cult of sportsmen of working-class origin is doubtless explained in part by the fact that these “success stories” symbolize the only recognized route to wealth and fame. Everything suggests that the “interests” and values which practitioners from the working and lower-middle classes bring into the conduct of sports are in harmony with the corresponding requirements of *professionalization*

²⁵ Public in this case means what Americans would call private—usually elite boarding institutions like Eton or the Rugby School itself.

(which can, of course, coexist with the appearances of amateurism)[...]. (832-33, italics in original)²⁶

These “interests and values” involve, in part, the effects expected from bodily exercise. According to Bourdieu, the working-class athlete hopes to produce “a strong body, bearing the outward signs of strength” as opposed to the bourgeois athlete who demands a healthy body produced by activities such as early gymnastics that are primarily hygienic in function (835). Activities and exercise, even sports, are therefore used by different classes in different ways to produce particular bodies and thereby specific masculinities. In Bourdieu’s theoretical terms, there is

the *instrumental* relation to the body which the working class express in all the practices centered on the body [...] and which is also manifested in the choice of sports requiring a considerable investment of effort, sometimes of pain and suffering (e.g. boxing) and sometimes a *gambling with the body itself* (as in motor-cycling, parachute-jumping, all forms of acrobatics, and, to some extent, all sports involving fighting, among which we may include rugby). On the other side, there is the tendency of the privileged classes to treat the body as an *end in itself*[...] (838, italics in original)

The mention of rugby as a sport requiring pain and suffering, fighting and even the risking of the body is important, especially in light of the sport’s long entanglement with violent traditions and those traditions’ links with gender, because it points to how these ways of using the body, or bodily practices to use Connell’s term, contribute to productions and interpretations of masculinity at the same time as they produce and

²⁶ Although in 1978, when Bourdieu was writing, soccer’s professional players were likely the object of this “cult of sportsmen,” Bourdieu’s mention of professionalization with the appearance of amateurism speaks to the specific situation of French rugby and shamateurism at the time, as discussed above. The “working-class cult of sportsmen” and success stories will be examined in the context of soccer in chapter three.

inform class identity. Therefore, social class, uses of the body, and accompanying ideas about gender are bound up in Bourdieu's analysis.

My analysis will pay special attention to these intersections in a rather particular body of works that run from literature—as Pierre Charreton qualifies Jean Prévost's *Plaisirs des sports (Fêtes du corps 3)*—to a collection of newspaper reports, to short stories supposedly based on true events. Prévost was one of the first to seek a way to discuss and analyze the body at play without sliding into the erotic, according to Charreton (ibid 10). His success earned him the recognition of the Direction de la Jeunesse et des Sports as well as the Association des Ecrivains Sportifs in renaming the Prix de littérature sportive after him in 1948, making it the Grand Prix Jean Prévost de Littérature sportive (Charreton, *Le sport, l'ascèse* 239).²⁷ Prévost's essays in *Plaisirs des sports* are exemplary of Charreton's contention that, “Jusque vers 1930, la littérature sportive se manifestera donc comme un mouvement vers la spontanéité instinctive, vers la vie et l'action. Elle veut porter remède aux maux dont la sensibilité avait été affectée sous l'effet du romantisme, du symbolisme puis du freudisme et du surréalisme” (*Fêtes du corps* 12). [Until about 1930, sports literature manifested itself as a movement towards instinctive spontaneity, towards life and action. It wanted to remedy the evils that sensibility had been affected by under the sway of romanticism, symbolism, and then of Freudianism and surrealism.] I am most interested, however, not in Prévost's position vis à vis other literary movements of the time but in the movements of the bodies he takes such care in describing in fascinatingly gendered and classed terms.

²⁷ I fully acknowledge the ongoing disputes about the very term “sports literature,” but I am interested here in examining the content of sports-themed writing and representations of bodies to be found therein, not in the debate about what to call such compositions. For sketches of the terminological debate, see Charreton (*Fêtes du corps* 3-5), Heimermann, Le Targat and Lyleire, and Voilley.

Like Prévost, Jean Lacouture was a journalist. Instead of branching out into literary criticism and novels as Prévost did, however, Lacouture was interested in history, politics, and biography, publishing biographies of de Gaulle, Ho Chi Minh, Nasser, and Mitterand, among others. He also loved rugby, and when the rugby specialist at *Le Monde* where he worked left in 1962, Lacouture persuaded his editor to appoint him to the position; he then covered international matches and French championship finals until 1978 (Lacouture, Interview). His book *Le rugby, c'est un monde* is primarily a collection of *Le Monde* articles dating from 1965 to 1978, along with some from other sources, and was re-issued in 2007 in time for the International Rugby Board World Cup hosted by France. His history of rugby, *Voyous et gentlemen*, was also re-issued for the occasion. The popularity of both books and the wide original distribution of Lacouture's newspaper articles make them important for their influence on public perceptions of rugby.

Another classic of rugby writing, and the one on which I will focus the most attention, is Henri Garcia's *Les contes du rugby*. Like Prévost and Lacouture, Garcia was a journalist, but he specialized in sports, joining *L'Équipe* in 1949 and retiring as editor and director of the paper in 1993. He was appointed to the Ordre national du mérite as a chevalier and was also a Chevalier des Artes et lettres; he won the Grand Prix de littérature sportive, also known as the Prix Tristan Bernard, in 1986. He wrote several rugby story collections and histories of rugby, and was a member of the International Rugby Board's Hall of Fame Induction Panel as one of six "well-known rugby media personalities" ("IRB Hall of Fame"). I have selected three stories from his *Les contes du rugby* to focus on because of the collection's popularity and the individual stories' complicated treatments of identity.

II. Class and Rugby in French Writing

With the ascendance of concerns with the human body—its evolution, diseases, clothing, and reproduction—during the first decades of the twentieth century came a new area of literature interested in the bodily experience of sports (Charreton, *Fêtes du corps*). One participant in this trend was Jean Prévost, whose project in his essay collection *Plaisirs des sports* was to “remarquer des sentiments corporelles, surtout des sensations de mouvement” (Prévost 9) [to observe corporal feelings, especially feelings of movement]. In sections he devotes to rugby, Prévost seems to suggest that different kinds of movement have different class connotations by describing the movements of backs and forwards, even from the same teams, in different terms. However, these social divisions stem from player positions and performance, not necessarily any actual social status imported from off the pitch; the players’ names and occupations, which would suggest social rank, are never given. For example, Prévost notes how before a match “les lignes arrière flairent le combat; les avants flairent la lutte et le travail, et ceux-là n’observent pas seulement leurs adversaires, ils les pèsent” (106) [the back line senses combat; the forwards sense struggle and work, and they do not merely observe their opponents, they weigh them up]. Prévost uses a verb for both the forwards and backs that is associated with animality, but the backs smell the glory of combat while the forwards smell the slog and struggle of work. Furthermore, the idea of forwards “weighing up” their opponents suggests an added dimension of doing heavy lifting like oxen or donkeys would do. The fleet of foot animality of the backs is contrasted with the trudging one of the forwards when Prévost describes the start of the game: as the teams ready for kick-

off, “se dessinent la ligne lourde des avants, la ligne claire et manoeuvrière des trois-quarts” (106) [the heavy line of forwards, the light/clear and manoeuvring/tactician back line, are formed]. The forwards are thick and plodding, while the backs are intellectual and tactical beings, light on their feet and graceful.

When the match is not going well, the differences, both physical and in terms of perceived class, between the two groups is made even more clear as the familiar plaint of the pack forwards is heard:

Le demi lance moins tôt sa balle, les mêlées se disloquent et doutent, et l’âme des bons avants grogne une espèce de plainte: « C’est nous qui peinons et poussons depuis le début de la bataille, et les seigneurs trois-quarts s’amuse aux fautes que nous payons [. »] (Prévost 114)
[The scrum half throws the ball less quickly, the scrums collapse and doubt themselves, and the souls of the good forwards grumble a sort of complaint: “It is we who have been toiling and pushing since the beginning of the battle, and the back line lords amuse themselves with errors that we have to pay for.”]

The pack defines itself as a toiling beast of burden, which links back to earlier images of lumbering strength and therefore creates a solidly working class image, while the backs have the panache and play of the upper classes unconcerned by straining exertion. There is even some “class” resentment on the part of the forwards who feel used and unappreciated by the backs. The transitions rugby was undergoing between the two world wars when Prévost was writing seem to have been translated onto the field: the backs represent the more aristocratic elements of the game with its links to the Parisian *gratin*, intellectuals, and urbane amateurism, while the forwards embody the southwestern agricultural and rural ethos of the game.

Reinforcing the contrast between the two groups of players are images that highlight, for example, the “souplesse” (Prévost 106) [suppleness] of one of the centers or how the “jambes anguleuses et brusques” [angular and blunt legs] of the winger “tâtent le terrain, comme des pattes d’araignee” (106) [sound out the terrain, like the legs of a spider]. The backs are quick, delicate, flexible; on the other hand, when forwards run the ball, they are “sangliers” [wild boars] who struggle and fight but lose speed and muddle into the defending forwards (107), losing any chance to gain ground towards the try line. The forwards thus rely on brute strength instead of rapidity, quickly running out of steam and not seeming to be terribly gifted at maneuvering as they charge into the opposing pack instead of going around or passing off the ball.²⁸ As a result of their differing capabilities, the relationship between the backs and the forwards is nearly feudal: “les avants [...] servent docilement les rapides demi-dieux” (113) [the forwards docilely serve the fast demi-gods]. The pack works to get the ball out from physical contact, to drive their opponents backwards, to claim the ball after a tackle, but once they secure it, the ball is frequently picked up by the scrum half and passed out to the back line so they can pass and run and engage in their beautiful, champagne-style play. The backs are the players who usually score, and so they are the ones who are easily noticed and worshipped for their skill; it is the backs, the demi-gods, who are tempted by pride and glory (113-114).

This kind of movement by the backs contrasts with the frequently static position of the forwards. Unlike the backs who zip about the field as individuals, the forwards form a “bloc” to be “cimenté” (112), and their scrums take on the features of steel or

²⁸ Of course, taking the ball straight back into contact is one of the functions of forward players and how their strength and size are used in the game; if they were fast and light, they would be backs.

stone buildings, as Prévost plays off the meanings of “pilier”: “les piliers s’enracinent par leurs crampons et ahanent, et deux lignes d’arc-boutants renforcent cette brusque architecture. La troisième ligne pourtant se ploie en arcs plus souples” (107) [the props/pillars root themselves with their cleats and strive, and two lines of flying buttresses reinforce this abrupt architecture. The flankers and eight man meanwhile bend themselves into more supple arches]. The image of the impromptu cathedral resonates at more than the level of constructing a scrum as architecture. This is an edifice rooted firmly in the ground, an organically grown gothic structure that brings with it and supports the weight of historical allusions and its own Barthesian mythology. Muscular Christianity is invoked by combining images of strength and church structures. French *esprit de clocher* (local pride) is also referenced through the cathedral image, as the expression is built on the image of a steeple and home turf being that from which one could see one’s local church bell tower. In turn, the image links again to soil with both the emphasis on locality and the organicness of the infrastructure of the scrum. These elements of rugby mythology are perhaps most clearly expressed in comments about rugby being in the very dirt of the Languedoc region (Garcia 90).

Important to note, however, is that both the natural elegance of the backs and the solid masonry of the forwards are validated as important and necessary to rugby by Prévost. This validation is not universal in rugby writing. In reference to the 1971 French championship match that proved to be “Un match d’avants gagné par un arrière” (Lacouture, *Le Rugby* 59) [A match of forwards won by a back], Lacouture notes :

On peut préférer un rugby de lutins et de gazelles, les galopades à la bayonnaise, les percées de Jean Gachassin, le jeu de seigneurs réinventé par André Boniface, on peut préférer le rugby en dentelles, en étincelles, en zigzag et en

cascades, mais on ne peut pas se nourrir, même en Gascogne, que de confit de canard et de Château-Margaux. Il faut aussi des nourritures qui «tiennent à l'estomac», comme on dit ici. (61)
[One may prefer a rugby of sprites and gazelles, Bayonne-style stampedes, Jean Gachissin's breaks, the game of lords reinvented by André Boniface, one can prefer rugby in lace, in sparks, in zigzags and stunts, but all the same one cannot feed oneself, even in Gascony, only with duck confit and Château-Margaux. You also need food that «sticks to your stomach, » as we say around here.]

His imagery echoes Prévost's play with lightness and heaviness but adds more concrete class references to his descriptions by linking backline play and flair with rich gastronomic fare and fine wine, delicate fabrics, and exotic animals and placing them in opposition to perhaps more simple but more filling food, a comparison possibly invoking a kind of French meat and potatoes peasant essentials. While he concedes that pretty rugby may be more esthetically pleasing and popular, he still insists that this style must remember the importance of basics. Lacouture thus re-affirms the ethos of the rural strong man without all the aristocratic and elegant trappings but also respects the *seigneurs* and lords for the beauty of their style of play.

Lacouture posits that this division of labor between backs and forwards is one based on body type and physical ability (*Le rugby* 49), which may correspond to profession and thereby class, but some contend that rugby players can be categorized based on temperament. Thus in rugby there are two kinds of players: those who play pianos and those who move pianos, a famous line uttered by French international player Pierre Danos and quoted by Garcia (187), by McRae (10), and by Dine (*French Rugby* 196). A drastic example of this division is found in the story of the selfsame Pierre Danos, as told by Henri Garcia in *Les contes du rugby* (1961). Danos is a fly half,

elegant, intelligent, handsome, and a great rugby player. However, because of these qualities as well as his mediocre time in the military, his teammates doubt his courage and thus, for them, his manliness. It takes a dramatic injury and incredible self-sacrifice for Danos to prove himself, and the story thereby illustrates the traits valued by his team in their particular notion of masculinity while at the same time producing through representation a model of masculinity for rugby.

A. Pierre Danos the Piano Player

Pierre Danos was a real rugby player, born in Toulouse, who played scrum half for the French national team between 1954 and 1960, and who was one of the game's piano players he famously quipped about. This meant that his playing style was elegant and quick, and that he relied more on his brains than the strength of his body to play well. Henri Garcia's tale about Danos, titled "Le sang du poète," relates some of the difficulties such a type of player might encounter on the pitch when he runs up against rugby culture's competing notions of class-based masculinities, and the titular reference to Danos as a poet and not a rugbyman reinforces such distinctions among men. In fact, the entire arc of the story follows how Danos arrived in Toulon, had his courage doubted because of his supposed smarts and beauty, and eventually proved his ability to physically suffer on the rugby pitch, thereby proving his manliness according to the rest of the players' definitions—but Garcia also casts the whole saga in terms of social class.

Garcia introduces his character by emphasizing something other than Danos's rugby skills, although these are gestured to obliquely: "Lorsque Pierre Danos débarqua à Toulon au Café de l'Amirauté, on comprit vite que c'était une vedette. A vingt ans, il

n'avait pas encore qu'une modeste réputation, mais il était beau comme un jeune premier et la beauté, à Toulon, ça compte" (183). [When Pierre Danos landed in Toulon at the Café de l'Amirauté, it was quickly understood that he was a star. At twenty years old, he had only but a modest reputation, but he was as handsome as a young film leading man and in Toulon, beauty counts.] Danos's construction as a handsome film star removes him from the everyday crowd, elevating him to a celebrity status that would separate him from the working class regulars of rugby. Immediately following this observation about Danos's looks, the narrator proceeds to enumerate the lengths that the Toulon club's members went to in order to acquire Danos, who was then in the military and stationed elsewhere: calls to the Minister of the Armed Forces to get Danos transferred to Toulon, a ministerial order overriding regular orders, and a personal conference with the general at the staff headquarters in Toulon to secure a post for Danos (183-85). This intense desire for Danos shows him to be a coveted commodity, almost objectifying and thereby, at least in the heteronormative rugby world, feminizing him to some extent.

Nevertheless, when Danos arrives in Toulon the only job that can be found for him is as a chauffeur for General Pontcarral, but as it turns out Danos doesn't know how to drive and furthermore the army has no available lodgings for him. He ends up living at a hotel in town, playing rugby on Sundays, training on Thursdays, and "le reste du temps, il prenait le soleil sur le quai de Stalingrad ou à la terrasse de «la Rotonde»" [the rest of the time, he basked in the sun on the Stalingrad quai or on the patio at the Rotonde bar] (185). Such a life of leisure once again distances Danos from the working classes, and the mention of tanning reinforces the importance of his looks. After a while, Danos figures he has fulfilled his military service and discovers he has over-served by three

weeks, provoking difficulty in demobilizing him (186-87). The narrator concludes the saga of Danos' military duties by noting that though he may have been a "médiocre soldat" (187) he was a remarkable rugby captain, and launches into the tale proper of how Danos proved his courage on the pitch.

By this point in the story, the narrator has sufficiently constructed Pierre Danos's image as one of a leisure class, beautiful celebrity; he has been presented as, with the army's aid, leading a very soft and quasi-non-civilian life spent in the comfort of a hotel, playing rugby, and tanning. Indeed, Danos seems to be living up to his pretty-boy, movie star-looks by lounging around town soaking up the sun. His body is represented by the narrator as an aesthetic object to be admired for its beauty, not a tool for rough use on the rugby pitch. This seems to contradict the narrator's statement about the importance of beauty in Toulon, but that beauty seems to only count in the café and for the regular townfolk, for fans rather than for players.

The narrator follows comments about Danos taking in the sun with the observation that he played so well that the loyal Toulon team fans idolized him (185). Again, this is the spectators, not teammates, and again, the observation on skill is followed by an aesthetic assertion: "Il avait déjà cette allure racée de matador, celui qui dix ans plus tard allait devenir le Dominguin du rugby, le lieutenant cher à Lucien Mias" (Garcia 185-86).²⁹ [He already had that blueblood allure of a matador, he who ten years later would become the Dominguin of rugby, the lieutenant dear to Lucien Mias.] The reference to bluebloodedness reinforces the image of Danos as separate from the working and middle classes and part of an aristocratic segment of society. Furthermore, Luis

²⁹ Lucien Mias played second row for the international French side from 1951 to 1959, participating in the legendary 1958 tour of South Africa and captaining the French team to a Five Nations tournament win in 1959. See Marchal for Mias's views on how rugby has changed.

Miguel Dominguin, a famous Spanish matador of the 1940s and '50s, was reputed not only for his skill in the bullring but also for his romance with Ava Gardner and for his charm (“Dominguin”), so that the idea of both lovers and fighters are subtly contained within the reference to Dominguin, providing two supposedly competing concepts of masculinity in one descriptor. With the allusion to the look of a matador paired with the use of the term lieutenant, the narrator brings together artistic and militaristic masculinities. Of course, these qualities are not always mutually exclusive, but the portrait emerging of Danos is certainly more complex than those painted by Garcia of two other rugby-playing characters, Wisser and Sancey, brute forwards who gleefully engaged in violence and who were never described as pretty boys or graceful matadors. Danos embodies a much more complex masculinity than those two men, and this seems to result in confusion for his teammates and perhaps, to some extent, for the narrator.

After having linked Danos with the roles of matador and lieutenant, the narrator returns to more explicitly classed descriptions, insisting on the “*élégance*” of Danos’s play that placed him “*parmi les grands seigneurs de notre rugby*” (186) [among the great seigneurs of our rugby]. The feudal term “*grand seigneur*” recalls a naturalized, hereditary notion of nobility, hinting at innate ability and divine rights that would, at least mythologically, make a person elegant. However, the choice of an aristocratic term is complicated by the mention of Danos’s nickname, bestowed by the Welsh, of “*petit Napoléon*” (186), recalling Emperor Napoleon I, who created the *Légion d’Honneur* to recognize merit and base titles thereon instead of returning to chivalry. Once more, the narrator mixes metaphors and creates a complex web of identifications for Danos. Though he inhabits the supposedly meritocratic world of sports, Danos simultaneously is

crowned Emperor and hailed as a seigneur. His elegance and artistry, alluded to in the mention of Dominguin hint further, in the context of rugby's imagined class structure, at aristocracy. These class distinctions lay the groundwork for Danos's coming troubles in the story as he encounters the earthier elements of the rugby universe.

Indeed, because of Danos's aristocratic appearance and demeanor, because of his renown as an elegant leader instead of a brute warrior, the players and fans surrounding him assume that he is lacking in physical courage. The narrator explains that, for Danos, even though

on lui attribuait à peu près toutes les vertus du grand joueur de rugby, il en était une qu'on lui contesta longtemps: le courage. Il était trop beau, trop intelligent, trop grand seigneur, pour accepter la souffrance, la besogne obscure et pénible. D'ailleurs, il disait avec une superbe élégance: «Au rugby il y a ceux qui déménagent les pianos et ceux qui en jouent...» Et tout le monde le consacrait virtuose. Assurément, pensait-on, le Dominguin du rugby français était fait pour l'habit de lumière et non point pour le bleu de chauffe." (187)

[he had attributed to him almost all the virtues of a great rugby player, there was one that was disputed a long time: courage. He was too handsome, too intelligent, too much of a fine gentleman, to accept the suffering, the humble and hard work. Besides, he would say with superb elegance: "In rugby, there are those who move pianos and there are those who play them..." And everyone considered him a virtuoso. Assuredly, they thought, the Dominguin of French rugby was made for the bullfighter's costume and not for workingmen's overalls.]

These thoughts provide a clear picture of the rugby public's opinion of matadors: they are handsome artists, but not hard workers. Furthermore, here intelligence and elegance are seen as separate from physical courage and willingness to labor. While these qualities are seen as acceptable and even admirable, the rugby crowd deems them insufficient; to achieve greatness, a man must prove himself to be physically brave,

dedicated to a tough job and willing to suffer. Artistry is set up in opposition to work, and the image of overalls lays claim to a certain class sensibility for southwestern French rugby. The second part of Garcia's tale relates how Pierre Danos, seemingly despite his reputation as an artistic and aristocratic type, achieved the kind of greatness reserved for the laborers of rugby.

The crucial episode of Danos's achievement is opened by a description of the Colombes stadium where the 1958 match against England is held. Nationalistic motivations are removed from Danos's act of courage: the narrator notes that the stadium is a symbol of peace and that the French supporters had not yet acquired the habit of singing the Marseillaise (188), both indications of a lack of nationalistic ardor and competitiveness based on borders. Gone also, it seems, is motivation to win, as the match quickly devolves into a rout by the English of the French, as the French "attaquants de charme" (188) and their champagne rugby crack under the force of the big, monstrous English (189). One of the French players is even booed as he exits the pitch, but "le public se montrait un peu cruel car le gentil Christian [Vignes, the inside center], malgré sa petite gueule de danseur de tango, n'était pas un dégonflé; il allait aux vestiaires se faire piquer et mettre un emplâtre à la cuisse pour revenir à la bataille" (190) [the spectators showed themselves to be a bit cruel since the kind Christian, despite his look of a tango dancer, was not a coward; he was going to the locker room to get an injection and a bandage on his thigh in order to rejoin the battle]. Vignes is described as a man who can, "malgré" his pretty face and graceful dancer's body, manage to attain bravery in battle, unlike Danos, who has been portrayed as being only his pretty face and therefore, his teammates have assumed, weak and perhaps cowardly. The use of the

word “despite” and the opposition of a dance and a battle lay out the parameters for a masculinity particular to the situation, again opposing artistry and courage, grace and brute strength. Vigne’s injury also foreshadows the upcoming events involving Danos.

Just after a third try by the English, Pierre Danos is knocked over and trampled during the course of play. When the team doctor and manager help him stand, “[s]es pieds se dérobaient, son visage était livide et son bras gauche pendait, inerte. Sur le touche, [...le] docteur Martin s’affairait car il y avait urgence. Danos, la main labourée par des crampons anglais, avait les deux grosses veines sectionnées et il perdait son sang en abondance” (191) [His feet gave way beneath him, his face was pallid, and his left arm hung inert. On the sidelines, Doctor Martin bustled about due to the matter’s urgency. Danos, his hand worked over by English cleats, had had two large veins severed and he was losing an abundance of blood]. Danos, however, refuses to be taken to the hospital and insists on simply being bandaged up (191). Solidarity is a key rugby value, and Danos’s solidarity with his team, acted out in his refusal to leave the sidelines of the match, shows him to be cognizant of the game’s cultural expectations. At half time, the Welsh referee, the English and French captains, and Lucien Mias come over to check on him and encourage him to let himself be looked at. Danos assures them, groaning, that he’ll soon be back in play: “Je vais venir, je vais venir, tenez bon” (191). [“I’ll be back, I’ll be back, sit tight.”] Not only will he not depart, then, but Danos suggests that he expects to rejoin the game. He has thereby verbalized his courage, but has yet to act on it to prove it to those watching, and that acting is all-important.

Play resumes after the half with the French players shuffled in their positions to cover for injuries, but another player is soon injured, reducing the forwards to five in

number out of the usual eight and forcing major changes in the backline.³⁰ Finally, Danos's hemorrhaging stops as does that of the French team; a couple of the injured players come to their senses and limp back onto the field just as Doctor Martin "achevait un énorme pansement à la main de Danos. Pierrot était cadavérique, mais il voulait absolument reprendre sa place" (192) [completed an enormous bandage on Danos's hand. Pierrot {Danos's nickname, a typically Southern French diminutive of Pierre} was cadaver-like, but he absolutely wanted to regain his position on the field]. Interestingly, Danos has temporarily lost his attractiveness but gained a sense of purpose and tenacity that may have been hidden by his leisurely lifestyle and lackadaisical attitude toward the military. Perhaps inspired by the other injured players' performances of physical courage, perhaps piqued by their doubts to prove his own masculine worth, Danos ignores the doctor's advice to stay quietly on the sidelines, saying, "Ce n'est pas possible, docteur, il faut tenter l'impossible, il reste encore une demi-heure à jouer..." (192). [That's not possible, doctor, one must attempt the impossible, there's still a half hour to play.] The use of an impersonal imperative suggests that Danos feels compelled by something outside himself to continue play, perhaps some cultural mandate that demands certain actions in the face of circumstance. He escapes from the doctor, and on "jambes flageolantes" [quavering legs] enters the pitch to the applause of the public (192), their clapping testament to his act of courage and their approval.

At first, Danos stays behind at defense, but slowly he gains animation until he reclaims his position in the heart of the action at scrum half: "Chaque balle qu'il touchait lui valait d'atroces souffrances, mais il continuait. Mieux même, à trois reprises, dans

³⁰ Substitutions for injured players were not allowed until the 1968-1969 season and were limited to two. Tactical substitutions were not permitted until 1996 ("History of the Laws").

son style seigneurial de matador, il se glissa au ras de la mêlée, provoquant, par trois fois, d'immenses déchirures dans la défense anglaise" (192). [Each ball that he touched brought him excruciating pain, but he continued. Even better, three times, in his magisterial matador style, he slipped level to the scrum, creating, each of the three times, immense holes in the English defense.] Danos thus goes from being a warm body on the pitch to a man in on the action to an excellent, play-creating leader, all despite his painful injury. He is even able to play elegantly in his accustomed style despite his pain, proving that artistry and physical bravery are not mutually exclusive. However, although Danos had these three opportunities for tries "au bout de ses mains ensanglantées" [at the tips of his bloodied fingers], he "avait perdu tant de forces qu'il ne put conclure et les avants de France étaient trop épuisés pour achever son oeuvre. Dans les ultimes minutes, il chancelait, à moitié inconscient" (193) [had lost so much strength that he couldn't follow through and the French forwards were too exhausted to finish his work. In the final minutes, he faltered, half unconscious]. Danos incarnates here both the French mentality of losing with honor and the rugbyman masculinity that requires physical sacrifice, without losing his classy style. He thereby complicates the notion that masculinity in rugby is about brute strength and physical will by showing that those qualities can co-exist quite well with grace and elegance.

Indeed, when the doctor yells for him to come off, Danos shakes his head and puts the ball into the scrum for the last play of the game. Though the French forwards win the ball, it comes out so slowly that when Danos finally grabs it two English forwards tackle him and throw him to the ground. When the crowd of players clears, Danos "resta évanoui, le pansement arraché. De sa plaie béante le sang jaillissait à

nouveau. Le coup de sifflet final mit un terme à son calvaire” (193) [was still unconscious, his bandage ripped off. From his gaping wound blood spurted anew. The final whistle put an end to his Calvary]. The idea of sacrifice is introduced by the Christ imagery of a bleeding wound combined with that of a stigmata, as well as by the description of Danos’s tribulations as a Way to the Cross or martyrdom. In the context of Danos’s performance of masculinity, this sacrifice becomes a sort of parallel to or component of the masculinity Danos has been acting out. Redemption, implied in the Christ references, suggests that Danos’s sacrifice will lead to a kind of salvation of manhood, but the images also hint at the difficulty of acquiring this salvation, intimating that this ultimate brand of manhood is reserved for the few able to make the required self-sacrifices. Danos’s symbolic death, in the form of his unconsciousness, is just this kind of sacrifice.

In a way, Danos is baptized by blood to achieve full rugby masculinity in the eyes of his teammates and fans. The tale’s title, “Le sang du poète” [The Blood of the Poet], indicates the importance of this bloodshed to the story, but also emphasizes the elements of artistry introduced by Danos into the game. Poets are usually considered intellectuals, and if Danos is a poet as the title posits, the story could be read as him trying to overcome his intellectual and artistic leanings, or at least reputation, in order to engage in tough behavior coded as working class, behavior considered crucial to masculine identity in southwestern French rugby union. However, the Christ imagery complicates these competing notions of masculinity by suggesting that perhaps they are not in opposition; after all, Christian religious tradition has it that the carpenter’s son and the son of the Lord were unified in one body. Thus the brute physicality demanded by rugby’s working

class ethos and the regalness of someone addressed as “Lord,” qualities Danos is able to embody simultaneously, are shown to have existed in one masculinity before. Class distinctions, real or perceived, are overcome both in the Christ narrative and in Danos’ actions.

After the match, Pierre Danos is rushed off the pitch and to the hospital to be operated upon while the rest of the French and the English teams head to the Lutetia hotel to embark on a third half of toasts, songs, and Charolais steaks.³¹ Silence falls over the festivities, however, when two figures appear at the entrance:

Le docteur Martin avançait, soutenant Pierre Danos. Le beau, l’élégant virtuose, celui qui paraissait mieux fait pour les mondanités que pour jouer les héros de souffrance et d’abnégation, venait vers nous avec le visage d’un Christ du Greco. Nous restâmes muets quelques secondes avec au coeur le remords d’avoir si vite oublié son héroïsme. (194)
[Doctor Martin approached, supporting Pierre Danos. The handsome, the elegant virtuoso, he who seemed better made for society life/polite small talk than to play the hero at suffering and self-denial, came towards us with the face of an El Greco Christ. We stayed mute a few seconds with remorse in our hearts to have so quickly forgotten his heroism.]

Class-based expectations for male behavior are obvious in the narrator’s description of Danos: artists and society types are elegant and handsome while rugby players are made for physical suffering and personal abnegation; one group engages more the mind while the others sacrifice their bodies; the intellectual is linked to higher classes and the physical to laboring classes. Danos is categorized with the non-rugby types both through his physical description as handsome and elegant and through his depiction as a high-art Christ figure. At the same time, however, the Christ imagery suggests that Danos may

³¹ The third half is comprised of the traditional meal and celebration, usually including alcoholic beverages and rugby songs, that takes place after a match and is hosted by the home team.

have saved or redeemed the team's honor via his sacrifices on the pitch. Yet the shifts in representations of Danos's gender performances also indicate how behaviors are differently classed and therefore how masculinities are differently constructed and interpreted, which in turn points to the difficulty in policing different values associated with and reproduced by masculinity. Thus despite the town's and the crowd's and the narrator's and players' reactions to Danos and his beauty and artistry, his actions are needed and therefore validated, thereby expanding ideas about what constitutes masculinity and masculine behavior. This kind of contradiction is not unusual in the rugby universe; Dine explains how Guy Boniface was a player who was able "to reconcile apparently contradictory notions: of mobility and rootedness; of modernity and tradition; of change and continuity; of the primacy of both the individual and the community; of the national and the local determinants of identity" (*French Rugby* 139). Drawing on the story of Danos, to Dine's list can be added rugby's aristocratic roots and ethos and the sport's rough physicality; its requirements for artistry and smart innovation and its need for bodily sacrifice.

Perhaps these contradictions explain why, despite all of the powerful imagery of Danos as Christ, the team had forgotten his actions, however momentarily. This lapse betrays the banality of such actions on the pitch; after all, Vignes went off injured and came back. What seems to make Danos's story exceptional is that he subverts the constructed opposition between his seemingly high-society, artistic character and the acting out of physical courage; in other words, the text constructs a variety of models of masculinity and tries to make them conflicting, but this conflict is subverted by Danos's performance. This shows that the intersection of identities is being debated in the text,

that the relationships among gender, class, and rugby are being felt out. Nevertheless, the more painful brand of masculinity is taken for granted in Garcia's rugby universe, as physical heroics easily slip rugbymen's minds.

Furthermore, Danos's actions are mitigated by the state they leave him in as well as by comparison to others, as shown when one of his fellow Frenchmen breaks the silence that had fallen upon his entrance:

Le grand Jules, le lutteur du début du siècle, le vieux lion au coeur généreux, quitta la table officielle précipitamment. «Pierrot, mon petit Pierrot...» Il ne put dire davantage, le brave Jules. Danos, pris de vertige, avait laissé tomber sa tête sur la poitrine énorme du vieux colosse. Jules, les yeux pleins de larmes, le ramassa comme un oiseau blessé et le porta jusqu'à la table de Tricolores. (194)³²
[The great Jules, the fighter from the dawn of the century, the old lion with a generous heart, hastily left the official table. "Pierrot, my little Pierrot..." He couldn't say anymore, good Jules. Danos, overcome by vertigo, had let his head fall against the enormous chest of the old colossus. Jules, his eyes full of tears, picked him up like an injured bird and carried him to the Tricolor's table.]

Cadenat, a former player himself (and the first rugby player to surpass 100 kilograms in weight) and the founder of A.S. Béziers, is characterized by his size and pugnacity, although here he is also depicted as gentle and generous. Danos, on the other hand, is a broken little bird who is carried to the safety of his team table by this weeping lion. The differences in their descriptions seem to try to construct the men's masculinities as conflicting again, but the memory of Danos's actions on the pitch undermines that. Thus the imagery in the rest of the quotation is somewhat muddled: while perhaps the lion reference ties in with the Christ imagery so that the rowdy, violent forwards are lions laying down with the gentle backs incarnated as artistic songbirds instead of lambs, the

³² Jules Cadenat was a former pioneer of French rugby, an international player, and in the 1950s president of the Béziers rugby club.

symbolism does not quite seem to work because backs and forwards from the same team, as Danos and Cadenat would be, are not truly enemies. Or perhaps the Christ imagery is meant to portray how self-sacrifice can serve an example to other men, but the point of this sacrifice is unclear: is it honor? is it dedication? perseverance? Or was this simply a way for Danos to prove himself to colleagues and perhaps to himself? Whatever it is, the performance of bravery and masculinity earns him a standing ovation at the banquet: “Le grand et noble David Marques se leva le premier pour applaudir et tous les Anglais, debout, tournés vers Pierre Danos, battirent un ban pour celui qui venait d’entrer de plain-pied dans la légende” (194).³³ [The great and noble David Marques rose first to clap and all the English, standing, turned towards Pierre Danos, gave a round of applause for the man who entered straight away into legend.] Danos’s legendary status rests on his perseverance through suffering despite his pretty-boy, aristocratic image: even when severely injured, he refused to leave the sidelines and managed to return to the match; after an operation, he made an appearance at the all-important third half. He is able to please the Toulon locals with his elegant beauty and the rugby culture with his physical bravery. The story about him therefore seems to struggle to reconcile these competing, classed notions of masculinity.

B. Antoine Wisser, *dit* Papparou, and the Anti-Paris

The separations among classed performances in Garcia’s story about Danos are imbued with differing, competing understandings of masculinity that value different kinds of behavior and bodily traits. These threads are likewise apparent in another Garcia story, titled “Un certain Papparou,” comprising a loose compilation of anecdotes about Antoine Wisser, another French international player. In addition to class and gender,

³³ A legendary English rugby player himself.

local identity becomes, in this story, a key element of the construction of Wisser's character; his opposition to anyone he perceives as an outsider or even rules he perceives as handed down from Paris, shapes his reactions to events surrounding him. As discussed earlier, throughout the history of French rugby union, there has been fairly consistent resistance to what is constructed as the Parisian center and insistence on an oppositional southern identity. Indeed, in Garcia, Lacouture, and Denis Tillinac, much is made of the north-south distinction, and, perhaps more accurately, the divide between Parisian rugby and rugby in the south of France. These divisions, broadly painted, are justified by

Lacouture:

Le site idéal d'une équipe de rugby, le lieu vraiment «porteur» d'une bonne équipe, c'est une ville de trente à quarante mille habitants, où les gens se connaissent assez bien pour faire, à l'équipe, un vrai tremplin social, mais où la société est suffisamment vaste et démultipliée pour que des échanges se développent, pour que l'activité sportive puisse donner élan à d'autres démarches. (*Le rugby* 45)

[The ideal site for a rugby team, the place that really carries a good team, is a city of 30 to 40 thousand residents, where the people know each other well enough to serve, for the team, as a real social springboard, but where society is sufficiently vast/wide/cultured and geared down so that exchanges can develop, so that sports activities can provide the impetus for other interests.]

According to Lacouture, then, the ideal site for a rugby team is certainly not Paris, which is too big and whose society is too rigidly sedimented. For the journalist, rugby requires a community with flexible and interpenetrable social groups, and in turn, the game can function as a community builder. The sport is once again portrayed as an organic entity, echoing Prévost, but that this time depends on the people of a place, not the soil. The game is nearly populist, a perception that shows how drastically the idea of rugby has been altered from its elite English roots.

Furthermore, Lacouture encourages his reader to go to the stadium to see

des types au cou de taureau, au frontal de bélier, transfigurés d'un sourire de violoniste écoutant du Bach devant une feinte, un élan, un tir, une passe croisée. Quand on a fait «des études», on prend de préférence ces plaisirs-là en lisant Giraudoux. Mais il se trouve que le monsieur de Bellac goûtait fort le rugby et qu'un bon nombre d'amateurs de Giraudoux prirent autant de plaisir à voir opérer les Boniface qu'à lire les *Aventures de Jérôme Bardini*. (*Le rugby* 48-49)

[guys with bull-like necks, with frontal bones like rams, transfigured by the smile of a violinist listening to Bach at the sight of a fake, a surge, a penalty kick, a scissors pass. When one has studied at university, one prefers to find these pleasures by reading Giraudoux. But it so happens that the man from Bellac savored rugby and that many lovers of Giraudoux would get as much pleasure from seeing the Boniface brothers play as from reading the *Aventures of Jérôme Bardini*.]³⁴

While Lacouture animalizes rugby spectators who are presumably working-class and perhaps uneducated, he also shows their appreciation of a certain kind of beauty and equates this beauty of a perfectly executed rugby maneuver to that of a certain kind of literature. This particular section of Lacouture's work was written in 1968, most of a decade after Garcia's collection was published, and *Le rugby, c'est un monde* did not appear in print until 1979. Nevertheless, Lacouture seems like Garcia, to want to separate the rugby world from that of intellectuals. He works in the opposite direction to Garcia, however, by instructing the educated and intellectuals in the art of rugby and taking them down a notch by poking fun at their "studies." This tendency to attempt to shock or undermine the civilized, understood as those who are cultured or educated (again subtly indicting class denominations), is a well-documented part of rugby

³⁴ The Boniface brothers, Guy and André, were back line players on the national French team in the late fifties and early sixties. They helped develop the "expansive and adventurous style of attacking three-quarter play [... which] national and international audiences alike would now come to identify and celebrate as characteristically 'French'" (Dine, *French Rugby* 141).

subcultures, whether through song or action. Garcia's character of Paparou—Antoine Wisser's nickname—revels in such excess to the point of swallowing earthworms as long as his hand and killing rats by biting them on the neck behind the head (Garcia 94). His flouting of convention through shocking behavior is a kind of nose-thumbing gesture towards the genteel classes.

The story "Un certain Paparou," supposedly based on the exploits of the rugbyman Antoine Wisser who played between the World Wars, constructs a masculinity that is chauvinistic, rampantly heterosexual while inhabiting a homosocial milieu, fiercely local, and obsessed with the physical. Paparou's masculine and class identifications are imbricated with his regional identity, which is largely constructed in opposition to what he perceives as outside forces: centralization, modernization, and regulation. Garcia's story describing Wisser is really a collection of anecdotes allegedly relayed by Paparou himself, all humorous and all quite possibly exaggerations, as the narrator admits: "Assurément [Paparou] a tant raconté d'histoires, qu'il a certainement doublé le temps de sa folle jeunesse, et ce n'était pas fini" (85). [Assuredly Paparou had told stories for so long that he had certainly doubled the length of his crazy youth, and it was not over.] For the narrator, Paparou's never-ending youth is linked to sexual consumption: "Je crois qu'il a toujours vingt ans, ne serait-ce que parce qu'il a changé souvent de compagne" (85). [I believe that he was still twenty years old, if it were only because he had so often changed female companions.] This observation leads into an account of Paparou's experience as a pimp: when Lézignan, the town where Paparou runs a café, is bypassed by the autoroute, "il décida de récupérer sa clientèle en embauchant de jeunes personnes du sexe aimable assez peu farouches" (86) [he decided

to reclaim his clientele by hiring young people of the gentler sex who were not so shy]. The municipality chooses to turn a blind eye to Wisser's brothel, "Etant donné le préjudice causé à son enfant terrible par l'amélioration de la route nationale. [...] Après tout, par son initiative, Antoine Wisser contribuait à réduire les méfaits de la crise vinicole en attirant à Lézignan des consommateurs de passage" (86) [given the loss sustained by its *enfant terrible* due to improvements in the national autoroute.... After all, with his initiative, Antoine Wisser was contributing to a reduction in the damages of the viticulture crisis by attracting to Lézignan consumers in transit]. The narrator thus colludes with the city government in winking at Wisser's illegal enterprise, excusing him for it by invoking both economics and Wisser's status as the town's own unruly child.

From a wider perspective, the rugbyman's enterprise constitutes an act of protest and resistance to central authority and centralization in the form of national roadways, an act of rebellion tacitly approved of by the provincial town management. Once more, as discussed earlier in this chapter, rugby culture in the provinces has posited Paris as the enemy, an occurrence constructed on and enmeshed with the traditional resentment of less-developed regions towards the capital's influence and control (Weber, *Peasants Into Frenchmen*). Paparou's later lie to the referee during his infamous ear-biting match could be read as yet another instance of resistance to a central authority, and the final section of the story begins with an account of how the immediate geography of Lézignan effects the style of rugby played there. Relying on regionalism and an ethos of *terroir*, the narrator ties the rough terrain of the area to the rough masculinity cultivated by and contributing to the tough rugby played there. The insistence on regional flavor and ethos flies in the face of the homogenization perpetrated by modernization (Ross 10-12) and contributes to

and perhaps builds upon the conservative and reactionary nature of masculinity as defined in these stories.

Another aspect of the masculinity associated with Paparou reveals itself in the anecdote about his brothel. The narrator's description of Wisser's female employees' activities illustrates a casually misogynistic attitude exemplified in the expected activities of the women:

En dehors de leurs attributions particulières, ces demoiselles étaient considérées par «Paparou» comme ses propres filles et comme telles devaient abandonner le côté public pour les vertus filiales et ainsi épluchaient les légumes, servaient à table, lavaient la vaisselle. Mieux même, aux heures vespérales propices aux farniente, surtout en ce coin rôti du Languedoc, elles se livraient à des travaux d'aiguille ou tricotaient des chandails pour papa Antoine. (86)

[Outside of their specific duties, these young ladies were considered by Paparou to be his own daughters and as such had to abandon the public side for filial values and so peel vegetables, wait at table, and wash the dishes. Even better, in the evening hours favorable to laziness, especially in this burnt corner of the Languedoc, they engaged in needle work or knitted sweaters/jerseys for papa Antoine.]

Outside of the rather repugnant thought of a man whoring out his daughters, the role of a working-class, feminine rugby daughter is clearly laid out in this passage. Ethnologist Anne Saouter's study of French rugby includes a section about women's roles in the rugby community, and caring for the man's jersey is a primary element of her job as a rugby wife or mother (setting aside for the moment the troublesome truth that some women play rugby themselves). Wisser's substitute daughters are dutiful to conservative roles of homemakers and domestic servants, but with the twist of added, scandalous roles when in the public eye.

Wisser's household arrangements also satirize domestic life and the allegedly de-virilizing effects of French modernization on men as their roles as *jeunes cadres* developed, an issue perhaps less prominent when Wisser was playing rugby but much more visible when Garcia's stories were published in 1961. Kristen Ross paraphrases Christiane Rochefort, explaining that "the qualities required of the new middle-class businessman—a certain amorphous adaptability bordering on passivity, serviceability, a pleasant nature, and being on the whole devoid of singularity—amounted to a distinct loss in virility" (175). Such non-virile qualities are not found in the hero of "Paparou." Instead, he is more like a character out of tall tale, a man with a fiery temper who glories in violence on the rugby pitch, a man whose vocations include pimp and barman. While the life of the *jeune cadre* is taken up by business travel, material accumulation, and "a cult of comfort centered on the home" (Ross 175), Paparou is portrayed as deeply rooted in his corner of the world; the stories make no mention of material wealth or technological acquisitions such as cars or televisions; and while there may be comforts in Paparou's home, they are of a decidedly different type. Furthermore, Ross explains that the revolutionary *cadre* travels light both literally and figuratively: "Traveling light is of course also freeing oneself of ideological baggage—the latter facilitated by the revolutionary gender division of labor whereby the women, left behind in villages [...] become the repositories for traditional memory and continuity" (175). Using Ross' argument that as overseas colonization failed for France the country turned to internal colonization frequently taking the form of modernization, one could interpret Paparou as resisting this colonization in his own corner of France. At the same time, however, Paparou's status as non-itinerant revolutionary means that he and the male narrator, as

well as the male author, are feminized by their rootedness and story-telling—it is they, not the women, who have become the repositories of tradition because they are the ones recalling the past and recording history.

Eventually though, Wisser is forced to close down his sex-based enterprise and open a fully legal restaurant nearer the national autoroute (Garcia 86-87). At this point, the narrative shifts into a monologue by Wisser, as related to “nous” (the narrator), about “un fameux match militaire qu’il disputa sur le terrain de Narbonne”(87) [a first-rate military match that he played on the pitch at Narbonne]. During the course of this game, Wisser and the prop forward opposite him escalate their physical confrontations in the scrums until Wisser tries to bite the other man and ends up tearing off the man’s ear with his teeth (87). Not knowing what to do when his opponent starts screaming and wishing to avoid punishment from the referee who singles him out as the perpetrator, Wisser decides to swallow the ear in order to get rid of the evidence and then lie to the referee, claiming that perhaps his headgear had caught and ripped off the prop’s appendage. He even helps the referee and other players look for the missing organ in the grass while feeling the ear swimming around in his own stomach (88).

Wisser goes on to note that he had forgotten all about this incident until one day, in his legitimate bar by the national roadway, two men came in late in the evening and took a table. Listening in on their conversation, which eventually turns to rugby, Paparou discovers that one of the men is the victim of his long-ago ear-biting. Sure enough, the guy with only part of an ear calls to Wisser behind the bar, asking if he is indeed Paparou and whether he remembers a certain game and a certain incident, pointing to the disfigured side of his head (89). Paparou responds defensively, “Je m’en souviens

parfaitement, et je n'ai pas oublié non plus que tu as cherché le bagarre le premier en m'enfonçant les doigts dans les yeux" (89). [I remember that perfectly, and I haven't forgotten either that you were looking for a fight first by sticking your fingers in my eyes.]³⁵ Evidently, he feels justified in having harmed his opponent because the man was allegedly asking for it. But Wisser's former opponent quickly calms him down by explaining that he came not to continue their fight, but to patch things up:

Figure-toi qu'il y avait longtemps que je voulais te revoir, car tu es le type auquel j'ai pensé le plus, depuis plus de trente ans. Au moins une fois par jour, le matin en me rasant. Je te voyais toujours pareil, grimaçant sous ton serre-tête. Alors j'en ai eu assez, j'ai voulu te voir avec un visage plus sympathique et c'est pourquoi je suis venu jusqu'ici. (89)

[Believe it or not, it's been a long time that I've wanted to see you again, because you're the guy I've thought about the most for the last thirty years. At least once a day, in the morning while shaving. I've always pictured you the same, grimacing from under your scrum cap. So I had enough of that, I wanted to see you with a nicer face and that's why I've come all the way here.]

The opponent's obsession with Wisser verges on desire, recalling the Toulon team's intense desire for the player Danos. Yet for this man, the desire is not based on beauty like it was for Danos, but on a lack of it—Wisser's contorted face and the man's missing ear—and a desire to remedy that lack, at least in the case of Wisser's visage. Sure enough, the two men make up over a bite to eat and plenty to drink and end up reminiscing until well past midnight (90).

The final paragraph of this section of the story is addressed to the readers and sets itself up as a kind of lesson: "Voyez-vous, les enfants, c'est ça le rugby. Sur le terrain on ne se fait pas de cadeaux, on s'en colle plein la pipe au besoin, mais après, c'est fini, on

³⁵ Player John Daniell devotes a section of his memoirs to the practice of eye-gouging in rugby and how sticking one's fingers in an opponent's eyes is a bit of a French specialty (49-54).

reste copains” (90). [You see, children, that’s rugby. On the pitch you don’t get off lightly, you beat each other up if you need to, but afterwards, it’s over, you’re still friends.] This kind of forgiving attitude is key in rugby lore, and is even to some extent ritualized by the post-match celebrations that involve both teams that played, a meal, and usually copious amounts of alcohol. By breaking bread and drinking together, as well as singing, dancing, and otherwise partying together, the players are more often than not able to smoothe over the affronts of the game.

However, this particular anecdote about Wisser and his eating of an ear has a less happy-go-lucky side, revealing a rather casual attitude towards violence and even a laughing off of disfigurement. When Wisser engages his opponent in fisticuffs under the scrum, they are going back to the roots of rugby when it was up to the boys playing to settle scores, as it were, on the pitch without the interference of their schoolmasters (Dunning and Sheard 70). When Wisser then deceives the referee who gets involved, he is defying not only authority but also the forces of civilization, in the form of regulations of violence, that have impacted the sport over the years. While in mid-nineteenth century England such behavior may have marked a young man as of a higher social class, in early-twentieth century France it marks Papparou as closer to the peasantry and resistant to modernization in the form of centralization—yet Papparou, obviously, is fiercely proud of that connotation.

Indeed, the first part of the last section of Garcia’s story about Wisser opens with a description of Lézignan, the narrator noting the area’s harshness from the rocky soil to the knotty, tortured grapevines to the baking sun and even the rough accent of its people’s speech, and then asking rhetorically, “Comment, dans ces conditions, les hommes qui

naissent sur cette terre ne seraient-ils point robustes et directs, peu enclins aux fioritures et aux conversations de salon?” (90). [How, in these conditions, could the men who are born on this soil not be sturdy and direct, little inclined to flourishes/embellishments or to salon conversations?] This sort of environmental determinism, perhaps an echo of the naturalism of nineteenth century French literature, only enlarges the perceived gap between Parisians and provincials in terms of manners, character, and physical ability. Jean Prévost’s 1925 *Plaisirs des sports* (a date that roughly coincides with the era of Wisser’s glory and thus with the events being related to Garcia’s narrator) had also emphasized the negative effects of city life and its contribution to weak constitutions (Prévost 52-55). The logic linking environment with character also recalls early twentieth century ideas about hygiene and social diseases, ideas that lead, in part, to the development of sports. The model of masculinity being set out is therefore one that is clearly tied to a rural, or at least non-urban, lifestyle. It is plain-speaking, even blunt; one that does not sugar-coat its words; and one that emphasizes physical strength. This masculinity is likewise dependent on the kind of *esprit de clocher* espoused by Wisser and the particular class attributes implied by his immediate location.

Local pride is highlighted again in the story as the narrator relates several practical jokes played on the referees who came to officiate in Lézignan. The referees represent outside authority and the conduct of the village towards them shows the locals’ mistrust of outsiders. The village’s closing of ranks is also evident in the townspeople’s treatment of the local rugby players, who were all both literal and figurative “enfants du village” (92). The whole village watched over the ruggers’ training regimen, which

involved—being as it was prior to professionalization—using every work-related errand to get in some running:

Le moindre déplacement à la gare, chez l'épicier ou le boulanger, les joueurs lézignannais l'effectuaient coude au corps. En les voyant courir du matin au soir comme des dératés, les villageois, sur le pas de leur porte, ne cachaient pas leur satisfaction. «Ah! Ils vont bien cette saison les gars de l'équipe, regardez-moi ça s'ils galopent, ça fait plaisir à voir.» (92)

[The least movement to the train station, the grocer's, or the baker's was carried out on the double by the Lézignan players. Seeing them run from morning to evening like crazy people, the villagers, on their doorsteps, did not hide their satisfaction. "Oh! They're doing well this season the guys on the team, look at that how they gallop, it's a pleasure to see."]

The villagers' commentary indicates that they take a real interest in the players, even keeping track of how in shape they are, taking pleasure in observing their exercise, and discussing the team among themselves. The team is thereby depicted as truly a local phenomenon, consolidating neighborly bonds and reinforcing village pride—a real example of the *rugby de villages* and the *esprit de clocher* so vaunted in other texts. These phenomena in themselves hark back to a time with less emigration to Southwest France, most everybody was from the area, and there was perhaps a stronger sense of local identity. Historian Eugen Weber suggests that this kind of identity persisted until nearly the turn of the twentieth century in some places, and until the First World War in others (*Peasants into Frenchmen*).³⁶ Thus the modes of masculinity on display in “Paparou” are firmly grounded in a sense of belonging to a specific community, of pride in that small group, and of how that clan-like bunch relates to the land it lives on. Once

³⁶ It should be noted, however, that Daniell explores the importance and impact of home turf and village spirit in French rugby even at the turn of the twenty first century in his chapter entitled “Home and Away” (27-38).

again, this is in implied contrast to the anonymity of urban life and to that epitome of urbanness, Paris.

Also in contrast to Paris and its players is the relationship of the Lézignan players to amateurism. In Paris at the turn of the century, the leisure that accompanied upper class status created time for sports, and elitism guarded the gates of the games from lower class participants. But in Lézignan between the Wars the amateurism enforced by the national rugby board led to creativity. In the above passage, the simple fact that the rugby men cannot take time off of work to play implies their class positions as wage-earners, and the references to errand-running and the places they run to further solidify perceptions of social standing. As laborers and workers, their bodies are their capital, and while the narrator comments on their physiques the men are not simply on display and the villagers' commentary is on their movement. In this episode, then, locality, class, and movement combine to produce a particular construction of masculinity.

Paparou describes the differences between the good old days of this kind of rugby in his village and the rugby of the present:

Quand je vois les jeunes d'aujourd'hui s'entraîner comme des demoiselles avec des déguisements de Martiens (Paparou fait ici allusion aux survêtements modernes qu'il a en horreur), ça me fait pitié... Etonnez-vous après ça qu'ils fatiguent vite et qu'ils plaquent mou! Un véritable athlète doit s'entraîner à poil! Il faut que le corps respire, nom de Dieu..." (92-93)

[When I see the young people of today practicing like gurlies in Martian costumes (Paparou alludes here to the modern tracksuits that horrify him), I feel sorry for them.... Go figure that after that they tire quickly and tackle weakly! A real athlete should train naked! The body has to breathe, for God's sake...]

The adoption of modern clothing and training techniques renders the young players of today less masculine, in Paparou's eyes. They are not hard men who never tire; they are weaklings in funny clothes worthy only of pity. For contrast, he describes his team's training regimen: they ran laps at the whim of the coach, who reigned over them with a whip in one hand and a bottle of red wine in the other; their stadium lacked nice turf, so they spread the dregs of pressed grapes over the pitch to soften it up; and while the opposing team headed towards the locker rooms after a match, Paparou and his teammates ran four more laps at top speed for the coach (93). Finally, Paparou claims that he and his brother, on their four-kilometer trips between the village and their workplace, would whip their cart's horse to a run and then sprint along behind it passing a ball back and forth. They did this four times a day until the horse began to eventually suffer the effects and died (93). Of course, their opponents also suffered the adverse effects of Paparou and his team's incredible fitness, and indeed their endurance and strength, "c'est pourquoi, sans le vouloir, nous faisons mal à nos adversaires" (93-94) [that's why, without wanting to, we hurt our adversaries]. In these passages the element of exaggeration is apparent, but this renders Paparou's definition and performance of masculinity even clearer: a rugby man must have strength and endurance beyond belief, be willing to put himself through extreme physical exertion and pain, and love every minute of such trials.

A certain disregard for one's own physical well-being is involved in this formula, too. Wisser tells the narrator about a game played in Narbonne against the touring New Zealand team in 1926, during which his captain, knowing that Paparou was a good hard tackler, counsels him to keep an eye on the flyhalf. That flyhalf soon got the ball coming

out of a scrum, but Paparou, at open-side flanker, nailed him immediately. While Paparou got back up with only a bump on his forehead, the poor flyhalf was stretchered off (96). At the next scrum the captain advises Paparou to watch the opposing center, and when that man received the ball, Paparou tackled him. Paparou stood up with an eyebrow arch split open, but once again, his victim was carried off on a stretcher. Finally, the captain tells Paparou to watch the Maori right winger O’Papa, and sure enough, despite the man’s imposing height, Paparou manages to tackle him: “Nous roulons et j’entends un craquement terrible qui m’estourbit. Je me retrouve la tête coincée dans la barrière de bois, mais tandis que six personnes me tirent par la peau du cul pour me dégager, je vois O’Papa [...], que l’on embarque sur un civière” (96). [We rolled and I heard a horrible cracking that stunned me. I came to myself with my head stuck in the wooden fence, but while six people pulled on me by the scruff of the neck to free me, I saw O’Papa being carried off on a stretcher.] As Paparou headed back out onto the pitch, his captain said to him to no longer keep an eye on anybody, else there would not be enough players to finish the game.

Wisser’s use of his body as a weapon, his dismissal of the ideas of fair play and character building, and his willingness to risk physical harm all fit into Bourdieu’s definitions of working and lower-middle class men’s relation to their bodies. Garcia’s story also links bodies’ performances to regional identity, but it is an identity constructed largely in opposition to outside power and standards of civilization, especially when these are perceived as coming from Paris. Violence provides a means to resist civilization, to identify with a peasant past, and to assert a very particular notion of masculinity.

C. Sancey-Soro and Violent, Rebellious Masculinity

Violence is also a key part of Garcia's story about Raymond Sancey and Robert Soro. The story's title, "L'étrange duel Sancey-Soro," links the tale to nineteenth-century French ideals of honor, masculinity, and virility as epitomized by the duel. The tale opens with a voiced challenge: "Non! à Lourdes, tu ne mettras pas le doigt au cul du gros Soro! Tel était le défi lancé par la bonne ville de Toulon, à son deuxième ligne Sancey" (27). [No! At Lourdes, you will not put your finger up fat Soro's ass! Such was the challenge thrown down by the good city of Toulon to its second-line player Sancey.] Already, the tale's twists on the duel are evident: a whole town is throwing down the gauntlet to one of its own, urging him to harm a third party. They have chosen their champion instead of the champion choosing his seconds, as would normally happen with a duel; an ambush is being set up because Soro is not in on these plans, and ambushes were not considered fair play for duels. Furthermore, the duel was a traditionally upper-class form of violence, giving it a social connotation that contrasts with southwestern French rugby union's class ethos. Finally, the weapon of choice is a finger, not a sword nor a pistol, and the insertion of a man's finger into another man's anus will require some negotiations in the meanings of masculinity associated with the duel. Thus if, as the story's title suggests, what happens later is going to be a duel, it is going to be a truly strange one indeed.

The formulation of this odd challenge creates a twofold invasion—that of Lourdes by Toulon and that of Soro by Sancey. On the broader, geographical level of invasion, Toulon is portrayed as already besieged and resistant: "Toulon occupe une place à part dans le monde d'Ovalie. [...] Perdu dans l'océan du football, Toulon reste, à travers vents

et marées, la citadelle solide du rugby” (27). [Toulon occupies a place apart in the world of the Ovalie. Adrift in the ocean of soccer, Toulon remains, through wind and tide, the solid fortress of rugby.] Thus while Toulon may be part of the *Ovalie*, that imaginary province of rugby, it is outside the southwest corner of France that comprises the Ovalie’s geographic territory. Lourdes, in contrast, is situated in the middle of that rugby region. Apart from spatial considerations broadly dividing the country into the soccer-playing north and the rugby-mad southwest, Garcia’s reference to soccer also recalls the long history of contrasts between that sport and rugby in France wherein soccer represented the industrial, the professionalized, and the urban, while rugby was traditionally associated with the agricultural, the amateur, and the rural. Garcia’s wording places Toulon, this citadel of rugby with its aristocratic and amateur values, above the crass, professional world of soccer surrounding it. The image of a citadel also conjures up ideas of military assaults and warfare, ideas linked not only to sports and especially to rugby but also to the shaping and proving of masculinities that emphasize martial prowess. Men are to prove themselves and their virility on the field of battle, and with the rise of modern sports this impetus was translated onto the sports field (Maguire). The value placed on this kind of masculinity by French rugby was explored in the stories about Pierre Danos and Antoine Wisser. In the above passage providing background for Sancey’s story, this version of masculinity with its Ovalie values is to be defended against the watered-down version of masculinity offered by soccer.

Furthermore, the Toulon of the time had already suffered an invasion—the events recounted by Garcia supposedly took place in 1945, when “Toulon renaissait de ces cendres. Tout le vieux quartier au bord de la rade avait été rasé par les bombardements.

Le Stade Mayol n'avait pas été épargné, 35 bombes l'avaient transformé en une gigantesque taupinière" (30). [Toulon was being reborn from its ashes. All the old quarter by the port had been leveled by bombings. The Mayol Stadium had not been spared, 35 bombs had transformed it into a gigantic molehill.] The destruction of entire neighborhoods and the reduction of a site of sporting glory to a series of dirt piles are certainly assaults on the local pride so important to French rugby. After the Liberation, all that was left of rugby in Toulon was a handful of players, a couple of managers, and not much else. Rugby's value system, however, insists on persistence and perseverance, and this is what Toulon rugby did following its destruction during the war—the narrator highlights this by alluding to a phoenix rising from the flames. The team's confrontation with Lourdes affords an occasion to assert this re-birth: such a match would solidify Toulon's courage in the face of adversity, as the Lourdes team was both far superior in skill and size to Toulon's team (30) and would have home-field advantage in their match, an advantage with huge ramifications in France (Daniell 30-33), indeed making it supposedly "impossible de gagner" (Garcia 29) [impossible to win] for Toulon. A provocative and defiant gesture such as that suggested by the town to Sancey would constitute defiance of easy defeat, a refusal to retreat, and an opportunity to shame the other team. The act would also highlight the Toulon players' physical courage, already a required trait on the pitch, by braving the potential (and, in the event, actual) physical backlash of Soro, his Lourdes teammates, and their fans. Accomplishing this action would claim a modicum of honor for Sancey, his teammates, and their Toulonnais fans by reclaiming control and power through the penetration and therefore feminization of a member of the opposing team.

In the moments of the story leading up to this assertive action, Garcia's description of Toulon's forward pack ends with Sancey:

Dans cette belle collection d'anges déchus, on peut même dire que l'énorme Raymond Sancey était particulièrement déchaîné. A Lourdes, se dégonfler devant Soro, ce bébé-cadum qui avait eu l'heur de plaire aux sélectionneurs de l'équipe de France? Il ne fallait pas y compter, Sancey l'avait affirmé plus de vingt fois! (31-32)³⁷
[In this lovely collection of fallen angels, one could even say the enormous Raymond Sancey was particularly wild. At Lourdes, to back down before Soro, that baby-face who had had the temerity to please the selectioners of the French national team? You shouldn't count on it, Sancey had maintained that more than twenty times!]

The image of Sancey the enormous, proud, and wild man is set against that of Soro, portrayed as a nice little toddler, a poster-child for baby soap, who had the good fortune to be selected for the national team. This opposition obliterates the option of backing down for Sancey the man, so when the rumor goes around that he is to stick his finger up the "baby" Soro's asshole, he must meet the challenge; "Après tout, sa réputation était en jeu" (32). [After all, his reputation was at stake.] Sancey's status as a man would be compromised in the town's eyes by his failure to meet its challenge and measure up to Soro the mere baby. This concern with reputation and honor again relates to the value system behind the institution of the duel in France: men were frequently concerned with the conservation of their reputation, and were sometimes thus pushed into dueling by their disquiet about public perceptions of their masculinity (Nye, *Masculinity*). Therefore once the challenge, however ludicrous, had been issued to Sancey by Toulon, he felt

³⁷ Cadum was a soap brand created in 1907 that was later acquired by Colgate. Its brand icon was a baby, the "Bébé Cadum," whose skin was obviously soft and healthy. Beginning in 1924, the brand organized the election of the Cadum baby, a contest that continues today. Thanks to packaging and advertising, the expression "Bébé Cadum" became such a norm that the words could almost no longer be dissociated. A nice, healthy toddler was *de facto* a Baby Cadum, but "Bébé Cadum" is still a common schoolyard taunt. See "Avec 45.000 nourissons en lice" and "Maï-Anna, bébé Cadum 2009."

compelled to defend his stature as a man. An element of jealousy is present, too, in Sancey's mention of Soro's selection to the national team, and perhaps a desire for a similar measure of recognition, albeit notoriety instead of fame.

Acting as Sancey's accomplices in this duel during the Lourdes-Toulon match, the Toulon forwards "poursuivaient un plan précis: provoquer un accident qui entraînerait une bagarre générale et permettrait à Sancey d'exécuter le noir dessein où ses supporters l'avaient poussé: mettre son doigt au cul du gros Soro, chez lui, à Lourdes" (Garcia 34) [followed an exact plan: provoke an accident that would lead to a brawl and would permit Sancey to act out the dark intention his fans had pushed him to: put his finger up the ass of big Soro, on his home turf, at Lourdes]. Again, the mention of location accentuates the idea of invasion and penetration, but responsibility for Sancey's action is partly shifted onto the townsfolk of Toulon through the descriptive clause indicating that Sancey has been pushed into action by his fans. Public opinion is once more advanced as the motive it frequently was, albeit an ulterior one, for duels, but while the Sancey-Soro duel may be a question of honor for Sancey and Toulon, Sancey's action itself is described in less honorable terms as a "noir dessein," complicating assumptions about the moral quality of duels and their doings.

This disturbance of codes of honor is further evident when Garcia writes that, finally, in the second half of the game, a suitable brawl breaks out during which "on ne prêta pas attention à la manoeuvre de Sancey. Quittant les rangs toulonnais, il se glissa traîtreusement dans le camp lourdaise et, par surprise mais d'une poigne forte, il humilia Robert Soro en hurlant: — Soro, tu l'as dans le cul!" (35) [nobody paid attention to Sancey's maneuvers. Leaving the Toulonnais ranks, he traitorously slipped into the

Lourdais camp and, sneakily but with a strong fist, he humiliated Robert Soro, crying: Soro, you've taken it in the ass!]. The incident is portrayed as taking place in the heat of battle, with maneuvers, ranks, and enemy camps all invoking militaristic masculinities, but Sancey must traitorously enter that enemy territory—traitorously perhaps because in rugby entering the fray from behind the opposing team is to enter play offsides and thus illegally, but perhaps also traitorously because of his aforementioned “noir dessein,” which could be construed as contradicting the rules of fair play, of engagement, or of heteronormatively acceptable masculine behavior. The description also nods towards the fact that such sneakiness is formally against the laws of rugby and the codes of dueling but practically necessary for warfare. However, this act with its emphasis on power over sexuality (“une poigne forte,” “humilia”) is readable as a kind of rape, which can also be used as a form of warfare. Sancey's actions transgress rules of rugby and social comportment, but they nonetheless humiliate Soro. This humiliation is both intimately physical and crushingly public because Sancey advertises the event in a loud voice, asserting his success in imposing his will on Soro and thereby reducing him to a passive object of penetration. The vocal aspect of Soro's humiliation is especially important because of its ramifications for his social reputation; just as a duel would have no impact if its results were not made known, Sancey's action would be meaningless without the crowd's discovery of it. Yet, if the duel is about honor, here the emphasis is on humiliation, which suggests that for Sancey (and possibly his hometown) honor may be defined as dependant on or preserved by humiliating another.

The other characters' interpretations of the events paint Soro as the wronged party in the duel. Soro's reaction as described by Garcia is revealing: “Mais il est fou! Mais il

est fou! criait le bon gros Robert, qui ne comprenait rien à l'accès de folie pédéraste qui s'était emparé de Raymond Sancey" (35). [But he's crazy! But he's crazy! Cried the good, fat Soro, who understood none of the crazed fit of pederasty that had swept up Raymond Sancey.] The narrator here opposes the "good" Soro to the "fallen angel" Sancey who got carried away by his allegedly homosexual folly of an impulse. The Lourdes fans, on the other hand, have a more strident reaction: "Macarel! Mettre le doigt au cul de notre Soro... Ils y vont un peu fort, ces salauds! Pédés! Pédés!" (35). [Egads! Putting his finger up our Soro's ass... They're going too far, these bastards! Homos! Homos!] Whereas earlier in the tale Sancey's actions had been portrayed as being about power and defiance, here both the narrator and part of the crowd perceive them as indicative of some sexual motive. The Lourdes crowd clearly condemns such actions: "Les cailloux se mirent à voler" (35). [Stones began to fly about.] Thus in contrast to the Toulon fans and players who see Sancey's action as an assertion of power (which also fits with an interpretation of his act as a form of rape) and/or of defiance (of Toulon's inferior sporting ability, of its destruction during the war, of social convention) and therefore as staking some sort of claim to honor, the Lourdes crowd views his action as excessive, worthy only of "bastards" and "faggots," and deserving (as is only fitting with the undertones of Catholic religious imagery in the tale) of stoning. Even the Toulon players joke later in the showers that Sancey's action, "C'est un coup à aller en correctionnelle pour attentat à la pudeur!" (36). [That's a stunt that will get you before the magistrate for indecency!] In the end, while he was encouraged by his town and aided by his teammates, Sancey alone is labeled indecent and deviant, constructed by the narrator as an anti-hero of sorts.

Of course, by 1945 when the events took place, and certainly by 1961 when Garcia's book was published, actual duels had all but disappeared from France. However, the issues of honor and codes of masculinity and virile reputation underpinning the practice were very much alive, though expressed in different ways. Garcia's use of the duel as a frame for his tale is both nostalgic in its praise of the institution's version of masculinity and perverse in its twisting of those same masculine traits with class issues and violent actions. The relating of one man's honor to another's humiliation and defining that humiliation as being sodomized creates a disturbing relationship between rape and masculinity. Yet, this is rugby's classic embrace of both conservatism and excess, adhering to bygone social attitudes while thumbing its nose at propriety, embodying hegemonic hyper-masculinity and tingeing it with homoeroticism. Sancey's act is heralded as heroic through its commemoration in writing despite its seeming contradiction of the dictates of the hegemonic masculinity of the sport, time, and place insinuated by imagery of warfare and warriors, Catholicism, and the *esprit de clocher* and importance of *terroir* linking the players to their villages. The language of the duel implies the rhetoric of honor, and Sancey's concern with his reputation (and Soro's concern about being humiliated) complies with such codes. Sancey's action thus, though perverting the practices of the duel, reinforces its underlying emphasis on violence, penetration, and reputation as formative of masculine values.

III. Conclusions: Class, Violence, and Masculinity

The definitions of masculinity in the Sancey-Soro tale also draw deeply from the domain of war, reflected in and reinforced by the language of warfare, of "combat"

(Prévost 106, 116), enemy lines and enemy territory; a language that references another traditionally all-male space. Rugby is a battle, and as such is seen as a mold of men.³⁸

This formative quality relates back to the use of violence and violent games as rites of passage, a relationship clear in Denis Tillinac's structuring of his rugby memoirs as a bildungsroman of sorts wherein he learns life lessons and how to be a man by playing and watching rugby in the southwest of France. Lacouture however, while using this same vocabulary of "l'infanterie," "la cavalerie," and even "l'artilleur" (*Le Rugby* 49-50), concludes his extended militaristic metaphors of the game by asking what rugby is all about:

[Est-ce qu'il s'agit de] rentrer chez soi avec un point de plus que l'adversaire, en écrivant au président de la République, au maire, ou au président du Comité des foires: «Mission accomplie», ou de jouer bien, de s'amuser soi-même et d'enchanter un public d'amateurs, de mettre en valeur un des plus beaux jeux inventés par l'homme? De quoi s'agit-il: d'une bataille ou d'un fête? (*Le Rugby* 50)

[Is it about going home with one more point than your adversary, while writing to the President of the Republic, the mayor, or to the president of the recreation committee: "Mission accomplished," or about playing well, having fun and pleasing an amateur public, about setting off one of the most beautiful games to be invented by man? What is it about: a battle or a holiday?]

With this question, Lacouture puts his finger on an important tension in rugby among the brutality on the pitch, the artistry of the game, and the game and its culture as a technique of sociability (Bourdieu; Dine, *French Rugby*). These differing definitions reflect class differences, too, and once again circle back to the questions of what is masculine and tensions among various modes of being masculine, questions explored in Garcia's stories.

³⁸ Mangan analyzes this phenomenon in British poetry, arguing "just how powerful were the images of sacrifice in war and preparation in sport, to the point that sport became the ultimate metaphor for war and war became a 'sporting' endeavor" (140).

But the prolonged battle scenes in Garcia, like something out of the *Iliad*, also reinforce hegemonic masculinity in their glorification of men as warriors and, in the case of rugby, of their bodies as weapons. Here Connell's circuitry of body-reflexive practices is clear: men clash physically and are celebrated as battle heroes, true men. The warrior model of masculinity is a classic one, although one that began to fall out of favor in France after the First World War. In addition to the crisis of masculinity precipitated by the defeat of 1870, the defeat and occupation of France during the Second World War witnessed gender upheaval on both the individual and a national symbolic level:

Images of French imperial superiority were troubled by the defeat of June 1940, and the years following the Second World War brought further humiliations in several bloody wars of independence. In some respects warrior masculinity was not too hard to overcome anyway: since the end of the First World War, many returning veterans evinced contempt for the dehumanizing nature of war and thus destabilized the link between manhood and the military. This 'unmanning of the warrior' was a dominant motif in films, novels and popular songs right up to 1939-40. The 1940 defeat and occupation at the hands of Germany humiliated French men in the very activities that anchored male identity: work, warfare, and the protection of women and children. While women and children figured prominently among those sent to concentration camps, millions of French men had been taken to Germany either as prisoners of war or as part of the conscripted labor forces. Many of those who remained in France were left working directly or indirectly for the Germans without any autonomous forms of identity or expression (for example, trade unions). The eventual collapse of the Vichy regime sent this reconstruction into crisis as well. The fact that women often become more active in the economy as well as in the resistance movement represented further proof that French masculinity was in disarray. (Forth and Taihe 9)

Reactions to this new state of affairs were many and varied, and perhaps lingered in Garcia's mind as he composed his rugby tales.

After the Second World War's "material hardship and deprivation" and its "violent disruption of national identities," France witnessed the mobilization of "gender identities [...] to make sense of such radical dislocations. [...] At the level of representation, such experiences were to be embedded in cultural narratives that continue to inflect gender relations in France today, such as the femininity of betrayal and submission to the occupier and the masculine prerogative of resistance" (Gorrara 157). This idea would fit in easily with the necessitation of resistant action for re-claiming masculinity in "L'étrange duel Sancey-Soro." Indeed, Claire Gorrara's chapter in *French Masculinities* about the *roman noir* in post-Second World War France "examine[s] the late 1940s as a period that witnessed the consolidation of a masculinist ethos, firmly rooted in the heroic images of male resistance and sacrifice for the greater good of the nation" (157). The Sancey-Soro duel as related by Garcia took place in 1945, precisely when this masculinist ethos was taking shape. However, Garcia is writing somewhat later, publishing his collection of rugby stories in 1961. This era was another moment in French history where masculinity and gender roles were threatened (as Connell notes, when is masculinity not in crisis, and similarly Butler would say that gender is always a becoming, always shifting) as French colonial possessions rebelled and were liberated. Furthermore, Kristen Ross demonstrates that this time of modernization and de-colonization provoked plenty of anxiety about the shift to consumer culture and the rise of a newer, cleaner, more urban and more technologically advanced France. Both Gorrara and Martin O'Shaughnessy draw on Ross' assertions to build arguments about

representations of masculinity in post-War France, Gorrara illuminating (as mentioned) the genre of the *roman noir* and O'Shaughnessy examining masculinities found in cinematic stardom. Broadly outlining the "evolution of male stardom from the 1930s to the 1950s" before more carefully complicating the matter, O'Shaughnessy makes the generalization that "having helped to embody patriarchal dominance in the 1930s, male stars served to reveal a crisis of national virility in the wake of the collapse of 1940 before being enlisted in the service of misogynistic reassertion of masculine power in the post-war years" (191).

Garcia, then, would seem to be harking back to a rather recent perceived glory age of masculinity to contrast Frenchmen's former virility, as embodied by his characters, to the domesticated, materialistic masculinity of the *cadres* of the new France. Paparou, for example, offers a twist on the "'cult of comfort centered on the home' so central to the leisured time of the ambitious young *cadre*" (Gorrara, qting Ross, 164) by filling his home with prostitutes who cook and clean and sew for him. Danos provides a model for masculinity that embraces both grace and physical bravery, while Sancey complicates his personal reputation in order to uphold the honor of his village. However, these stories have also shown that masculine identity is far from simple: it is defined in relation to, among other things, class, region, and honor. Rugby becomes an important site for the intersection of these threads of identity and the negotiation of competing constructions of masculinity and class, but the game's attendant culture affects identity in its own ways. At the turn of the twentieth century, the re-birth of Parisian rugby and rugby union's professionalization would send the subculture into a tailspin filled with pink, glitter, and the glitz of showbiz.

Chapter Two: Men In Pink

I. *Allez le Stade Français!*

It is the chilly afternoon of December 10, 2006, and I am in Paris at the Parc des Princes stadium. The scene appears to be the apotheosis of camp: people are wearing pink and flowered shirts, waving bubblegum pink flags, and watching cancan dancers from the Moulin Rouge perform in silver g-strings and headdresses that resemble large pink octopuses. Over the stadium sound system, the cancan music segues into Dexy's Midnight Runners' "Come on Eileen" as the women exit the temporary stage at center field via a rolled-out pink carpet. Some female cheerleaders in blue and red uniforms fringed with white fluff file out and dance a routine to the song "Love Generation," the theme for this season's *Star Academy* TV show.¹ Finally, as workers disassemble the stage and roll up the carpet, a squadron of teenaged boys in pink and blue forms a corridor from the locker room tunnel entrance to midfield and the cancan dancers brave the grass in their stiletto heels to carry a silver rugby ball out to center field and place it on the ground. Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive" blares out across the pitch. The ceremony complete, the match can now begin. The fifteen men who had been warming

¹ *Star Academy* is a popular French reality series that resembles somewhat a cross between the U.S. shows *American Idol* and *Big Brother*. It features a group of 20 young people who want to be music stars and who are selected to live together in a chateau outside of Paris, taking dance, voice, and performance lessons as well as participating in workouts for fitness and completing group projects, all the while being filmed. The students are graded by the teachers of each course, and for the first 15 or so weeks, the two or three students with the lowest grade average are the ones nominated to leave the show. At the end of each week the students must perform a show on live TV, during which they are scored by a panel of judges. The public meanwhile participates in a call-in vote to save the student of their choice.

up in skintight pink tops by attacking pink tackling pads reemerge from the tunnel, sporting Hawaiian-esque printed jerseys featuring pink flowers on a navy blue background, to the tune of “Flight of the Valkyries.” One of my companions, a fellow American but a newcomer to rugby, leans over to me and whispers, “I feel like I should be at a gay pride rally, not a rugby game.”

I don’t know how long her feeling lasted after play began, the Sale Sharks from England confronting Stade Français of Paris in a typically brutal 80 minute match. The game, attended by an enthusiastic crowd of 44,112 (a record for a pool match of the European Cup), began with a kick off by fly half David Skrela of Stade. After missing a penalty in the fourth minute, Sale still managed to post the first score of the game as Daniel Larretchea, their replacement fly half for the injured Charlie Hodgson, slotted a penalty kick from 30 meters out for three points in the fifteenth minute.² In the next minute, Stade won a ruck in Sale’s half of the pitch and the back line passed the ball out to veteran international wing Christophe Dominici who danced through Sale’s line and ran into the try zone behind the uprights to touch the ball down for five points. Watching Skrela line up to kick the conversion, I noticed something small and pink racing towards him across the grass; it was a remote control car reminiscent of my sister’s Barbie doll car from childhood, and it was carrying a kicking tee as well as a bottle of water to Skrela. I had never seen such a set-up before; normally, the tee and water bottles are simply run out by trainers.

Skrela missed the conversion and a penalty shortly afterwards, but the crowd’s spirit wasn’t dampened as they swirled their pink flags, did the Wave, and sang along to an adapted version of “Come on Eileen” that encouraged, “Allez le Stade Français!”

² In rugby, like in soccer and unlike in American football, the game clock starts at zero and counts up.

Julien Saubade, Dominici's counterpart on Stade's other wing, must have heard them, as the next time the Stade backs spun the ball out to him in Sale's half of the pitch, he kicked the ball high over the heads of Sale's approaching line and sprinted through them to snatch it up on the second bounce, then flop down on the ball in the try zone to score. This time, Skrela converted, adding two more points. Closing the first half of the match, Lee Thomas from the Sharks kicked a penalty and Dominici scored another try, this one passed out to him off of a rolling maul, but Skrela again failed to convert, leaving the score at Stade Français 17, Sale Sharks 6.

During the second half the Sale forwards buckled down even more, trying to hit harder than some of the non-international French players might have been used to. Thomas put up three more points on a penalty in the 60th minute, but Lionel Bauxis, in for Skrela for all of six minutes, answered with another three points for Stade in the 67th. Then Sébastien Chabal, a Frenchman playing for Sale, whose bushy beard and long locks together with his brutal playing style have earned him the nicknames "Ice Man" and "Cave Man," had an inspired moment and intercepted a pass in the Stade backline. A crowd favorite known for his hulking musculature, impressive stature, and concussion-inducing tackles, Chabal showed off his speed by sprinting 45 meters to score under the uprights. Thomas handily made the conversion to drag Sale to within four points of Stade (16-20), but while Chabal still lay on his back near the try zone with a trainer tending to the leg cramps that had resulted from his run, Saubade had his own moment and intercepted a pass from between two of Sale's backs. After nearly bobbling the ball, Saubade gained control and ran 40 meters in for a try that was easily converted by Bauxis

in the last minute of the game.³ When the final whistle confirmed Stade's victory, silver and pink streamers shot from little cannons fluttered down over the spectators as the Stade players walked around the field in a victory lap, clapping and waving at the crowd who were once again shouting along to "I Will Survive."⁴

What exactly is it about seeing a scene such as this one—burly rugby men running about in tight pink jerseys and practicing with pink tackling pads while listening to disco—that strikes folks as strange? For starters, though the French soccer team that won the World Cup in 1998 adopted "I Will Survive" as their theme song, the tune had long before been appropriated as a gay anthem. As for the color scheme, "Pink is the last colour associated with a macho sport like rugby," according to Franck Mesnel, a well-known former French player (Nair). Why? Because pink, in France as in much of the Western world, has certain popular connotations: for instance, there is the legacy of the pink triangle symbol; a 1999 history of homosexuals in France is titled *The Pink and the Black* (Dean); and a French TV channel launched in 2004 and aimed at homosexuals is called Pink TV (Carvajal).⁵ In short, pink has come to signify homosexuality, and thus is at variance with the aggressively heterosexual, macho values of hegemonic rugby masculinity.⁶ So what if we take into account Stade Français' recent marketing

³ My memory was aided in this reconstruction of the game by Verneaux's and Kitson's articles.

⁴ Stade Français lost the return game in England (6-12) the next week, but went on to tie the Ospreys and beat Calvisano only to lose to Leicester in the quarterfinals and fall out of the running for the Cup.

⁵ It should also be acknowledged that pink is the color of the French Socialist party as well as an accepted symbol of breast cancer awareness.

⁶ It must be noted that rugby culture's gender norms have been complicated by the growth of women's rugby, so much so that even today "[w]omen's participation in the sport could [...] be expected to challenge fundamentally what it means to be male and female" (Wright and Clarke 229). Women's involvement in rugby and rugby culture has implications for these gender and sexual norms (women's rugby is populated by many queer females) that have begun to be studied by, among others, Gill, Shockley, Wheatley, and Wright and Clark. The rise of homosexual men's rugby clubs similarly subverts the hegemonic masculinity of rugby union that enforces heteronormativity and homophobia. Indeed, while France was gearing up for the 2007 rugby World Cup, "the country's half dozen gay rugby clubs [were]

technique: nude calendars of the players, a nude photo coffee table book, and (of course!) a “making of” the calendar DVD, all under the brand name Dieux du Stade? The photos in the calendars and book feature players posing in groups, alone, or in pairs, all in various states of undress, and although the images are purportedly aimed at interesting women in rugby, the products have gained popularity and a reputation as gay male soft porn.⁷ In a review of the 2007 calendar, a journalist for the British paper *The Guardian* claimed that the photos drew inspiration from “the naked buttocks of gay porn” and displayed “explicit, and decidedly gay, poses” (Ronay). He dismisses the possibility that a British club would ever engage in such an endeavor, stating that “French rugby has always been a bit more louche” (ibid).

Putting aside the journalist’s phobic and ridiculing tone, is there anything to this fuss over pink-wearing and body-baring French ruggers? Are my friend’s shock and the accusations of the British journalist products of cultural differences in perceptions of sexuality and gender? Is this pinkness and group nudity a manifestation of men being so assured in their dominant, hegemonic masculinity that they do not care what others think (somewhat akin to American football players being able to pat each other on the rear without being labeled “homos”)? Or of a sports team catering to a new female audience? Can we reduce all the fuss to a successful new marketing campaign for a traditionally hyper-macho sport?

Building on the previous chapter’s examination of constructions and interpretations of social class and masculinity, this chapter continues to investigate

closing ranks to tackle prejudice on the pitch” (Proust). However, in this chapter I am focusing on mainstream men’s rugby and its prevailing ideas of gender and sexuality.

⁷ Indeed, the friends of mine who purchased the coffee table book off the web for me as a gift began receiving promotions from the online vendor for other books in the “gay and lesbian literature” category shortly afterwards.

masculinities in French rugby but focuses on the more recent Dieux du Stade phenomenon. These events have opened up a new space for the construction of masculinity, symptomatic of and reinforced by changes in French rugby union culture as it has been influenced by the growing commercialization of rugby union in France and the 1995 professionalization of the sport. Because rugby as a sport has historically been concerned with “manliness” (Dine, *French Rugby* 4-5; Chandler and Nauright 2) and because French rugby pits its own regions against each other as well as against the rest of the rugby world, the iterations of the game as played in France provide an ideal arena for studying local, national, and international, as well as historical shifts in definitions of what it means to be a man. The Dieux du Stade photographs collected in the coffee table book *Locker Room Nudes* are important to study in this context because the play with these definitions and constructions of masculinity, and the popularity of both the images and the Stade Français team in France make them key sites of representation and production of gender in French rugby union.

As established in the first chapter, after rugby migrated from Paris and became rooted in southern France, the culture of men’s rugby union subscribed to a performance of masculinity that emphasized the body as a weapon, as an instrument through which the team’s power was channeled. Physical courage and disregard for bodily pain therefore became highly valued traits of this “true” masculinity. Local rugby teams defended their villages’ honor, making team members warriors for their locality and reinforcing an occasionally belligerent but longstanding *esprit de clocher*. Participation in a rugby team also served as an apprenticeship for manhood for younger men, a process that involved the relegation of women to peripheral roles of, frequently, caretaker or groupie (Saouter).

An aggressive brand of heterosexuality both contributed to and was a product of these highly regulated gender roles. Given this background, Dieux du Stade's objectification of men and embrace of women as important contributors to rugby culture come as a shock, but perhaps a predictable one; rugby's gendering processes had been interrupted by professionalization and increased commercialization not long before Dieux's appearance on the scene. The processes of identification which had before been worked out on multiple levels—rural/urban, Paris/provinces, upperclass/working class, backs/forwards—are now being smoothed over by the market, flattened into a glossy black and white image of a new, reductive masculinity, fashioned for broader and different consumption. This new culture welcomes outsiders, focuses on image and aesthetics, and openly embraces the latent homoerotics of the rugby subculture that were previously mocked, hidden, or unmentioned.

II. Stade Français

Before the pink uniforms and the nude photos, however, before showtunes and celebrity godmothers, Stade Français had a long history as a rugby team. Founded in Paris in 1883, Stade Français was a powerhouse club around the turn of that century, earning its first title in 1892 in a match refereed by the Baron de Coubertin himself and then competing in every French club championship final until 1899, winning in 1894, 1895, 1897, and 1898. From 1899 through the 1908 season Stade Français contested the championship final on six occasions, winning in 1901, 1903, and 1908. Despite such success during the early years of the domestic league, after 1908 Stade Français failed to appear in a final until the 1927 season, when the team played but was defeated by

Toulouse. Stade Français subsequently spent over fifty years in the lower divisions of French rugby.

In 1992, while the team still languished in the third division of the French leagues, entrepreneur Max Guazzini took over as club president desirous to return first-class rugby to Paris. In 1995 Stade Français and another Parisian side, Club Athlétique des Sports Généraux (CASG), merged to form Stade Français CASG, as the team is now officially known. That same year, the team returned to the top division and Bernard Laporte was appointed head coach.⁸ In 1998 the team reached the French championship final and ended their 90-year title drought by defeating Perpignan 34 points to 7 at the new Stade de France. Since then, the club has remained not only in the premier division but also near the head of the Top 14, winning the French championship again in 2000, 2003, 2004, and 2007, and has reached the later rounds of the Heineken Cup (also known as the European Rugby Cup) several times, including the final in 2001 and 2006 (Daniell 166).

All of this success, however, has not been without controversy. People in all levels of the rugby universe dislike Guazzini and object to his methods for a variety of reasons. First, in the rather closed subculture of rugby union, Guazzini can be construed as an outsider, having never played himself (Daniell 112), and therefore he gets set up as an interloper ignorant of the traditional ways and unspoken rules of rugby. Second, Guazzini is openly gay, which is rare in men's rugby culture (Daniell 112) where homophobia is often rampant.⁹ Finally, as much as Guazzini has worked to facilitate the

⁸ Laporte, a former player himself, went on to coach the French national side from 1999 to 2007.

⁹ In December of 2009, Welsh international player Gareth Thomas came out at age 35, having retired from international play in 2007 after playing in 100 international matches and thereby becoming Wales' most-capped player. In an interview with the British newspaper *The Daily Mail*, he stated, "It's pretty tough for me being the only international rugby player to break the taboo. Statistically I can't be the only one, but I'm not aware of any other gay player still in the game" (Weathers). As of 2007 there were a half-dozen

improvement of the team's quality of play, he is still interested in business and showmanship—as evidenced by his development of France 2 radio—and these values are often seen as anathema to the rugby union ethos of amateurism. Guazzini labored to re-define the image of Stade Français from a losing team in a non-rugby city to a top-flight club and entertainment juggernaut: he brought in female cheerleaders, had music before games, showed fireworks at evening matches, and introduced the radio-controlled car that brings the kicking tee to players on the pitch. In 1998, after Stade Français-CASG won the Championnat de France de Rugby in their first season in Groupe A1, a journalist for *L'Equipe* described the negative attitude of detractors: “Trop de fric, trop de stars, trop de parias, de sales gueules, de caractériels, de pom-pom girls, de petites voitures à apporter le tee bien avant cinq heures. Pas assez d'âme, de public, de culture. Bref, pas rugby, en résumé condescendant” (Van Moere 66). [Too much cash, too many stars, too many outcasts, folks with bad looks, maladjusted folks, cheerleaders, little cars for bringing the kicking tee well before five o'clock. Not enough soul, audience, culture. Basically, not rugby, to sum up condescendingly.] However, the journalist goes on to point out that, by capturing the Bouclier de Brennus, the Stade team “a balayé tous les clichés” [brushed away all the clichés], and he claims this as proof that provincial rugby values and professional Parisian rugby are not “incompatible” (ibid). Perhaps this kind of recognition and grudging acclaim emboldened Guazzini to take his next steps and further defy rugby tradition.

Originally, the team colors of Stade Français were simply blue and red—the colors of the city of Paris—and white socks were added in patriotic fervor to recall the

gay rugby clubs in France, but they were relatively newly formed and loosely linked, and “anti-gay prejudice [was] still the norm in rugby circles” (Proust).

tricolore. At first, Guazzini contented himself with adding three lightning bolts to the team crest and introducing a fresh jersey design every year in his quest to make the team easily recognizable. In 2005, however, he decided to switch the team's away colors to all bubblegum pink—shorts, jerseys, socks, even the remote control car—arguing that he wanted the team and its colors to be instantly recognizable. Replica jerseys sold well, and Guazzini had pink flags printed and distributed freely at matches. In August 2006, a new pink jersey designed by Kenzo made its debut, followed by the controversial blue jersey printed with green flashes and pink lilies in September 2006.

Over and above the (supposed) shock in the macho rugby world over the pink and flowered jerseys and contributing to complaints that Guazzini's modern media ways were debasing rugby, perhaps the biggest stir was created by Guazzini's initiation of the *Dieux du Stade* calendar in 2000. The club president explained the endeavor by arguing that it would attract more women to rugby, increasing spectatorship. Whomever the audience, the calendars, DVDs, and even coffee table book have sold extremely well—over 200,000 copies per year since 2005 (Lora)—and there is now even a men's skin care line sold under the brand name, complete with aftershave, cologne, and moisturizers.¹⁰ The constructions of masculinity implied in these new developments both borrow from the past and look toward the future.

They look forward because this new masculinity is homogenized, evacuates the local, foregrounds the international, and packages it as a commodity for capitalistic consumption. The men on the glossy black and white pages are musclebound models to

¹⁰ This historical background information is compiled from Van Moere, Dine (*French Rugby* 186-187), Lacouture (*Voyous* 166), and the team's official website ("Historique"). The skin care line can also be viewed and purchased at the team's website in the "ligne cosmétique" section of the "boutique" option on the menu of the main page, <www.stade.fr>.

be looked at as aesthetic objects instead of powerful playing machines. Many of their poses reinforce this objectification as they borrow from soft-core porn, striptease, and glamour shots. Of course, these photographs permit us to admire the potential for action in these men's bodies as well as the well-sculpted bodies in themselves, but this aspect of looking is downplayed by those same poses and by the framing of the project itself.¹¹ The supposed invitation to women (or the received invitation to men) to ogle the male players is also a new development, as it simultaneously invites objectification of those men.

These poses and products also promote the healthy, hygienic body of the bourgeoisie through their images of showers and the promotion of a skin care line, a conception of the body that was more or less abandoned by French rugby after it originally migrated southward. In this way, the project looks back to older perceptions of Parisian rugby by associating it with class concerns about the body that had been lost. At the same time, however, the project's emphasis on muscle motions towards ideals of the strong body embraced by the working class. The images thus straddle the lines laid out by Bourdieu regarding class-based uses of the body, complicating the notions of class explored in the previous chapter's analysis of social class and rugby.

The Dieux du Stade images also look backward in their play with old jokes about Parisian rugby being full of homosexuals, an allegation that builds on tensions between the stereotypes of the strongmen of the provinces and the effeminate urban intellectuals

¹¹ The project also led to a spat between Guazzini and Ewen McKenzie, who coached Stade Français from mid-2008 until he was fired on September 8, 2009. After he was sacked, McKenzie claimed that Guazzini recruited players based more on their looks for the calendar than on their playing abilities which led to the team "verging on amateurism"; Guazzini replied that "everything [McKenzie] said was rubbish." ("McKenzie slams Stade"). McKenzie's allegations were originally published in *L'Equipe* ("McKenzie: «Je ne suis pas si nul»") as was Guazzini's rebuttal ("Max Guazzini réplique").

of Paris. In line with the early twentieth-century Parisian style of rugby discussed in the last chapter, these images also avoid the violence of the game by largely bracketing out physical confrontation and even the signs that such activities might take place. Reaching even further back, the artistic image of the nude male athlete extends all the way to ancient Greece and the original Olympic athletes, all males, who competed in the buff (Young). Therefore, while building on some old traditions, the Stade Français and Dieux du Stade images and marketing break away from other traditions in an attempt to win recognition, yet the images created in turn escape from their intended projects and make new claims about masculinity in French rugby union culture.

III. Dieux du Stade

The Dieux du Stade brand was not the first entity to toy with the reputation of Parisian rugby in French rugby union culture. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the self-proclaimed “Show-bizz” gang from the Racing Club de France—another Parisian rugby team and Stade Français’ oldest rivals—decided to re-inject rugby with what they felt was a lost sense of playfulness and festivity, and their subsequent on-field antics involved wearing pink bowties or bald caps and drinking champagne at half time. Their debut came in 1987 when five members of the RCF team, all of them backs, decided before a game to pay homage to their opponents from Bayonne by wearing *bérets basques* during the match (Dine, *French Rugby* 185; McRae 229). The Bayonne home crowd reacted favorably to the Parisians’ theatrical gesture towards their club heritage, and the jokers went on to play other pranks and call themselves “Show-bizz.” Their most famous and recursive antic was their donning of pink bow-ties while playing, and they even presented

one of these ties to then-President François Mitterrand during pre-game introductions at the final of the French championship against Agen in 1990—a game RCF went on to win (Dine, *French Rugby* 185; McRae 229). Frank Mesnel, one of the founders of the group, explained in an interview with Donald McRae:

We were not typical French internationals. We were Parisian rugby players. I think maybe we started our jokes because, as rugby players, we were lost in Paris. [...] So we thought, well, let us entertain ourselves while saying something about our rugby culture. Everyone in French rugby hated Racing. They hated us because we were from Paris. That's rugby, that's people! What can you do? Ours is a conservative sport. In rugby, because we are Parisians, we are all dogs! We are all homosexuals! Even outside the little world of rugby, in France itself, everyone thinks that every Parisian man is a homosexual. This is very amusing to us. We enjoy the idea. As students we have many cultural and artistic interests so we decide to play with this joke. If we are called the homosexuals of French rugby we will be happy! We will laugh! We will wear our pink bow-ties! (McRae 230-231)

The Show-bizz group's ironic actions played on not only the traditional divide of north and south in rugby but also the usual perceptions of gender and sexuality in French rugby. Philip Dine labels the group's play as "characteristically post-modern" but lacking a real challenge "to rugby's patriarchal assumptions" (*French Rugby* 186). Indeed, while the group's embrace of the label "homosexual" mocks the use of the term as an insult, their actions and words may simultaneously reinforce stereotypes of gays.

Putting aside those politics for the present discussion, the Show-bizz five did go on to strengthen rugby's links to the commercial world by founding a clothing enterprise, which they named Eden Park after the rugby ground in Auckland and for which they selected the pink bow-tie, the symbol of their national renown, as the logo. The brand—whose products include rugby jersey-style shirts, sportswear, women's wear, and a

cologne called “Pink Fizz”—is hugely popular in France and there are store branches in many other countries.¹² Actual French rugby players frequently model Eden Park’s clothing lines in publicity campaigns, often in ads that feature lots of rugby balls.¹³ Dine sees Frank Mesnel and the Show-bizz gang’s actions as “an obvious continuity as regards the commercial and social activities of the Parisian elite” albeit one that may be ending the south-west’s hegemony in rugby and shifting the sport’s “centre of gravity [...] back to the national capital, where its story first began” (*French Rugby* 186). In contrast, Dine regards Guazzini’s monetary investments in Stade Français and the use of Gloria Gaynor’s “I Will Survive” for the club’s signature tune as evidence of “the reinvention of Stade Français [,which] must be regarded as French rugby’s equivalent of an epistemological break” (ibid) in terms of rugby’s definition and purpose. Dine’s analysis, published in 2001, does not mention the Dieux du Stade brand, which might well be construed to support his conclusion.

Yet, the break Dine sees might not be so drastic. After all, the Dieux du Stade brand shares some traits with Franck Mesnel’s Eden Park: both are Parisian; both are commercial; both are aimed at a middle-class, urban demographic that includes women. The open embrace of the sale of the idea of rugby and the use of players as advertisements are part of a larger and growing trend in French rugby union. These facts might cushion the shock of the calendar and coffee-table book photos a bit, in principal at least, by providing some continuity with more mainstream rugby union culture.

¹² A full list of boutiques is available at <<http://www.eden-park.fr/fr/commun/points-vente.htm>>.

¹³ In April 2009, English player Danny Cipriani was selected to be the face of the new fashion campaign for Eden Park (Darby). A somewhat less-recent example of such a campaign can be found in the March 2005 French edition of *Marie Claire*, featured before the table of contents: French national team players Frédéric Michalak and Fabien Pelous, among others, are pictured holding up a woman who clutches a weathered rugby ball, and everyone is wearing Eden Park brand clothing.

There are other ways in which the photos may not be such a huge jump. First of all, nudity is a commonality in rugby, just as in many other team sports. In the locker room, players change into uniform together before the game and after the match undress, shower, and put on street clothes in front of each other. As for touching, any contact sport requires a player to touch his or her opponent, but rugby also places positive value on touching one's own teammate. For lock forwards, grabbing a teammate's crotch area is perfectly normal during a game because it is a necessary part of constructing a scrum or lifting in a lineout. The physical intimacy created by the game itself out on the pitch—tackling, binding on in rucks and mauls, and anything happening in the scrum—may also contribute to a heightened comfort level with one's own and with others' bodies, permitting touching perhaps considered taboo in other arenas. Furthermore, rugby's physicality may construct the fit and muscular body as a source of pride and as such, it is liable to be shown off.¹⁴ The third half and team initiation rituals are other stories, but a certain acceptance of nudity, coupled with European rather than American perceptions of its place in society, might ratchet down the initial shock of seeing rugbymen displaying themselves for the public.¹⁵

While nakedness and bodily contact may be rather normal parts of the sport's culture, the international nature of French rugby since professionalization is an aspect of the game to which some are still acclimating, making it perhaps pertinent in explaining some people's shock over the photographs that not all of the players featured in the

¹⁴ Many rugby players also take pride in their injuries, be they as minor as bruises, and enjoy comparing "war wounds" after a match to testify to both the match's difficulty and the player's personal toughness.

¹⁵ Sheard and Dunning offer an analysis of English rugby culture that delves into how and why rugby players "have gained a reputation for regularly violating a number of taboos, especially those regarding violence, physical contact, nakedness, obscenity, drunkenness, and the treatment of property" (5). My own personal experiences with French rugby, in addition to Saouter's analysis of French rugby, would suggest that similar behaviors take place on the Continent as well.

photos of Dieux du Stade are French. The man on the cover of the dust jacket, Mirco Bergamasco, is Italian; the man on the back, Juan Martin Hernandez, is Argentinean. Both also play for their respective national teams. Bergamasco's older brother, Mauro, is likewise featured in the book, as are Agustin Pichot (Argentina), Daniel Browne (New Zealand), Ignacio Corleto (Argentina), Diego Dominguez (Argentina), and Mike James (Canada). Pieter De Villiers was born in South Africa but has become a French player and citizen. This diversity of nationalities and (some) national origins reflects the new reality of French rugby in the recently professionalized world of Rugby Union. Journalist Pierre-Michel Bonnot addressed the detractors of this new brand of melting pot, poking fun at those mired in nostalgia after the Stade Français-CASG team won the French Championship in 1998 with players hailing from Fiji, New Zealand, Argentina, and England. He wrote that Stade's victory was "un superbe camouflet à tous ceux qui croient encore qu'il faut avoir fait sa première communion ensemble et avoir transpiré dix ans sous le même maillot pour faire des champions" (67) [a superb snub to all of those who still believe that it is necessary to have taken first communion together and sweated ten years together in the same jersey in order to make champions]. His comments underline the ascension of a world view in rugby that embraces (or at least accepts) globalization, replacing rugby clubs built on immediate geographical community with clubs built on what he terms "la première solidarité du rugby, [...] la trouille. [...] Il faut s'unir pour faire front, se fondre dans le groupe pour exister, et c'est tout aussi vrai pour quinze vedettes venues de quinze horizons différents et parlant le même langage, celui de l'excellence, que dans la plus humble des équipes de canton" (ibid) [the foremost solidarity of rugby, fear. You must unite yourselves in order to face up to it, melt into the

group to exist, and that's all as true for fifteen stars come from fifteen different places and speaking the same language, that of excellence, as it is in the most humble of regional teams]. In other words, teammates no longer have to come from the same parish and have played together since childhood in order to form a championship-winning group; they can come from anywhere and play just as well, joined only by a passion for the sport. As a result, teams have come to represent less the opposition between towns and communities and more the teams themselves. Local roots and team loyalty matter less than excellence, than winning. Nationality, religion, *esprit de clocher* are subsumed by the quest for championships. The community of rugby that is presented by both Bonnot and the photos in *Locker Room Nudes* thus both de-emphasizes the more limited, boundary-minded masculinity evident in the texts by Henri Garcia examined earlier and gestures towards a more open and accepting, less regionally antagonistic culture—in a similar direction as Michel Gardère in his biography of Abdelatif Benazzi.¹⁶

This new brand of rugby, shaped by greater commercialization and globalization, is much less exclusive than that of the sport's early decades in France. In 1921, a journalist praised the team from Perpignan for its victory in the French championship against Toulouse by writing to them that “Vous avez donné à toute l'obscur province ce pur rayonnement de votre jeune gloire. Vous avez prouvé que l'équipe représentative

¹⁶ Gardère wrote an interesting biography of Abdelatif Benazzi, the first player of North African descent to captain the French national rugby team (see Dine, *French Rugby* 196-97). Though the author makes much of the fraternity Benazzi finds in rugby, his attachments to his mother and to Islam are described in ways that bring his masculinity into question. Gardère includes a long section attempting to equate the *muezzin* of Benazzi's native Morocco to the *clocher* of his adopted French village (145-48). This familiarizes Benazzi to the French audience, collapsing differences so that Gardère can emphasize that rugby transcends national boundaries and identities. Further analysis could examine how the book might function as a project to recuperate the colonizer's masculinity when ex-colonized and/or racized men are constructed as a threat to white French masculinity, but for the present, Benazzi's story certainly points us in the direction of new ideas of masculinities in French rugby union facilitated by global markets and interdependency, cultural métissage, and the changing demographics of France.

d'un pays, composée d'éléments du pays, était invincible" (qtd. in Bodis 238). [You have given to the entire shadowy province this pure brilliance of your young glory. You have proven that the team that is representative of an area, composed of elements from that area, is invincible.] We have seen how, in Garcia's stories, the importance of *terroir* and provincialism is still key to identity in rugby union. Perhaps this attitude contributed to the delay of French rugby's integration with regards to players of African descent; it was not until 1995 that the French squad had a captain of North African descent, and that man was Benazzi. Despite his status as "one of world rugby's finest forwards" (McRae 403), Benazzi was still confronted with blatant—and sometimes physically violent—racism against him.¹⁷ Even nearly ten years later, the *Dieux du Stade* book features few non-white players, perhaps a reflection of the fact that though rugby may be diversifying it is still dominantly white in its public image: of 62 men pictured, three are black.¹⁸

Willy Monfret, from Paris, is photographed twice: once in a portrait showing only his face (72); once, shown from the knees up but wearing shorts, with Morgan Souply in the locker room (25). Monfret is not a rugby player, though, but a weight lifter. Olivier Missoup, also born in France but a rugby player, is photographed once, leaning on his right elbow over a rugby ball with his arm draped modestly across his body, his gaze averted from the camera (51). Yannick Larguet, from Isère, is featured in a set of five photographs, the first one showing only his hand holding up a rugby ball (116). On the facing page, Larguet is laying on his stomach on the ground and the frame crops his shoulders and knees, leaving his clenched buttocks at the center of the page as

¹⁷ Benazzi speaks about his experiences with racism to McRae (402-5) and to Gardère at length.

¹⁸ Several athletes are, as mentioned, of Latin American descent, and Moise Santamaria, a featured kickboxer, is Brazilian. While these men may consider themselves white, French constructions of racial difference might judge otherwise. I have chosen to focus on players who are darker-skinned simply because this is the most visible racial marker in these black and white photographs.

the focal point of the image (117). The photo is taken at a downward angle from a point of view just above the backs of his knees. The next photo, a two-page spread, pictures Larguet laying on his side, holding the ball down and out so that it and his right wrist cover his crotch (118-19). He is holding his head off the ground and looking at the ball as if he is holding it out to place it or pass it off after a tackle. On the following page, divided into quarters, Larguet is captured in four photos running with a rugby ball near enough to a wall to cast a shadow just larger than himself, his body photographed from the side or back (120). His feet touch the ground in none of the photos of the sequence, and the exertion can be seen in his leg muscles that are emphasized by light and shadow. On the facing page is a single shot of him running away from the camera, highlighting his right buttock, thigh muscle, and contracted calf (121). The final photo of the series has him laid out on his stomach as if placing the ball over the try line for a score, his torso raised with the effort and his legs off the ground as if he were sliding into the try zone (123). Despite the fact that this and some of the other photos of Larguet are stills, the effect is that of movement; Larguet's is a body in action, an athletically functioning body. Whereas other players' bodies are treated as aesthetic objects, Larguet's is constructed primarily as active, perhaps suggesting that black bodies are still viewed in rugby union as functional and not beautiful. Monfret's and Missoup's portraits might speak against that representation of black bodies, but the quantity of Larguet's photos weighs heavily against theirs.

While including the photos of non-white players is a beginning towards changing rugby union's lily-white image, it also contributes to the de-emphasizing of the primacy of the team, which is key in rugby, since Larguet comes from Colomiers rugby, Missoup

from Domont rugby, and Monfret from outside of rugby altogether.¹⁹ The importance of team solidarity is overlooked in the book both by the inclusion of athletes not only from teams other than Stade Français but also from other sports entirely, including Greco-Roman wrestling and judo. Their presence especially contrasts with rugby culture's frequent insistence on rugby as an exception to other sports, as a closed world that sets itself apart from others in various ways (Saouter). In a similar vein, the majority of the photos also focus on individual players, again counter to the game's and the culture's emphasis on the group. This openness and individuality detract from the significance and importance of initiation into the group, a process that is routinely ritualized by rugby teams. In these ways, the photos suggest that membership on a rugby team is less about forming a locally-minded, homogeneous, masculine identity mindful of social hierarchies and more about individual recognition.

The sanctity of the rugby locker room is another rugby tradition the photos depart from: the *Dieux du Stade* book that collects and adds to photos from the calendar bears an English language title of *Locker Room Nudes*, and in fact many of the pictures are staged in the actual Stade locker room at Jean Bouin stadium in Paris. One photo shows only the locker room, neat and devoid of players, with damp footprints as the sole evidence of human presence (12-13); another photo, shot from the same viewpoint, shows the floor wet and muddy, strewn with empty plastic bottles and discarded clothing and gear. Lockers gape open, kit bags are jammed under benches, jackets dangle off hangers, and a lone player, barefoot, sits on a bench with one hand over his face (32-33). In contrast, ethnologist Anne Saouter explains how the rugby changing room is a space to be respected, one where representatives of the press, girlfriends, wives, and friends in

¹⁹ These were the teams the men were playing for at the time of *Locker Room Nudes*' publication.

general are not allowed. She titles her book's section dedicated to the locker room "Les magies des vestiaires" and explains,

[Les] vestiaires sont un des lieux du rugby autour duquel se dessine avec le plus de force un discours de la clôture, du secret. Placés sous les tribunes ou à proximité du terrain, ils ne sont jamais ouverts au public. [...] Dans ce véritable sanctuaire, où chacun se prépare cérémonieusement, les joueurs se retrouvent exclusivement entre eux, se déshabillent et se rhabillent, ont des attentions pour leur corps. (47-48)

[The locker room is one of the places in rugby around which is most strongly formed a discourse of the private, of the secret. Placed under the bleachers or close to the pitch, it is never open to the public. In this veritable sanctuary, where each man ceremoniously readies himself, the players are alone amongst themselves, undressing, and re-dressing, and taking care of their bodies].²⁰

She argues that "Le vestiaire est le lieu de la métamorphose où un corps communautaire se forme. Le corps individuel est désormais la «propriété» de celui-ci" (49). [The locker room is the place of metamorphoses where a community body is formed. The individual body is from now on the "property" of that community body.] Through the camera's intrusion on this sacred space, the team's cohesion is invaded yet again, the community's body torn asunder.

This invasion also strips the magically sutured team body of its mythic air by purporting to show the players in the midst of transformation. The supermen of the pitch have to undress, get on their kits, shower, and even use the toilets just like regular men. Staging the photographs in the locker room where these private moments take place lends

²⁰ Usually, the press is not allowed in rugby union locker rooms, but there have been some notable exceptions, such as the Top 14 teams allowing photographer Denis Rouvre to take portraits of players directly after matches in order to capture the "marks of confrontation on them: knocks and bruises, anger and exhaustion" (Rouvre, "Sortie").

an air of voyeurism to the images.²¹ For example, Thomas Lombard is photographed from behind in a toilet stall, standing with his left arm leaning on a toilet paper dispenser and his right arm bending in front of him, standing over the toilet bowl (*Locker Room Nudes* 9). Another photo catches him either pulling on or taking off his shorts while sitting on a bench, facing away from the camera (24). Two other players stand in the showers with their backs to the camera in a long shot through the locker room (40-41). A group of three men covered in mud wrestle each other on the shower floor in two separate photo spreads (36-38). Photos like these where the subjects look away from the camera use the convention of catching a subject unaware to heighten the voyeuristic fantasy.²²

Most of the photographs in the book feature players looking into the camera, though, relying more on exhibitionism than voyeurism. Many of the men's poses and facial expressions echo the conventions of the "come-on" described by Annette Kuhn:

The woman [...], far from being caught unawares in her own pleasure, now seems openly to acknowledge the spectator by her direct look at the camera. This is a particular kind of look—the head is tilted so that her glance is slightly angled rather than face-on. The indirect look signifies sexual invitation or teasing, a reading underscored by the cultural connotations of the slightly parted lips. [...The] "come-on" look suggests that the woman is purposefully displaying her body for the spectator, that she knows he is there and is inviting him quite openly to take a good look. (41-42)

²¹ See Kuhn for a discussion of voyeurism and "lawless seeing" in soft-core pornography featuring women. While the gender of the photographic subjects may be different, the set up of the picture as a stolen glance stays the same, although this invites intriguing complications for notions of the gaze and power relations.

²² The singer Clarika capitalizes on this kind of fantasy in her song "Les garçons dans les vestiaires," the lyrics for which detail a woman fantasizing about what men do in locker rooms and lamenting that she is not a man and so can not find out the truth about what they get up to. In the music video for the song, Stade Français players go about their business in their locker room while the singer appears and disappears in a mist, wearing a slinky red dress. The video, which was featured on Stade Français' website, ends with the woman, played by Clarika herself, in drag as a janitor with a mustache, hanging out with the players in the locker room, arm wrestling, and drinking beer. The video thus adds some gender bending to the voyeuristic mix and alludes to the homoerotic overtones of the calendar.

For example, we see national team players Christophe Dominici and Fabien Galthié posing with the Bouclier de Brennus, the national championship trophy.²³ In Dominici's pose, he looks into the camera while seated on the dirt-covered floor and resting one elbow on a wooden bench and the other on his knee. The Bouclier is behind him on the bench so that only its bottom portion shows (102). On the facing page, Galthié is standing at an angle turned slightly away from the camera, lifting the Bouclier to shoulder level and kissing its seal with his eyes closed. His effort puts into relief the musculature of his upper back, shoulder, and left arm (103). On the following two pages, the Bouclier is on the floor, propped against a wooden bench, and Galthié is leaning back against it with his right arm raised to grip its upper edge. In the first photo, he looks into the camera (104); in the second his eyes are closed (105). Galthié's poses are sensual, suggesting tender strength in the first one and a kind of languor in the last two as if exhausted from his embrace of the Bouclier. This series of photos ties masculinity to individual achievement by showing the players by themselves with the trophy instead of with the entire team. Furthermore, the loving embraces of the Bouclier suggest sexuality, perhaps a (fulfilled) masturbatory fantasy of winning national championships, that would unite (male) players in a shared and thereby homosocial dream.

Other photographs are more overtly homoerotic. Two Stade Français teammates maul naked with the ball between them, their faces turned from the camera and buttocks showing (16-17); Frédéric Michalak and Clement Poitrenaud sit close together astride a low wall, Poitrenaud in front of Michalak, Michalak with his left arm draped over Poitrenaud's shoulder, both men turned slightly towards the camera as it shoots perpendicularly across the wall, both men completely naked (48-49); a group of four

²³ Galthié, after retiring from play, coached Stade Français from 2004 to late June 2008.

players squeeze, standing, into a small enclosure, one holding a rugby ball with one arm and a teammate with the other, the other two players with their bodies facing each other but heads turned toward the camera, both pulling at a pair of mesh shorts (54-55). Other photos show Greco-roman wrestlers grappling in the nude (58-63); a group of three men standing side by side with their arms around each other, naked (108); and a different group of three standing in the bath, one with his back to the camera, one bent slightly at the waist to lean over and rest his hands on the edge of the bath, the third leaning backwards against an adjoining wall (141). These photos suggest a masculinity less anxious about homosexuality than before.

In addition to their interest due to their placement in proximity of each other, the players' bodies are intriguing in these photographs due to their similarities, once more suggesting a homogenized vision of masculinity. As mentioned before, the traditional (and amateur) *rugby des villages* condones if not forthrightly encourages Rabelaisian appetites, often resulting in well-padded bodies, especially for the pack players whose positions require more brute strength and tolerance of violent contact during games than the backline players. Sports journalist Jean Lacouture calls forwards rhinoceroses (*Le rugby* 197) and "bison" (111), compares them to "mineurs du fond" (85) [underground workers], and refers to two different players as embodiments of Gargantua (101, 110). Backs, meanwhile, are "artistes" (ibid 86), "antilopes" (111), "cavaliers" (197) [equestrians], and purebred racers (111). In contrast to Lacouture's visions, the differences between the bodies of these two groups of players are much less evident in the Dieux du Stade photos. There are no flabby abdomens or extra-chunky limbs on the forwards here, only an especially thick neck or a slightly broader pair of shoulders.

Likewise, the backs are not the caricatured delicate aristocrats of Lacouture or Garcia, but instead nearly as muscular as many of the forwards pictured.

Another difference from tradition manifest in the individual portraits is the absence of that other bodily mark of rugby men: scars. Ears are a frequent site of such mutilation, as discussed earlier in relation to Henri Garcia's supposedly non-fiction tale about "un certain Papparou" who, retaliating against his opponent for having clawed his eyes, bites the said opponent's ear in the next scrum, tearing it off and swallowing it (88). Less dramatically, ears are also prone to chafing during rugby matches and often develop what is called "cauliflower ear" as pockets of blood solidify into keloids and cause bumps and swelling in the cartilage.²⁴ Bruises are another recursive mark of having played, as are scratches, and both are often touted as trophies of a sort. John Daniell (a New Zealander playing in France and the author of a memoir about French rugby) sports two black, puffy eyes, one with a cut below it, and an ear that is a scabbed-over mass of bumpy keloid scars in his author photo on the back cover of his book.²⁵ A photo of Raphaël Ibanez (hooker and captain of the French national side at the time) accompanying a sports magazine article about French players in England shows him with a large black bruise under his left eye and smaller, multi-colored bruises around the same eye—the remains of a real shiner (Folgoas, "Les Français d'Angleterre" 20). An article profiling French national player Elvis Vermuelen features a close-up photograph of his face, which is covered with tiny cuts and scratches, and his crooked, flattened nose, which has clearly been broken at least once. The headline of the article quotes him as saying, "J' AIME LA BAGARRE" [I like to fight] (Folgoas). In the long months leading

²⁴ Many such ears are on display in Denis Rouvre's book *Sortie de Match*.

²⁵ This photo was, incidentally, taken by the aforementioned Denis Rouvre in his *Sortie de Match* series.

up to the IRB World Cup 2007, hosted by France, the French hebdomadaire magazine *Sport* ran a weekly series called “Le Journal de la Coupe du Monde.” The feature included, each week, a banner of head-shot photos of individual French players across the top of one of its wide pages. In these portraits, which somewhat resemble mug shots, several of the players show physical evidence of recently having played: Vermuelen is scratched up, Dimitri Szarzewski has a bruised cheekbone, Christophe Dominici has a black right eye. All of these men in the aforementioned examples bear their bumps and bruises with pride, indeed putting them on show as evidence of having done masculine battle with the sort of disregard for physical pain that Garcia praised in his characters.

Strangely, none of the ears or faces in *Locker Room Nudes* show these kinds of signs of action, although such scars might be hidden.²⁶ Neither do the men’s noses seem to have suffered dramatic breaks, as Elvis Vermeulen’s seems to have and as many rugby players’ noses do. Occasionally, players have teeth knocked out—an event described in the 1960 English novel *This Sporting Life*—but again, empty gums are either missing or hidden in the Dieux du Stade photos. There are several possible explanations for the lack of violently altered physical features, the foremost perhaps being that the book is for profit and might not do as well if it were full of gap-toothed, crooked-nosed men, but another being the increased awareness of safety and heightened preventative measures in present-day rugby, such as ear-taping and the wearing of scrum caps to protect ears or mouth guards to protect teeth.²⁷

²⁶ The blurb on the inner flap of the book’s dustjacket, however, claims that the players have not been prettified in any way. This is difficult to believe in light of the significant amount of “mascaping” on display in hairless chests and buttocks, as well as of the carefully smeared mud, hair sculpted by product, and shaved faces. It would not be a stretch, then, to assume that scars or bumps could be turned away from the camera or otherwise disguised.

²⁷ The laws, or rules, of rugby strictly outline what sorts of protection may or may not be worn.

However, some players and fans see even these rather modest safety developments as symptomatic of a new kind of rugby, one that emphasizes showmanship and spectacle and the importance of looks over the older value of function. Anthropologist Anne Saouter writes about such attitudes in her study of French male rugby players in the 1990s; she encountered players who refused to tape their ears, wear mouth guards, or put on a cup, construing these measures as restrictive of their bodily abilities (38). As discussed earlier, Henri Garcia's Paparou took this aversion to the extreme when he railed against modern training gear and extolled the virtues of practicing naked to permit the body to breathe. While rugby's conservatism is evident in that instance, Paparou's observations about nudity also offer an interesting counterpoint to the nudity found in *Locker Room Nudes*. For the old rugger, nudity has a purpose, just like the fatter bodies and lack of restrictive gear had functions for other earlier players. In the present-day photographs, the nudity is purely for show, and whereas bodies in rugby have historically been treasured for their functionality—which of course invites all sorts of scatological and sexual jokes, pranks, and allusions—the bodies in these pictures are on display and thus valued for their beauty.²⁸

The traditional violence of rugby, inherent in the brutal collisions of scrums and mauls and the physical shock of tackles, is thus bracketed out of the Dieux du Stade photographs. The closest it comes to being seen is in the images of three players wrestling, covered in mud, in the showers, but even this is contained—literally—by the shower cubicle, and the mud itself lacks the dirt clods and clumps of grass a real game would have caused to be dragged in. Though one photo in the series includes one of the

²⁸ One telling exception may be the photo of player Thomas Lombard and two others in the toilets, alluding to certain necessary functions of the body.

men's grimacing face, this photo comes across as staged and playful. Also playful is the set of two pictures in which some players hold up another, attempting to pull his shorts off. The men are all barefoot, outdoors on what seems to be the grass of a practice pitch, suggested by a fence and two soccer goals in the background and a faint trace of white line under their feet. They are all, even the victim of the "de-pantsing" as he hangs onto his shorts, grinning in this rather idyllic setting. These photos elide the physicality of rugby and the lingering signs of contact left by the game.

Instead, the emphasis on beauty and the show of nudity in the photos could reflect Classical representations of the body, echoing those statues of athletes that celebrate their musculature and poise, celebrate the potential motion and strength made possible by that still body. However, the final photo of the book might suggest otherwise. This picture depicts only a chest and arm—no head and no hand. The shoulder and bicep bulge; the pectorals are clearly defined. A vein is clearly visible in the upper arm, and the tiny hairs catch the light (151). The body is evidently strong, but it is decapitated, reduced to parts. Juan Martin Hernandez is reduced to a right arm and a chest, his body in effect objectified. In another photo discussed earlier, Yannick Larguet is reduced to buttocks. Of course, this kind of objectification and reduction of people to body parts is not new or exceptional in the genre of pornographic photography. What is perhaps new is presenting for profit real male athletes from a self-proclaimed hyper-virile and traditionally amateur sport in ways that borrow heavily from gay porn: the prominence of buttocks, the general lack of body hair, the fantasy space of the locker room (Pronger), the players reportedly paid 5,000 Euros for posing. Does the players' participation in such a scheme mean that their notions of masculinity leave room for homosexuality? These questions are not

meant to conflate gender with sexuality, but the two categories are difficult to tease out from one another in the popular mind. Male homosexuals are frequently seen as effeminate, while masculinity is interpreted as strength, setting up a binary where masculinity and homosexuality are set at opposite poles. The Dieux du Stade photographs break down, to a certain extent, this binary.

IV. Conclusion

So what do the pink uniforms, the marketing, and above all the Dieux du Stade photographs mean for masculinity in French rugby union? The Dieux du Stade brand represents a masculinity that is more concerned with the aesthetic than the functional; more with packaging than, perhaps, substance. Solidarity is fractured—whether by mixing up players from different teams or simply by removing them from a group context—which places the men on the market as bodies unattached to places, no longer necessarily loyal to the local team as was assumed in *rugby des villages*.

Professionalization, along with advances in diet and medicine and a longer season with more matches, has begun to dictate body build and render more or less obsolete the formerly striking physical differences between forwards and backs, as well as limit appetites. In turn, this erases some of the potential for intra-team gendering, with the backs as effeminate artists and the forwards as embodiments of brute strength; or, to recall Pierre Danos, between the piano movers and the piano players (Dine, McRae). Furthermore, the photographs take the privacy and intimacy of the dressing room and make it public, exposing the secrets of this transitional space, a move that could well be interpreted as threatening to rugby and its teams. However, the display of the naked body

for financial gain affords other connotations: these photographs frequently objectify the men in them, whereas before in rugby, and probably still on most pitches, players were and are resolutely active subjects. The argument could be made that the players' loss of power as they have become commodified on the professional market is reflected in the players' loss of power as they are severed from their team and rendered, for the most part, motionless in these photographs. Commercialism and capitalism are evident in the book as publicity stunt and as profit-generator, and marketing as well as power imbalances could be said to have distorted rugby union's patriarchal gender norms.

More than simple professionalization may be at play here, though. The pink bow ties and the nudie pictures hark back to the impact of show business as well as gross capitalism. The ruggers seem to be "playing off" the brutish warrior model of masculinity, doing a riff on their own gender and sexuality with hints of the feminine and suggestions of homoeroticism. Some self-parody as well as the gate-swelling aspect of social satire and shock value seem to be in the new mix. In competition for the Euro, they may have moved toward a tongue-in-check gesture of postmodern ironic self-criticism, with the old masculinity looking in a mirror, winking, and laughing—for a change, the warrior's battle face may have been put on the shelf for increased profits.

Chapter Three: Soccer, Race, and Migration: *Black, blanc, beur et les Bleus*

I. Introduction: World Cup 1998

The 1998 World Cup, both hosted and won by France, offers an interesting case of national identities being interpreted through sports, and neither the media nor academics have shrunk from proffering analyses. The presence of stars such as Zinedine Zidane focused much discussion on the status of racized individuals as well as immigrants and their children or even grandchildren in soccer and by extension in French society. The 1998 national side featured many players born outside the metropole (Karembeu from New Caledonia and Lama from Guyana), players whose parents were immigrants and who were thus French by “descendance directe” (Zidane, Djorkaeff), and players who fell “under the category of ‘descendance indirecte’: Barthez has a Spanish grandmother, and Lizarazu has three Spanish Basque grandparents” (Marks 52).¹ As a result, many people championed France’s victory as proof of its success in assimilating or integrating individuals with various cultural backgrounds into one nation; some saw the win as evidence of France’s new multicultural and multiracial identity; some dismissed the team as not being representative of the nation at all.

The dominant mood, however, was that of jubilation: France had ostensibly proven itself on the international stage as capable of not only successfully staging an

¹ An introduction to France’s complicated citizenship laws and the complicated situations of so-called immigrants and their descendants can be found in Jane Freedman as well as in Alec G. Hargreaves, *Immigration, “Race,” and Ethnicity*, especially chapter four.

enormous global event but also of winning in world competition.² Following the team's victory, fans poured out into the streets chanting, singing, and waving flags.³ These flags were not all the French *Tricolore*, however; in photographs and video clips, Algerian flags can also be seen. In a moment worthy of Roland Barthes's analysis of a black soldier saluting a French flag in *Mythologies* (189-203), Zinedine Zidane's face was projected onto the Arc de Triomphe.⁴ The son of Kabyle immigrants from Algeria, Zidane grew up in a rough neighborhood of Marseilles and is considered by both Algeria and France to be a citizen. He was scouted from a junior league championship in the Marseilles district by AS Cannes and went professional at age 14, playing in his first Ligue 1 match at seventeen and earning his first international cap for the French team at twenty-two. Some call him the best soccer player to have ever lived, or at least place him squarely in the elite pantheon of global soccer gods along with Pél  , Ronaldo, and Diego Maradona. Yet to project Zidane's face onto an iconic monument of French imperialism was to engage in the sort of myth-making Barthes so deftly unpacked.⁵

Myriad journalists, politicians, and others followed suit by linking France's victory on the soccer field with a sort of social victory in integrating populations from various backgrounds into a successful State. Sami Na  r, a French political philosopher of Algerian descent, stated in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, "Zidane a fait plus par ses

² Markovits explains, however, that the French team's victory was perhaps not as surprising as many painted it to be (2-8).

³ Lebovics briefly describes the experience of being in Paris at that moment and calls it "Surrealist" (136-138).

⁴ One photograph of Zidane on the Arc can be found in *L'Equipe* 849, 18 July 1998, spread across pages 6 and 7. The issue is a special "France 1998" supplement of *L'Equipe* 16.234.

⁵ The Arc de Triomphe was commissioned in 1806 after Napoleon's victory at Austerlitz, but it was not completed until after the original architect died. The final touches were put on the Arc, meant to commemorate the Napoleonic Wars, between 1833 and 1836. In the meantime, the French had begun to settle Algeria in 1825 and captured the country in 1830. Thus while the Arc commemorates more European empire (and its tribute was expanded with the addition of the Eternal Flame for an Unknown Soldier from the First World War), its glorification of Empire in general and its construction's temporal overlap with the colonization of North Africa suggest a more general import. Besides, myth is rarely exact.

déhanchements que dix ou quinze ans de politique d'intégration" (qtd. in Caillat). [Zidane did more with his zig zags than ten or fifteen years of integration politics]. In the paper *Libération*, politician Patrick Devidjian claimed, "Même si l'intégration ne se fait pas facilement, un événement comme celui-là fait reculer le racisme" (qtd. in Caillat). [Even if integration is not easily done, an event like this one makes racism back down.] Even then-Prime Minister Lionel Jospin got into the act, saying in an interview before the Final, "Quel meilleur exemple de notre unité et de notre diversité que cette magnifique équipe?" (qtd. in "Introduction," Dauncey and Hare 2) [What better example of our unity and diversity than this magnificent team?].

Hugh O'Donnell and Neil Blain examine some of the journalistic discourse in a selection of the French press and point out, however, the hand-wringing over French indifference to soccer, the lack of identification with the team reinforced by the "bureaucratic relationship of ownership" evident in the syntax of "l'équipe de France" (217), and the critiques of politicians who were perceived as jumping on the bandwagon of fandom.⁶ They admit that the hand-wringing and the lack of identification were more noticeable in the press at the beginning of the tournament than as the team's victories piled up. Andrei Markovits dates "this tremendous turnaround in the mood of the French public" to Sunday, June 28, 1998, when France defeated Paraguay (12). As problems of stadium building, ticket distribution, and low television viewership faded, however, the politicians piled on and the journalistic discourse leaned more to metaphor and political interpretations.⁷ For example, Dauncey and Hare note how both then-President Chirac

⁶ Gérard Desportes also criticized how "le politique réduit l'événement aux préoccupations du moment" [politics reduces the event to the preoccupations of the moment].

⁷ Markovits investigates these problems, in addition to violence outside the stadia and "nationalism's nasty manifestation" in some detail (8-11), and Markovits and Hellerman also note the lack of interest in the

and Jospin chatted with French players in the locker room after the semi-final and both received a player's jersey as a memento ("Introduction" 2). Furthermore, Chirac was given a jersey with his own name on it and wore it to the victory celebration he hosted after the Final. According to Dauncey and Hare,

[t]he symbolism of such a gift from the players was strong, given the prevalent emphasis on the racial and social inclusiveness of the team and the importance of its performances for encouraging harmony in French society: the symbolic inclusion of the head of state as an extra member of the national squad marked the solidarity of the French nation from highest office to poorest immigrant children in Marseille worshiping Zidane. (ibid)

In O'Donnell's and Blain's words, with the team's success, "new emergent high-level official discourses moved the debate from its previous terrain of French 'national character' on to much more directly political ground, with the team being used to represent and project a new cohesive and successfully integrated France" (221).

Nonetheless, the writers conclude that "football operates in France only as a weak sign of French society" (224). Historian Geoff Hare summarizes:

What the World Cup victory seems to have done is to provide a ready metaphor to discuss these issues [of economic difficulties, racism, social problems and orthodox political parties' failure to solve these problems]: either the multiracial national team was presented as proof of integrated cultural and ethnic diversity contributing to a shared national project, or the solidarity of successful teamwork was highlighted as evidence of assimilated "Frenchness" on the part of ethnically diverse players. Zidane was central to this political and social metaphor [...] The debate was not proof that the long-term problems of the *banlieues* had been solved. (*French Football* 136)⁸

World Cup expressed by many French at the outset along with critiques of the country's decision to host the expensive event, all of which quieted down as the French team continued to win (37).

⁸ In Dauncey and Hare's article "World Cup France '98," they go into more detail about the meanings and expressions of "French Victory as Metaphor for Successful French Integration" (338).

Thus, though the events of the World Cup served to open up a discussion, they were not in themselves proof that problems associated with race relations, immigration, and integration were fixed.

As a result, some critiqued the rhetoric of integration and success. Author and singer Magyd Cherfi wrote in *L'Humanité*, “La France, elle est métisse en rien. Demandez donc à un quelconque quidam de couleur s’il se sent chez lui dans cet Hexagone. Idem dans l’équipe de France. Dans ce team tricolore, il n’y a pas plus de beurs que de Kanaks ou de blacks, mais des mercenaires de la thune” (qtd. in Caillat). [France is mixed in nothing. Ask anyone of color if he feels at home in this Hexagon. The same for the French team. On that tricolor team, there are no more beurs than Kanaks or blacks, but mercenaries of cash.] For him, the team is about money, and the capitalistic impulses of its players overpower any trace of cultural mixing. Taking a different approach, Esmeralda argues that the debate and the celebratory rhetoric from the political left, including the *black-blanc-beur* slogan, frequently reproduced the racial categories and stereotypes relied on by the far right and Le Pen.⁹ For her, the discourse reinscribed racialization instead of moving outside of it.

As the foregoing examples show, soccer is an especially rich field for discussions of race and ethnicity in France due not only to the inclusion of players from multicultural backgrounds on the national squad, but also to the sport’s international stature: it travels

⁹ Interestingly, Le Pen himself attempted to co-opt the victory of the team for the Front National: “‘C’est la victoire de l’équipe de France, mais je la revendique aussi comme la victoire du Front national, qui en avait dessiné le cadre.’ À le croire, si les joueurs entonnent la Marseillaise, c’est bien la preuve d’une certaine lepénisation des esprits. [...] L’affrontement médiatisé des équipes de football a un certain parfum d’affrontement national. Et qui pourrait plus que nous [le FN] s’en féliciter?” (Dely) [“It’s the victory of the French team, but I claim it also as a victory of the National Front, who had framed it.” In his view, if the players sang the Marseillaise, it was proof of “a certain Le Pen-ization of minds... The mediatized confrontation of soccer teams has a certain perfume of national confrontation. And who could be more able than us to congratulate ourselves on that account?”].

in many ways and causes identities to overlap, collide, and complement each other. The emigration of athletic hopefuls is one example of this sort of movement. For example, in Fatou Diome's novel *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*, Madické, in Senegal, watches European soccer matches on his village's only television and dreams of becoming the next big soccer star in Europe. His sister, Salie, who has already emigrated to France, tries to discourage him due to her own knowledge of the terrible conditions in which many such hopefuls end up living and to her hopes for the betterment of her native land. Though this plot summary is simplistic, it shows how global capitalism lures both brains and brawn away from developing countries and can result in athletes living in a kind of indentured servitude, in danger of being used up and then discarded if they fail to make the necessary cuts for the team. This kind of exploitation is the dark side of the cultural mosaic praised in the French press and could be seen as a corollary to "the 'exodus' of French players since 1996" to foreign clubs with higher budgets (Eastham 64), a situation akin to the movement of labor in other sectors and that in turn provokes similar anxieties about the economy and national identity and cohesion.

Of course, many athletic hopefuls also hail from within France and still confront issues of identity and Frenchness. Thomté Ryam's novel *Banlieue noire* focuses on a youth named Sébastien who was born in Benin and adopted by a white French couple. After his adoptive father is fired from his job and, unable to find new employment, turns to alcohol and violence, his adoptive mother divorces his father and moves Sébastien and the couple's three biological children to a Parisian *banlieue*. Sébastien hates school but is passionate about playing soccer and hopes to become a professional player. Already he plays for the Under-16 team that leads the regional championship (Ryam 22-23).

Unfortunately, Sébastien also has a taste for “les conneries” (18) and a life deeply rooted in the *banlieue* and its worse elements that will combine to deprive him of his dream. Using *Le ventre de l’Atlantique* and *Banlieue noire* as key texts, I will explore the ways in which race and immigration are imbricated with soccer and capitalism, and how soccer, as “a vector of national values and identity,” has become cast as the embodiment of the tension between older definitions of those values and newer ones, as well as between competing cultural and social models (Hare, *Football in France* 4, 138). Mainly, I will focus on how these two novels puncture the meritocratic and integrationist myths attached to soccer.

I have selected these two novels for analysis because they both came out post-1998 but prior to the head-butt debacle of 2006. *Le ventre de l’Atlantique* was a bestseller, reaching number one on the list of *L’Express*, and it garnered much critical acclaim, earning commercial and media success as well as an excerpted place in the 2009 Penguin Anthology of Contemporary African Writing (“Le ventre de l’Atlantique”). *Banlieue noire* was also popular, and Lilian Thuram’s attention to the novel—he wrote the preface—as both a soccer player and anti-racism social activist lends it influence.¹⁰ Both novels grapple with the issues of racism, integration, migration, and economic situations that can influence soccer players and fans and illustrate the complexities people can face trying to follow their dreams about the game. Both also engage with the discourse that surrounded France’s 1998 win, which makes them even more intriguing.

¹⁰ Lilian Thuram, born in 1972 in Guadeloupe, is a retired French professional soccer player whose position was defender and who is the most capped player in the history of the French national team. He played in the top leagues in France, Italy, and Spain for over fifteen seasons. With France, Thuram won the 1998 World Cup and the Euro 2000. Thuram holds the record for most appearances at the European Championship, with sixteen. At the time of *Banlieue noire*’s publication, he served as a member of the Haut Conseil à l’Intégration. For more on Thuram’s anti-racism campaigns, see Lapchick and Winter.

II. Soccer in France

Despite its aristocratic origins, soccer's construction as a motor of integration in France has a long history. The sport arrived in France on the same wave of Anglophilia and French national anxiety that brought rugby across the Channel from Britain, and even engaged similarly urban social elites and traveled the same ground of Paris and the Channel ports as it developed (Hare, *Football in France* 16-17). Soccer managed to flourish, growing from 350 registered teams at the turn of the century to about 2,000 teams in 1911, though it suffered from the political and social schisms prevalent in France at that time—especially that between “the secularizing Republican left and the Catholic traditionalist right”—as well as from the fact that “four major national sports federations (governing bodies) had grown up, divided ideologically (lay or Catholic), and also distinct in that two were omnisports federations, and two solely devoted to football” (ibid). Compulsory national service between the 1880s and the First World War helped spread soccer, and in the Army “football became a common recreation, with inter-regimental and inter-regional games” (Hare, *French Football* 18). Tales of impromptu matches during the Great War exist, most notably the story investigated by historian Stanley Weintraub about the Christmas Truce of 1914 that supposedly included a friendly game between Allied and German soldiers.¹¹ By 1919 a French Cup had been arranged and the federations had transformed into one single French Football Federation (Hare, *French Football* 18). Furthermore, it was *entre les guerres* “that football really spread to the French industrial working class, and also to the country side” (ibid 19). Factories and

¹¹ Pick-up games of soccer among troops are shown in the film *Joyeux Noël*, also about the Christmas Truce.

family firms encouraged soccer and frequently founded their own sponsored teams, forging an industrial link that quickly led to the sport's professionalization.¹²

Perhaps paradoxically, many of these industrialists pushed soccer because the “values inherent in football were thought to foster teamwork, leadership, as well as local pride—indeed pride in the factory through its team” (ibid). These values were the ones that had been promoted by aristocratic and amateur proponents of the game. For example, in 1882 Baron Pierre de Coubertin lauded the game's merits in an article titled “La valeur morale et sociale du football,” arguing for the sport's superiority to other, traditional French games and pastimes. Looking to the games of England, the United States, and Australia, Coubertin judges those of France to be by comparison, though “fort intéressant[s],” primarily “enfantins” (39), unable to raise a crowd as significant as the one in New York the previous November that gathered for a soccer match. Coubertin's spirit of international competition is thus revealed, as well as his obvious admiration of Anglophone countries. As discussed in the chapter about rugby, such an interpretation of French inferiority extended well beyond the sports arena to the realm of economics, empire, and health. Along these same lines, Coubertin puts down the French game of *barres*:¹³

S'y entraîner systématiquement, c'est du temps perdu.
Pour s'y livrer, il ne faut pas ni beaucoup de courage, ni
beaucoup de cette agilité interne des muscles qui les fait
obéir avec une soudaineté merveilleuse aux
commandements les plus imprévus; pour y réussir, il n'est
pas besoin ni de cette rapidité de coup d'oeil, ni de cet
esprit de décision, ni de cette force de volonté qui font du

¹² Ian Pickup goes somewhat more into depth on the development of professionalization and its impact on soccer in “French Football From its Origins to Euro 84.”

¹³ While “les barres” can refer to the parallel or uneven bars in gymnastics, here Coubertin's reference seems to be more to the schoolyard game of “barres” that involves two teams, running, and prisoner-taking.

football, par exemple, une école de perfectionnement moral et d'apprentissage social. (39)

[To train systematically [at *barres*] is to lose time. To devote oneself to it, not much courage is needed, nor much of this internal agility of the muscles that makes them obey with marvelous suddenness to the most unexpected commands; to succeed at it, there is no need of this quickness of eye movement, nor of this spirit of decision, nor of this force of will that all make soccer, for example, a moral finishing school and a social apprenticeship.]

These values—willpower, courage, moral rectitude—were ones frequently grieved for in *fin de siècle* France, in which fears about degeneracy and neurasthenia ran rampant.

During the last decades of the nineteenth century and in accordance with contemporary notions of race and degeneracy, the health of the nation was deemed dependant on the well-being of individual bodies (Weber, *Fin de Siècle*). Thus after the French national body was amputated of Alsace and Lorraine in 1870, ways to reinvigorate the nation by strengthening individuals' bodies drew much attention. In Jacques Body's words, "Le sport est né en France après la défaite de 1870, non comme une distraction – selon son étymologie –, mais comme la clé d'une réforme pédagogique, d'un nouvel humanisme et de la revanche. Il s'agissait de rechercher une hygiène physique et morale régénératrice" (7). [Sports were born in France after the defeat of 1870, not as a pastime/distraction—according to its etymology—but as the key to pedagogical reform, to a new humanism, and to revenge. It was about searching for physical hygiene and moral regeneration.] Theorists of the day concluded that as a result of its deficiencies the French "race" was losing its vigor and becoming prone to national weakness.¹⁴ The Prussian victory over France was deployed as proof of this particular

¹⁴ For interesting analyses of this kind of thinking phenomenon in relation to Jews in Europe at the turn of the century and through the Second World War, see Brenner and Reuveni's *Emancipation Through Muscle*. Stereotypes of the "intellectual" versus the "muscle" Jew drew on the same kind of pseudo-scientific

kind of theory and sports were proposed as the solution, a way to reform and improve the national body and prepare it for an avenging mission (Nye 53; Thompson 25-26, 29; Weber, "Gymnastics"). Coubertin was one of these patriotic proponents of sports.

In this matter, the words of his essay on soccer are revealing. Writing of a hypothetical player, Coubertin states, "[S]'il peut se rendre cette justice que pas une fois il n'a eu peur, que pas une fois il n'a sacrifié l'intérêt de son camp au désir d'accomplir quelque prouesse individuelle, il sera content de lui. Nul m'ôtera de l'idée que le jeune homme qui a passé par là ne soit mieux préparé qu'un autre au football de la vie" (40). [If he can do himself the justice that not once he was afraid, not once did he sacrifice the interest of his side to the desire to accomplish some individual feat, he will be happy with himself. No one can change my mind that the young man who has gone through that would be better prepared than another for the soccer match of life.] Soccer is a metaphor for life, and the values and character traits necessary for each are interchangeable. However, warfare and its demands on a soldier seem to be also involved in this comparison through terminology such as fear, courage, "son camp," and sacrifice for the group. Sports were frequently seen at the time as suitable training for warfare, so perhaps life is the battlefield in Coubertin's view. With all the worries about degeneration and the loss of the German-annexed provinces in 1870, the collapse of life into war would make sense even twenty years later. In the same vein, Coubertin ends his essay with, essentially, a rallying cry to the French to not despair, to keep their heads up, unite, and seize the day.

reasoning employed at the time to argue that energy spent for intellectual endeavors detracted from energy available for physical exploits, and that the defects of individuals could then be passed down and become inherent in any "race."

Henri de Montherlant also draws parallels between sports and warfare, and vaunts soccer's ability to shape a man and a warrior out of a boy in multiple stories, poems, and even a play from *Les Olympiques*. The character of the Demi-Aile, a veiled representation of Montherlant himself, serves as an emotional, intellectual, and athletic mentor to the thirteen-year-old boy Peyrony in "La Leçon de football dans un parc." The Demi-Aile imparts lessons to Peyrony on what it means to be a man, a leader, and a responsible member of a team while referencing Aristotle, Goethe, and Patrocles: the "football lesson" is less about the actual game and more about the boy's development.

Coubertin's and Montherlant's writings clearly illustrate the amateur ethos that tenaciously clung to soccer through the First World War. Sports were perceived as formative, as makers of good warriors and citizens, sculptors of character. In their own way, these writers were casting sports as shapers of Frenchmen almost on a par with the public schools. However, these works also reflect the elitist mindset of early sports proponents and the fact that, until the Great War, primarily upper-class young men engaged in sporting activities. The situation changed, as mentioned before, after the First World War and a period of shamateurism followed, then sham professionalism, all finally supplanted by official professionalization after World War Two. The process began as interest in soccer grew and so did attendance at games, causing some club directors to see the opportunity to make a profit. In turn, this led to the trading of players to bring in more spectators. Some players had their transportation fees for such exchanges paid for as well as their uniforms, and comfortable jobs were found for some in, perhaps, the club director's company (Hare, *French Football* 20). Soon, caving to pressure from wealthy owners—especially Jean-Pierre Peugeot who owned the Sochaux club—the French

Football Federation “accepted professional player status, while retaining the amateur status of clubs; that is, they were still to be run as non-profit-making associations with unpaid officials” (ibid 20-21). However, clubs still had control over players and often signed them to life contracts, and players usually had other jobs, which would make them in today’s terms semi-professionals. For Hare, “All this suggests that French football professionalized around amateur values” (*French Football* 22).

Not everyone was happy with the new state of affairs, however. Georges Duhamel ripped on both specialization and professionalization in a chapter from his 1930 book about his travels in the United States. He clearly laid out the grounds for protest and the potential dangers posed to the French people if they went down a similar road as American athletes. Joseph Jolinon’s novel *Le Joueur de balle*, first published in 1929, extols similarly amateur values, following the life of a young man growing up just prior to the Great War and how soccer helps shape his character. The preface, however, already compares the players of the late 1920s unfavorably to the protagonist from 1913:

La distance qui le sépare des sportifs d’aujourd’hui nous donne la mesure d’un grand changement. Laissons aux critiques le soin de l’apprécier. Mais s’il existe encore des footballeurs épris de culture générale, ce n’est pas avec indifférence qu’après treize ans d’empêchement, en songeant à la guerre où tant d’autres sont morts, je leur représente leur frère. (7)

[The distance that separates him from the athletes of today gives us the measure of a large change. Leave to the critics the task of evaluating that. But if there still exist soccer players in love with general culture, it is not with indifference that after thirteen years of obstacles, reflecting on the war where so many others died, I show them their brother.]

Despite such protests, soccer nevertheless went officially professional in France in 1932 with the formation of a professional championship, although the system basically had to be begun again from scratch after the decimation due to the Second World War.

Professionalization caused soccer to be seen by many working-class and poor young men as a ticket out of a hard life. In Ian Pickup's words, "the professionalization of football in France in 1932 encouraged in particular the unqualified members of the working class to seek gainful employment in a rapidly developing sport" (28). At the same time, sports were becoming more available to those not from the upper classes; the Popular Front, which came to power in 1936, did much to diffuse the popularity of sports throughout society. New legislation mandated two weeks paid vacation and programs were launched to send all children to the mountains, camping, skiing, etc. (Holt 188-89 and 205-09). Somewhat similar to rugby league's situation in Britain, which went professional very early on, soccer began to take root more firmly in industrial areas as those from difficult backgrounds embraced it as an alternative to their life situations. Perhaps inevitably, many of these young men were from immigrant backgrounds as immigrants—especially after the Second World War—frequently were part of the blue-collar workforce.¹⁵ Soccer in France also drew men from other countries: "From the 1930s to the 1980s, over 1,000 players came to France to play football as professionals or

¹⁵ Alec G. Hargreaves explains that prior to the 1970s, foreigners "were heavily concentrated in badly paid, low-skilled jobs" (*Immigration, "Race," and Ethnicity* 40), and that even when he was writing in 1995, "there are strong indicators that they [second-generation members of recently established minority groups] tend to occupy a structural position which is similar to that of their parents" (43)—that is to say, as a reserve labor army of unemployed or under-employed people. In terms of segmentation, marginalization, and exclusion within the economy and workforce, "people of immigrant origin are generally less well placed than the rest of France's population, and certain minority groups—essentially non-Europeans—are more adversely affected than others" (*ibid.*). For example, the "foreign labour force has traditionally been over-represented in the industrial sector" (*ibid.*), and in 1990, among men, "70 per cent of foreigners were manual workers, compared with 40 per cent of French nationals" (44). Beaud and Noiriel also examine the social contexts of class and immigration for soccer.

semi-professionals. This is a little under 20 percent of the total number of first- and second-division players for the period” (Lanfranchi, “Migration” 68). Bromberger claims that successful foreign soccer stars are quickly adopted in places like Marseilles and that, “it appears that, all qualities being equal, foreign players are invariably granted a magnified aura compared with French-born players” (174-5). I would take that assertion with a grain of salt even though Bromberger restricts it to certain towns and teams.

Nevertheless, between actual developments in the sporting world—such as Georges Carpentier’s rise to celebrity—and the nascent sports literature, the myth of sports meritocracy spread. Drawing on texts from the first half of the twentieth century, Pierre Charreton examines “[l]e mythe littéraire du rapprochement social par le sport” and concludes, “[L]a mystification consiste à vouloir suggérer ou prouver que le sport constitue un facteur d’interpénétration sociale, alors qu’il est lui-même à l’image de la société et qu’il en reproduit les clivages, même à son corps défendant” (“Mythe littéraire” 401) [the myth/hoax consists in wanting to suggest or prove that sport constitutes a factor of social interpenetration, while it is itself made in the image of society and reproduces society’s distinctions even against its own will]. He notes that while many of the literary texts he examined perpetuate the myth, many others complicate or deny it.

Certainly there is historical and anecdotal evidence that sports promote or at least involve social integration and an image of a well-mixed French society. Historians Pierre Lanfranchi and Alfred Wahl state, “French football, in particular, had a long tradition of having a substantial number of immigrant players, from Yugoslav students to Polish miners and those who came from French-speaking North Africa” (114). Stéphane Beaud and Gérard Noiriel open their article about immigration in French soccer with a list of

players of immigrant origin and statistics about them on the French national team, arguing that the “pluriethnique” aspect of the French team of 1985 was not a radically new phenomenon (83-84). Similarly, Laurent Dubois argues that the French national team never did not have colonial players, citing the example of the 1935 World Cup team for which Raoul Diagne, born in Senegal, played. Larbi Ben Barek was another one of those players. Known as “la perle noire” [the Black Pearl], Ben Barek was from Morocco and became a key, goal-scoring figure on the French national team that he joined in 1938. When Atletico Madrid bought him from his Parisian team in 1948, one journalist supposedly wrote, “Vendez l’Arc de Triomphe ou la Tour Eiffel, mais ne vendez pas Ben Barek” (quoted in Ganne). [Sell the Arc de Triomphe or the Eiffel Tower, but don’t sell Ben Barek.] The journalist’s sentiments reveal how significant a part of French culture Ben Barek had become by comparing him to major French monuments.

Lanfranchi’s and Wahl’s reference to Polish miners, though, is of course to Raymond Kopa, who “had been born in Noeux-les-Mines in the mining area of northern France, to immigrant parents born in Poland. His family name was Kopaszewski. His father and his elder brother were both miners but Kopa himself dreamed of becoming an electrician. This modest ambition failed and he too went briefly to the mines” (116). During his brief time in the mines Kopa lost two fingers following a work accident, an incident that reinforced his dreams of escaping the mines (Beaud and Noiriel 86). As “the greatest and the most popular French footballer of the 1950s,” Kopa “symbolized not only the possibilities of social mobility but the successful and full integration of the immigrant” (Lanfranchi and Wahl 114). Indeed, “the press would write of Kopa the

‘poor pit-boy’ when it wanted to promote him as a model of social mobility in a society where talent could flourish, the so-called ‘New France’” (ibid 116). Kopa himself “never tried to keep in touch with his Polish roots” and “never tired of stressing that he was a Frenchman,” although he only took out French citizenship at the age of twenty-one and then cheerfully did his military service (ibid 117). However, his joy at being a French citizen and the design of his story “to show how well-integrated he was” were counterweighted with the “appropriate” emphasis on how his career illustrated the “hard path by which those born at the bottom might ascend the social ladder. [...] Kopa had to appear to sweat for his laurels; his success had to be seen to be the product of hard labour, unfailing self-denial and constant discipline” (ibid 118). Kopa ended up playing the part, moralizing to the young that they had it too easy; “thus he became a significant social actor” and his career “was used to promote acceptance of the wider social system” (ibid 118). Threads of this narrative are still visible today in sports discourse.¹⁶

Esmeralda, critical of this type of narrative, states,

L’intégration par le labeur, par une servilité empreinte de reconnaissance, reste le paradigme indépassable. [...] Les as du ballon, qui se signalaient par leur pigmentation (et/ou par la sonorité de leur patronyme), ne furent-ils pas considérés comme les dignes descendants des troupes coloniales, enrôlées, en leur temps, pour servir de chair à canon en offrant leur corps à l’Empire français? (141)
[Integration through labor, through servility imprinted with gratitude, persists as the impassable paradigm... Soccer aces, who are recognized by their skin pigmentation (and/or by the sound of their last name), aren’t they considered to be the worthy descendants of colonial troops, recruited, in their time, to serve as cannon fodder in offering their body to the French Empire?]

¹⁶ In reference to Zidane and his trajectory of integration, Abdallah writes: “La famille, le travail et le sens de l’effort personnel, la discipline et l’obéissance, la modestie, la fidélité et la solidarité: les valeurs somme toute fort traditionnelles véhiculées par Zidane semblent tout droit sorties d’un manuel d’instruction civique” (9). Importantly, Abdallah’s article was published in 2000, prior to the *coup de boule*.

Her argument is that the national team players are viewed and used in the same way as those who were drafted colonial servants of empire. She cites some 1998 newspaper articles as support, noting how they brag about France being capable of beating Brazil thanks to France's ability to pull from all of "ses cinq continents" [its five continents] for players, and she condemns this neo-colonialist discourse (145). Esmeralda's critique thus points to the reality of exploitation through colonial and neo-colonial power structures and rhetoric to counter the pulling-oneself-up-by one's-bootstraps narrative that is frequently put forward and even applauded in sports.

Rachid Mekloufi took a slightly different trajectory that resulted in narratives differing from both that of Kopa and that of the conscripted soldiers as suggested by Esmeralda.¹⁷ Touted as a model of integration of the indigenous Arabic population in French Algeria while he led the French team to victory, he became an Algerian national symbol when, in April 1958, he left the French team on the eve of the World Cup to join the team put together by the Front de Libération National, the group fighting for Algerian national liberation from France (Lanfranchi and Wahl 119).¹⁸ Prior to this defection, Mekloufi had sometimes been criticized as too attached to the colonial sport, to "the game of the occupier" (ibid 120), and after Algeria's independence in 1962 Mekloufi was indeed able to resume his professional career in France.¹⁹ His construction as a political

¹⁷ Lanfranchi examines Mekloufi's career in more detail, as he went from playing in Sétif to playing professionally in France to playing for the FLN team to playing in France to coaching in Algeria and being fired by the government there for being too professionally-oriented.

¹⁸ Fates provides a concise history of soccer in Algeria and the sport's long-standing subversive uses there from the colonial era to the revolution to the postcolonial era and radical Islamicization, concluding, "Football and politics in Algeria remain a strong coupling" (57).

¹⁹ An example of this kind of mindset is found in Rachid Boudjedra's *Le vainqueur de coupe*, when the protagonist, an FLN agent who is attending the 1957 French club championship final in order to assassinate a high-ranking collaborator, wonders repeatedly why Algerian players are playing for France, the enemy.

and sporting symbol in two different societies reveals the complexity and contradictions in sports and national narratives:

Too impregnated with professional sporting methods and attitudes associated with those who had emigrated, he never succeeded in winning over the Algerian power elite after his final return from France, whilst in France he is remembered as an excellent player too involved in politics for the good of his career and the interests of French football. (Lanfranchi and Wahl 124-25)

Lanfranchi's and Wahl's analysis of Kopa and Mekloufi provides insights into the varying ways immigrant soccer players, and soccer players who were the children of immigrants, were fitted into and also created narratives about nationalities. Beaud and Noiriél similarly underline "le rôle contradictoire qu'a joué jusqu'aujourd'hui le football dans l'intégration des immigrés. La majorité des récits autobiographiques, écrits pourtant par des joueurs qui ont « réussi », insistent sur les difficultés spécifiques qu'ils ont rencontrées dans leur carrière en tant qu'immigrés" (90) [the contradictory role that soccer has played until today in the integration of immigrants. The majority of autobiographical stories, written nevertheless by players who have "succeeded," insist on the specific difficulties they encountered as immigrants in their careers].²⁰ They further note that these stories did not change much over the years, citing the narratives of Kopa, whose grandfather arrived in France from Poland in the 1920s and whose autobiography was published in 1972, and Luis Fernandez, whose parents arrived from Spain in the 1960s and whose autobiography was published in 1988, as examples (90). Jean Tigana, who came a generation after Kopa and was of Malian origin, also suffered xenophobic slurs against his background and had his situation as an immigrant complicated by

²⁰ It is important to note that Beaud and Noiriél use the term "immigré" to refer to those who not only come from places other than France, but to their children and even grandchildren.

matters of skin color (Beaud and Noiriel 91). These kinds of experiences have unfortunately continued into the twenty-first century, with some high-profile incidents illustrating the persistence of xenophobia and racism.²¹

Despite this reality, soccer in France continues to be put forward as a way towards social harmony, with the 1998 national team as an example of this kind of new society, and youth continue to view soccer as an escape from social and economic problems. Part of this may be due to the mythology of meritocracy that has grown up around the sport, but there may well be other factors in play. Government involvement in sports has long been higher in France than in other European countries, going all the way back to Coubertin and his advocacy for organized international sport and continuing with Henri Delauney, who was the catalyst for European Cup. French soccer's "system of self-regulation and governance owes much to the French civic tradition of public service, of Republican and democratic values, and of State interventionism" (Hare, *Football in France* 10). A unique "partnership between the state and the nation's sporting organizations," (Dauncey and Hare, "World Cup" 333), the French approach to managing physical and sporting activities as public service has deep roots:

This notion of sport and recreation being a Republican public service mission may also be traced back to Coubertin's Olympic ideal (taking part is more important than winning): seeing sport as a philosophical and ethical

²¹ Some anti-discrimination advocates "say racial slurs and racially charged incidents are on the rise because of a confluence of factors" including "the increasing racial diversity of formerly all-white clubs, a growing resistance to immigration from African and Arab nations in several European countries, the tendency of race-related conflicts to grab headlines, and greater scrutiny of such incidents. In some areas [...] racial tension also appears to be fueled by a lack of economic opportunities for whites" (Whiteside). Examples of racially charged incidents include African-American player Oguchi Onyewu, who plays for a Belgian club, being harassed while driving, punched in the face by a fan, and hearing monkey chants; Samuel Eto'o, a Cameroonian playing for FC Barcelona, "being showered with monkey chants and peanuts from opposing fans"; and an Italian player, Paulo Di Canio, giving fans a Nazi-style salute (Whiteside). In 2004, Spain coach Luis Aragonés was fined 3,000 Euros for making a racist remark about French striker Thierry Henry ("First Taint").

approach to life, promoting the development of the physical and moral qualities that are the basics of sport, and through sport, educating young people in a spirit of better mutual understanding and friendship, thus contributing to the building of a better and more peaceful world. (Hare, *Football in France* 29)

As such, soccer has been constructed as another vehicle of integration. French government has built gymnasiums and sports fields in housing projects in order to distract youth from the street and crime and to encourage community involvement, social values, and the like (Silverstein).

Now, however, the commodification of soccer is squeezing out that former emphasis on community (Hare, *Football in France* 11-12), with professionalization allegedly perverting the sport's supposed former values.²² France's farm team investments in development have led to lower salaries for teams and therefore problems retaining players since the Bosman ruling of 1996.²³ Budget issues with French teams have also led to the best French players in development, like Nicolas Anelka, being poached by Spanish, Italian, and English clubs with astronomical budgets.²⁴ Challenges by global capitalism to the state interventionist approach in French sports have led to complications of the "French exception" in the sporting world. The Bosman ruling only further complicates matters, contributing to the relative brawn drain of talented young

²² Hare is not alone in lamenting the rise of what Abdallah calls "le *foot business*"; Abdallah himself notes that Nicolas Anelka has become the symbol of this *foot business* that "n'a plus grand-chose à voir avec l'image de générosité tant vantée depuis le Mondial" (12) [no longer much resembles the image of generosity so vaunted since the (1998) World Cup].

²³ The so-called Bosman ruling is a 1995 European Court of Justice decision that gave professional soccer players in the European Union "the right to a free transfer at the end of their contracts, with the provision that they were transferring from a club within one EU Association to a club within another EU Association" ("Bosman Ruling"). Further explanation of developments in European Union labor laws pertaining to soccer players can be found in Hare, "Is French Football Still French?" (144-45). Analysis of the Bosman Ruling's impact, including the pull of young talent away from France, can be found in Eastham, especially pages 64-68.

²⁴ Geoff Hare examines the case of Anelka in *Football in France* (85-89).

soccer players from France to clubs with bigger budgets in other European countries. The phenomenon is an interesting parallel to the situation of athletes in former French colonies, especially in Africa, where young talents leave the country in droves to migrate to higher-paying teams in France or elsewhere.

Attitudes also changed after the 1998 World Cup once the euphoria had worn off, and this shift is evident in more than just the reactions to Zidane's head butt that were examined in the introduction to this dissertation.²⁵ In 2001, a friendly match between France and Algeria began with the French national anthem being booed (Crumley) and with fifteen minutes left in the game, it was interrupted by a couple of young Beurs running onto the field wielding Algerian flags (Lebovics 140). When security rushed out and the two resisted, more youth of North African descent swarmed the pitch, which in turn led to the appearance of the CRS—Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité, which among other duties, serve as national riot police—and the referee calling off the match (141). Historian Herman Lebovics analyzes this incident as the youth

demonstrating their imagined belonging to Algeria, the home of their ancestors. But by exercising this particularly confrontational kind of pluralism, the young people had ruined the evening planned to demonstrate the friendship, the mutual tolerance, and the good will of both the people there and those watching the match in the two nations. The Beurs who disrupted the game were there to remind all that France's history of internal colonialism was not yet ended. (142)

In this instance, soccer, or rather the interruption of a soccer game, became a way to disrupt the usual narrative of union and integration. That the mayhem continued in the

²⁵ It should be duly noted that even prior to July 1998, some objected to the rhetoric of a "new France," and the example of the furor over the Stade de France, built especially for the World Cup, and its placement in the poorer suburb of St. Denis is a good example of this (Hare, *Football in France* 85; Dauncey, "Building the Finals" 107-117).

streets after the pitch invasion with cars driving around honking and flying Algerian flags was “an ironic reminder of July 1998” (Hare, *Football in France* 138). It was also a reminder that the triumphs of 1998 and the multiracial team as fleeting symbol of a New France had not, in fact, changed conditions for many.

This lack of improvement in social conditions was hammered home again during the riots of 2005, when, in addition to schools and cars and busses, gymnasiums were vandalized or burned. The arson of gyms was another indication that soccer associations had come to be seen as another means to control youth in difficult areas (Silverstein).²⁶ The two novels I will examine in this chapter acknowledge the myth of meritocracy in soccer and its implications and history for immigrants, but they complicate the myth and ultimately puncture it with their particular contexts and characters. Both books argue against the simplistic conception of sport as a panacea for society’s ills, ranging from poverty to racism to global capitalism.

Le ventre de l’Atlantique by-passes France by showing a Senegalese character who dreams of going to Italy, thereby going against the grain of emigration to and idolization of France, unlike his friends and compatriots. Perhaps this is a postcolonial strategy of de-centering the Metropole, despite that fact that the young soccer star-wannabe has a sister in France. After all, she is in Strasbourg, not Paris, another kind of de-centering. Wherever they may be, the siblings—Salie in France and Madické in Senegal—are able to communicate about soccer and are drawn together by watching the same matches. Thus, the book contains an argument for the universal power of sport to unite but against the exploitation of the formerly colonized and against the system of

²⁶ A cinematic representation of such resentment of sports is to be found in the film *La Haine*, when during riots sparked by a teenager’s death at the hands of the police, rioters destroy the gymnasium Hubert trains for boxing in.

recruitment wherein soccer players are workers exploited by the capitalist system. The novel draws many parallels between the situations of migrant laborers and slavery, even portraying a character in a state of indentured servitude as a soccer hopeful in France. Similarly, *Banlieue noire* shows soccer to be a false hope for escape from poverty and the *banlieue* for youth who have many opposing forces pulling them down. While neither book criticizes soccer in itself as a game, they do both comment on the system that surrounds the sport and on its contexts that are not always taken into account.

III. *Banlieue noire*

The main plots of both *Banlieue noire*, by Thomté Ryam, and *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*, by Fatou Diome, are situated during or closely after 1998, an important year for French soccer due to France hosting and winning that year's FIFA World Cup. However, unlike the many articles that year vaunting the victory of the "black-blanc-beur" team as signifying French success in integrating various populations into one nation, these two novels underline the frailty of the myth of soccer as a tool for escape from social margins and for access to full recognition. *Le ventre de l'Atlantique* ends with the little brother, Madické, of the narrator, Salie, staying in Senegal instead of pursuing his dream of playing soccer in Europe; *Banlieue noire* ends with Sébastien, a soccer-mad teenager adopted as a baby from Benin by a white French family and now living in a low-income suburb, accused of attempted murder and jailed with his friends Farid and Djamel, while his other friend Christophe, as well as Christophe's mother, are dead, all when the boys should have been playing a soccer match in view of national scouts. The novels thus explore some of the problems that have been overlooked or

masked by the recurrent brandishing of the multi-colored French national team as a symbol of France's new conception of nationality.

Indeed, Lilian Thuram authored the preface to *Banlieue noire*, noting that Sébastien's fate "aurait pu être ma propre histoire" (7) [could have been my own story]. Thuram writes, "Il suffit de naître dans une cité de l'exclusion et d'entendre les beaux discours d'intégration à la télévision le soir, pour comprendre que *l'espoir* y est devenu une tragédie quotidienne. D'ailleurs, aucune rue n'en porte le nom. Alors le héros du récit le brûle. Et lui avec" (7, italics in original). [Suffice it to be born in a housing project of exclusion and to hear the pretty speeches about integration on the television in the evening, to understand that hope there has become a daily tragedy. Besides, no street there bears that name. So the hero of the story burns it. And himself with it.] Thuram, who has long used his celebrity to fight racism and injustice in French society, goes on to condemn the French state for abandoning immigrants from formerly colonized nations in projects where the law's presence is scarce yet repressive and where employment is rarer still. He claims, quoting Ryam himself, that even school is no longer a way to a better future and indeed sometimes functions as part of the system of discrimination and exclusion, but also notes that the causes of social marginalization are complex and become cyclical, and a love of soccer and a belief in the magic of the round ball will not fix the projects or poverty or injustice. While Thuram's arguments neatly sum up the main didactic thrust of Ryam's tale, they also leave out the nuances that complicate the story and the protagonist's relationship to soccer.

Sébastien, the story's sixteen year-old protagonist, narrates *Banlieue noire*. His tale is told in flashback form, beginning with a brief page describing the situation of him

and his friends at a police station on December 21, 1998, and then covering the three preceding days. The story proper begins, dated “18 Décembre,” with the narrator’s self-introduction: “Je m’appelle Sébastien, un jeune Africain aux mensurations convenables: 1,75 m pour 75 kilos. J’ai été adopté au Bénin par un couple de Blancs qui parcouraient l’Afrique au début des années 1980” (13). [I am called Sebastian, a young African with nice measurements: 1.75 meters for 75 kilograms. I was adopted in Benin by a couple of Whites who were criss-crossing Africa at the beginning of the 1980s.] Already, the split between who is considered French and who is not, referenced in Thuram’s introduction as “ces jeunes Français, pas toujours reconnus comme tels” (8) [these young French, not always recognized as such], is evident in the boy’s self-description. His conception of what determines identity is also interesting: first he names himself, then gives his racial background and his physical stature. Any intellectual or emotional element is absent, as is the name of the family that adopted him. This anonymous status of the “Whites” lends itself to an allegorical interpretation of the situation as typical of or perhaps embodying the colonial, or even postcolonial, context, with white Frenchmen coming to Africa willy-nilly and leaving with a baby, a symbol of the future. Lending weight to this interpretation, Sébastien goes on to say, “De mon passé là-bas, de mes origines, je ne connais pas grand-chose, et il est difficile pour moi d’en parler” (13). [Of my past there, of my origins, I don’t know a lot, and it’s difficult for me to talk about it.] The teenager seems typical, then, of the supposedly rootless, not totally integrated postcolonial citizen in France. He also contrasts himself with his siblings: “J’ai deux (très) belles soeurs de 18 et 20 ans et un petit frère de 9 ans. Tous sont blancs, enfants légitimes de mes parents adoptifs” (13). [I have two (very) beautiful sisters who are 18 and 20 years old and a little

brother who's 9. They are all white, the legitimate children of my adoptive parents.] If this white family is the nation, Sébastien clearly sees himself as an outsider, as illegitimate, no matter how much he loves his adopted family or *patrie*.

Complicating matters is the family's recent history. When Sébastien first arrives in France in 1984, his adoptive family lives in a nice house in a nice neighborhood with no drama. One evening, however, the father announces that he has lost his engineering job for rather dubious economic reasons, and he quickly spirals downwards into alcoholism and violence, leading to the parents' divorce and the mother and children moving into housing projects on the outskirts of Paris when Sébastien is nine (Ryam 13-14). Sébastien recounts all this in a rather detached, ambivalent tone, noting that the projects in the *banlieue* Louis Armand are "Paris en pire, quoi" (14) [Paris but worse], but also saying that he had some great days there despite peer pressure and the overarching street culture.²⁷ Nonetheless, he also explains that this environment "fait de moi un être instable, ayant du mal à s'expliquer, à commenter ses choix, à choisir entre droit chemin et errances, entre bien et mal, agitation et calme, intelligence et bêtise. J'ai fait des conneries, mais sans jamais aller trop loin. Je ne pense pas être un mauvais garçon. En tout cas, je suis apprécié de mon entourage" (14-15) [makes of me an instable

²⁷ Although there does not seem to be an actual Parisian *banlieue* called Louis Armand, there are streets, *lycées* and a square in front of the Gare de Lyon all named after the engineer, *Résistant*, *Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer* [national railways] chief, and *Académicien* Louis Armand. Despite the fact that another Louis Armand—a speleologist who lived from 1854 to 1922—was also a prominent Frenchman, the engineer Armand is much better known and already has other sites around Paris named for him; therefore, I would propose that Sébastien's *banlieue* is named for him. This reference creates certain ironies for the protagonist and his friends: Armand attended l'École polytechnique and graduated second in his class while Sébastien and his friends struggle through school and hope to end their educations quickly; Armand was head engineer for the SNCF, a symbol of movement, while Sébastien and his friends are stuck in the *banlieue*; Armand was a decorated war hero, and was elected to the *Académie des sciences morales et politiques* and the *Académie française* while Sébastien and his friends resent high society and loathe anyone in uniform. At the same time, however, Armand's participation in the Resistance during the Second World War and his detention by the Gestapo could provide interesting parallels with the boys' situations.

being, having difficulty to explain myself, to explain my choices, to choose between the straight path and wandering, between good and bad, agitation and calm, intelligence and stupidity. I've done some stupid things, but without ever having gone too far. I don't think I'm a bad guy. At any rate, my pals appreciate/like me.] Sébastien thus also demonstrates some self-awareness, but also a lot of ambivalence about himself and his choices.

Finally, he says, “Ma passion c’est le sport et le football. Je le pratique depuis mon plus jeune age et je crois que je suis assez doué. Je ne me vois pas faire autre chose, surtout qu’au point de vue scolaire, ce n’est vraiment pas ça” (15). [My passion is sports and soccer. I’ve played soccer from a very young age and I think that I’m rather talented. I don’t see myself doing something else, especially not from a scholastic point of view, because that’s sure not it.] He explains that he’s already repeated his CP, or *cours primaire*—the equivalent of first grade in the United States—and is now repeating his *troisième*, or freshman year of high school, and that though his mother is no longer expecting much from him at school, she forces him to attend (15).²⁸ Sébastien says that school is not his thing because there, “[i]ls ne font que mentir” (15) [all they do is lie]. The example he gives, claiming the incident brought home such falsification to him, is resignedly pessimistic about the system: “J’ai compris ça quand ils ont dit à mon pote Farid qu’il était un mec intelligent et que s’il était plus sérieux, il pourrait réussir. À n’importe quel « zinzin » ils osaient dire ça!” (15). [I understood that when they said to

²⁸ In fact, French development and recruitment centers draw in players at a young age and thereby frequently bypass the standard national education system the students would have otherwise gone through. Zidane himself is an example of this experience: AS Cannes brought him into their club when he was thirteen and a half. However, Abdallah argues that the centers still provide “le cursus d’intégration républicaine qui permet aux jeunes de dépasser leurs limites—limites physiques, mais aussi mentale et territoriales” (11).

my buddy Farid that he was an intelligent guy and that if he were more serious, he could succeed. They dared to say that to any loony!] In fact, Sébastien blames most of the problems of his short life on the national education system, complaining that the school he attends in his neighborhood is full of crazies and therefore destines him to fail, whereas the kids in a neighboring HLM are sent to a school downtown where economic groups are mixed and most of the students succeed in going to a general high school, all in contrast to the students at his college who are usually placed into technical tracks or apprenticeships (16). Thus soccer appears to be his only hope, and the star to which he has hitched his wagon. It seems to be the only thing in his life that offers the possibility of dreams and a positive experience, outside, perhaps, his friends.

And yet, soccer success does not seem to mean escape from the *banlieue* for Sébastien. Instead of big cars, rings, and houses, he dreams of revenge on all those who have wronged him; he wants to “casser la tête du flic qui m’a traité de « sale nègre » sans avoir de problème, rentrer dans les boîtes de nuit qui me refusaient l’entrée avant et faire caca dans leurs verres, acheter les gens, faire l’amour à l’oeil, avoir mon bac *Honoris Causa*, tout plaquer du jour au lendemain et aller en Australie raconter ma vie à un aborigène” (18) [break the head of the cop who called me a “dirty nigger” without having problems, get into the nightclubs that denied me entry before and poop in their glasses, buy people, make love while being watched, get my baccalaureate *Honoris Causa*, leave everything all of a sudden and go to Australia to tell my life story to an aborigine]. Even in his own dreams, then, Sébastien is more or less stuck in the *banlieue* although he does want to have the ability to leave at the drop of a hat for other destinations. What first comes to his mind, however, is violence and debauchery, and only as the list progresses

does he get to degrees and freedom. Even then, his understanding of freedom is somewhat limited: “Juste montrer que je suis là et que j’existe, être libre. Pas besoin de se lever le matin et de sucer son patron sans même s’être lavé les dents” (18). [Just to show that I’m here and that I exist, to be free. No need to get up in the morning and to suck off the boss without even brushing your teeth.] Liberty seems to be defined negatively, by contrasting it with an exploitative situation, and Sébastien seems unable to imagine possibilities outside of what he knows.

During his soccer team’s practices, however, Sébastien says he is at least able to forget some of what he knows: “Ici, pour la plupart d’entre nous, c’est l’endroit où on donne le maximum, où l’on oublie tout” (22). [Here, for most of us, is the place where we give the maximum, where we forget everything.] This work ethic is in stark contrast to the impression given of Sébastien’s school life wherein he tries to get by with the least possible effort. For him, school is also a reminder of how the social system is set up against him, as he mentioned before in his rant about lies and bussing, but soccer practice is otherwise. There, at least, Sébastien finds a semblance of meritocracy, or at least believes he does:

On se bat pour gagner sa place, on s’arrache comme des fous. Tous, nous voulons devenir professionnels, malgré nos dénégations. Dimanche, un match important nous attend contre notre dauphin au classement. L’équipe tourne bien, elle est en tête du championnat régional des « moins de 16 ans ». Il y a une très bonne ambiance entre nous. On vient tous d’horizons différents, mais on a su se comprendre grâce à un ballon, et le temps passe à blaguer. (23)
[We fight each other for a spot on the team, we tear at each other like crazy people. All of us, we want to become professionals, despite our denials. Sunday, we have an important game against our heir apparent in the rankings. The team works well, it’s at the top of the regional championship of “under-16.” There’s a really good

atmosphere among us. We all come from different places, but we discovered how to understand each other thanks to a ball, and the time passes in joking.]

In this case, Sébastien buys into and seems to promote the ideology of understanding and solidarity through sports, with the caveat that all the players are fighting to become professionals and not simply playing for the joy of it.

Yet even in this more or less accepting ambiance, Sébastien can be rebellious and proud, sensitive to disrespect. He says that he likes his coach, Paul, who is a good coach, but that they still often butt heads, including this day when Paul yelled at him, perhaps with reason, and yet Sébastien got annoyed and talked back: “Je suis trop fier pour accepter qu’on m’engueule. Il pourrait me prendre dans un coin, me faire des remontrances, j’accepterais sûrement. Mais là, devant les copains, ce n’est pas possible” (23). [I’m too proud to accept that someone yells at me. He could have taken me into a corner, remonstrated with me, I surely would have accepted that. But there, in front of my friends, that wasn’t possible.] He knows that this attitude is stupid, that proving something to others can ruin a person’s life, and that his lippiness could come back to bite him, but he seems unable to help his bravado.

Sébastien then introduces the reader to his teammate Jean, who he describes as “tout le contraire de moi; ce que je voudrais bien être en fait: calme et serein” (24) [the exact opposite of me; what I would really like to be in fact: calm and serene]. Jean and Sébastien share the same birthday and even play the same position on the team, although Jean is right-footed and Sébastien left. Jean is the team captain, a boy who doesn’t exaggerate or brag, a serious person and good student, a reasonable person who is respected because he respects others (24). Sébastien reproaches Jean for being too nice

and not egotistical enough, because instead of scoring himself he passes to another player who then gets the glory (25). Sébastian warns him that this characteristic could be a handicap for him in the end.

At the end of this practice, which happens to be on a Thursday evening, coach Paul calls both Jean and Sébastian into his office to tell them that for the match on Sunday, scouts who have been keeping an eye on them from Monaco, Nantes, and Auxerre will be present and that the two have a great chance in front of them to join one of those clubs in their development centers (25). Paul then lets Jean leave, and gives Sébastian a pep talk, telling him he is the best player he has ever seen but that he needs to get himself together off the field, clean up his act, and have some self-confidence. Instead of thanking Paul as he wishes to do—giving him a hug, verbalizing his thanks—Sébastien simply says, “Oui, Coach” (26-27). At this early point in the novel, the stage is set. The reader knows that Sébastian and his friends have to make it to Sunday and their big game, but that they are attracted to the violence, alcohol, and *conneries* rife in their *banlieue*. They loathe the social and economic system and their anger and hatred take on monstrous forms. Jean is not the only counterexample to their attitudes: Sébastian shares his bedroom with a Rwandan refugee named Mobi whom his mother has taken in. Mobi survived the war but saw his brother and sister killed, which he says broke him into pieces. However, Sébastian notes, “Maintenant, il essaie d’oublier et de survivre comme il peut. C’est drôle, je ne vois pas de haine sur son visage et il parle de son pays, malgré tout, avec amour” (47-48). [Now, he is trying to forget and to survive as he can. It’s funny, I don’t see any hatred in his face and he speaks about his country, despite everything, with love.] Sébastian obviously has difficulty understanding Mobi’s attitude,

but they are friends nonetheless and stay up all Thursday night talking about Africa, AIDS, and governments (49). Their interactions show that Sébastien is able to empathize, to try to help people—he loans Mobi some of his clothes and gives him money for a haircut—and to discuss, at least at a rudimentary level, issues outside himself.

Predictably after this late-night discussion, Sébastien does not make it to school on time the next day, Friday, and events go downhill from there. According to him, conditions at school are horrible, although he tries to game the system by lying to his teachers and his social worker and cheating; he recounts battles among neighbors, including one in which a friend, Youssef, was killed; he makes fun of his teachers. On Saturday, he runs some errands, stops by his sisters' house, and meets an EMT there. Sébastien is suspicious as to the motives of the young, black “ambulancier” towards his sisters and decides to provoke the man by telling him that in his HLM, firemen are welcomed “d’une étrange façon” [in a strange manner] and that people in uniform are often imbeciles who need to wear a costume to exist (93). His words fail to rile the EMT, who explains to Sébastien that in his country calling emergency numbers is useless and that his only aim is to save people. He says that he would have preferred that Sébastien suggest returning to his homeland to use his knowledge and skills to help people in difficulty there, but understands that Sébastien is only sixteen (93-4). The EMT’s words seem to be presented in the same light as Mobi’s, both men having come from and shared situations that could give Sébastien greater perspective and alternate attitudes towards his own situation. Interestingly, Sébastien remarks that the EMT’s comments

calm him down, and in a bit of foreshadowing he also notes that he will always remember the young man's words and face (94).

Later in the day, Sébastien eats with his friend Christophe's girlfriend, and discusses sports with Jean. Despite all the problems that he has thought about during the day—racism, immigration, poverty, handicaps, money—he and Jean talk soccer and decide that the sport will save the world:

Nous nous promettons d'être des stars, des vedettes, de faire bondir les foules. De devenir les plus grands joueurs de la planète. De gagner des Coupes du monde et des Coupes d'Europe. On dit que notre football ramènera la paix à Kaboul, unira les catholiques et protestants à Dublin, redonnera du charme à *Elephant Man*,...et ressuscitera Lady Diana. (122)

[We promise each other to be stars, leading figures, to make crowds leap to their feet. To become the biggest players on the planet. To win World Cups and European Cups. We say that our soccer will bring peace back to Kabul, unite the Catholics and the Protestants in Dublin, give the Elephant Man back his charm,...and resuscitate Lady Diana.]

The boys' dreams start out big, but somewhat reasonable, and then devolve into the ridiculous. Nonetheless, they are happily dreaming, and have encountered hope, that rare visitor to the *banlieue*, as Thuram put it, and they are united in their soccer-provided fantasies. However, Jean decides to see his girlfriend that night instead of going out as Sébastien invites him to do, and these decisions prove to have drastic consequences.

Before heading out from his apartment, Sébastien packs his kitbag and says a prayer—the first time he has prayed since asking God to burn down his school. He promises that if he has a good game the next day, he will stop drinking and partying, and that if God does not want him to have a good game, to let him go to sleep that night and never wake up (125). He says:

Je prie pour ma mère, pour qu'elle trouve un mari gentil, c'est très important. Pour mes soeurs, mon frère, les vieux, les jeunes, tout Louis Armand. Ceux qui me font rêver habitent en bas de chez moi, dans la chambre à côté, Dieu. Alors faut pas que tu fasses comme s'ils n'étaient pas là. Je te prie pour le monde entier et tous ceux qui me connaissent. Je veux réussir pour eux. Il faut donc que tu me laisses faire un beau match. (125-26)

[I pray for my mother, so that she finds a nice husband, that's very important. For my sisters, my brother, the old, the young, all of Louis Armand. Those who make me dream live just below me, in the room next door, God. So you shouldn't act as if they weren't there. I pray to you for the whole world and all those who know me. I want to succeed for them. It's necessary therefore that you let me play a beautiful game.]

Once again, Sébastien is shown to be hanging all of his hopes on soccer. He genuinely loves his family and friends, and cares about his neighborhood, but to try to save everyone with one good game is too much to ask of a sport. The deck is stacked against Sébastien.

After his prayer, Sébastien heads over to meet Farid at Pierre-Alexis's apartment, where they begin drinking while watching a soccer game on television. Pierre-Alexis brags about his five year-old brother's soccer skills and how the child will eventually bring home millions when he plays for a big club (126-27). Once more, soccer is set up as the primary way to succeed and earn money. During the course of the conversation, one of the group in the apartment wonders why such and such a player is even still playing, noting that the player has already earned at least a million francs. The youth claims, "Je touche un million, je vais à Tahiti, j'ouvre un bar et une discothèque, comme ça je danse en étant ivre. J'insulte tout le monde et je me casse. Déjà, je jette ma copine ou je la refais de partout jusqu'à ce qu'elle devienne aussi belle que Sissi l'impératrice"

(132).²⁹ [I earn a million, I go to Tahiti, I open a bar and a nightclub, so I can dance while drunk. I insult everyone and leave. Already, I dump my girlfriend or I have her get plastic surgery all over until she becomes as beautiful as Sissi the empress.] While not as vengeful or violent as Sébastien’s fantasies of the privileges afforded by riches, this particular dream does echo the other boy’s. It also shows a certain lack of financial savvy as well as a lack of respect for women. From there, however, the conversation turns to race as another of the group comments, “Heureusement qu’il y a des Noirs et des Arabes pour les faire jouer les Français!” (132). [Happily there are Blacks and Arabs to make the French play.] Implicit in this comment is the perception that blacks and arabs are not French, but that French people are unable to play soccer without them.³⁰ Another replies, “Ouais, tes Noirs et tes Arabes, ils sont bien gentils, mais c’est qui à la fin qui soulève la coupe? C’est Deschamps. Coupe du Monde, c’est Deschamps. C’est pas un Noir ou un Arabe” (132). [Yeah, your Blacks and your Arabs, they’re nice, but who is it who in the end lifts the Cup? It’s Deschamps. World Cup, it’s Deschamps. It’s not a Black or an Arab.] This wry comment on the 1998 French World Cup victory points out that though the team may have been diverse, the leader was the white *français de souche* Didier Deschamps and it was, indeed, he who first got to lift the Cup in triumph, thereby perhaps undermining the narrative of the new multiracial France. The comment also points out how, across sports, racized players tend to be ghettoized into certain positions

²⁹ While Sissi was the nickname of Elisabeth of Bavaria, Empress of Austria and Queen of Hungary, and is the name of a Cuban model *née* Isabel Fleitas, the reference could also be to Sissi the Brazilian women’s soccer star. She is often referred to as the Queen of Soccer, and rose to global prominence in the 1991, 1995, and 1999 Women’s World Cups as well as the 1996 and 2000 Olympics wherein she represented Brazil. In 1999, she earned FIFA’s Golden Boot Award, FIFA’s Silver Ball Award, and was voted the second best (female) player in the world and the best female player in South America. While the WUSA was still functioning in the United States, she was a star for the San Jose CyberRays (Fernandez).

³⁰ One is reminded of stereotypes about the physical abilities of blacks and whites in the United States, concretized in the title of the basketball film *White Men Can’t Jump*.

that tend not to be positions of power or decision.³¹ Obviously, Zidane is an exception to this generalization, and the trend is starting to change, but the boys continue to joke that maybe they have seen blacks and Arabs hefting Cup trophies, but these were “La coupe d’Afrique, du Val-d’Oise ou des Yvelines, soulevée par un Noir de trente ans dans la catégorie des moins de quinze ans” (132). [The Africa Cup, the Val d’Oise Cup, or the Yvelines Cup, raised by a thirty year old Black playing in the under fifteen category.] Black and arab champions are thus seen as limited to lesser championships and achievements, possibly gotten through fraud.³² The youths discussing soccer and the politics of inclusion within the sports system therefore have not bought into the narrative

³¹ Maguire examines examples of racial stacking in British soccer and rugby teams and how non-white athletes are more frequently found in positions of non-centrality, positions that demand less leadership, and those that are perceived to have less influence on the flow of the game. Lanfranchi explores how in France the “discourse on African players is binomial: gift and immaturity. They use instinctive qualities but easily give up” (“Migration” 75). He states that this “restrictive identity of the footballer from Africa (or of African origins) is evident, in view of the careers they have in the football world” (ibid). Maguire notes also how a similar situation of stacking persists in North America within baseball, basketball, and American football (97-99), and for Australian aborigines playing rugby league (113). From a structural standpoint, the American NFL is particularly bad in this respect: in 2007, while about 70 percent of the players in the NFL were black, only six out of the 32 teams had black head coaches, and there were only three black general managers (Zirin). Even worse, in the NCAA only six of the 117 head football coaches were African American (ibid). While among NBA players 75 percent were black in 2005, only 11 of the 30 coaches were black (ibid). The MLB has only two black managers, but fewer than nine percent of its players are black; meanwhile, the demand for Latin American talent is growing and correspondingly there are five managers of Latino descent (ibid). In France, the number of black athletes has risen over the past fifty years or so, but similarly to American and British sports, the “surreprésentation relative des athlètes prend ici l’allure d’une véritable illusion du nombre, puisqu’ils sont quasiment absents dans les postes de direction, de responsabilité dans les clubs et dans les instances fédérales” (Boli) [relative over-representation of athletes takes on here the air of a veritable numeric illusion, since they are practically absent in positions of direction, of responsibility in the clubs and in federal instances]. There are exceptions, of course: Marcel Desailly, of Ghanian descent, was the captain of the French national soccer team during the 2004 European Cup. Nevertheless, Boli notes that in 1995 only Jean Tigana represented minorities as a coach in premier division soccer, while in 2005 there were no minority head coaches in that league although there was one minority assistant coach. In French rugby union, the exception of Serge Blanco confirms the rule for Boli.

³² In *Le ventre de l’Atlantique*, a Senegalese character does indeed have his birth records falsified to be able to go to a training center in France. I do not have data on how common this practice actually is, however.

of integration in sports, though this does not seem to temper their desires and dreams very much.³³

After leaving Pierre-Alexis' apartment, Sébastian and his group go to his sisters' party and then head to a Parisian nightclub. They travel in style—Djamel, an acquaintance who Sébastian describes as hyper-violent psychopath (128), is driving a BMW—and Sébastian notes, “Nous sommes tous dans la BMW avec de l'alcool et des armes; prêts à vivre une grande aventure humaine. Ce soir, tout le monde doit savoir l'existence que l'on mène. On boit, on discute. Je me dis que mes potes seraient capables de me tuer si je déménageais à Mermoz” (146). [We're all in the BMW with alcohol and weapons; ready to live a big human adventure. This evening, everybody must know the existence that we lead. We drink, we discuss. I tell myself that my buddies would be capable of killing me if I moved to Mermoz {a rival neighborhood}.] This kind of desire for recognition has shown itself throughout the novel, and is here explicit. Unfortunately, at this moment, that recognition would seem to come from violence.

The boys are refused entry to the first club they try, so they pick up some English girls and get into a second club where they buy three bottles of whiskey and get very drunk (150-52).³⁴ At four in the morning, Sébastian begins to feel ill, and reflects that “Dès le début, je savais que je finirais par dire: « J'aurais dû écouter Jean »” (154). [From the beginning, I knew that I would end up saying, I should have listened to Jean.]

³³ Maxime Traveret writes about how soccer played at the base of *banlieue* high rises is often as much a gesture of resistance as a means to social integration, and the youths' somewhat ambivalent attitude towards organized sports might reflect this cultural practice.

³⁴ While Ryam does not mention race as a motivation for the bouncers to deny the boys entry, Esmeralda notes that “la pratique de *la refoule* à la porte des discothèques” [the practice of sorting at the door of nightclubs] is common and commonly done on the basis of physiognomy (151).

At five a.m., the boys return to the BMW, still drinking, and spend an hour trying to get the car to start, two of them finally hiking five kilometers to get oil and gasoline (155).

Just before they reach Louis Armand, they decide to “s’amuser” (155) [amuse themselves] by blocking an ambulance from getting in front of them at a red light; the ambulance honks and flashes its lights to no avail. Finally, the driver gets out, followed by none other than the EMT Sébastien had met earlier that day, who tells the boys to knock it off, that there is a life in the balance (155). Sébastien tries to get his friends to cool it, but Christophe gets in the EMT’s face, asking him who he thinks he is: “Il lui lance qu’il fait pitié dans cet uniforme, qu’il devrait avoir honte d’être noir et de travailler pour ce pays, que les traîtres comme lui ça devrait aider les gens à Mermoz et pas à Louis-Armand” (155-56). [He spits that he’s piteous in that uniform, that he should be ashamed to be black and to work for this country, that traitors like him should go help people in Mermoz and not in Louis Armand.] When the EMT responds verbally, Christophe gets out of the car and the fight gets under way, the four boys against the ambulance driver and three EMTs. Sébastien says, “Je me rappelle en piétiner un à terre, en étrangler un autre. Mes trois autres compères sont eux aussi très violents. Ils continuent à taper, redoublent leurs coups, comme s’ils cherchaient à tuer, à supprimer leur vie” (156). [I remember kicking one on the ground, strangling another. My three companions are also being very violent. They continue to strike, redoubling their blows, as if they were looking to kill, to end their life.] Finally, the beating stops and the boys speed away, quite proud of themselves (156).

When Djamel drops off Sébastien, Christophe, and Farid at Pierre-Alexis’s, Sébastien begins to realize what they have done and starts to panic (157). The

needlessness and absurdity of their actions sink in and he awakes to the possible implications of their battle. Shortly after, at seven o'clock in the morning, Christophe's phone rings. It is his father, informing him that his mother has died of heart failure because the ambulance was late arriving due to an attack on it (158). An hour later, at eight o'clock, Christophe, Farid, and Sébastian are sitting at the base of Christophe's apartment tower because Christophe is afraid to go upstairs and face his father, when a little boy comes by and tells them that two police cars are patrolling the area (159). At that point, "Christophe sort son pistolet qui le rendait si fier, et il se met une balle dans la tête" (160). [Christophe took out his pistol that made him so proud, and he put a bullet in his brain.] It is a bitter irony that his object of pride is also his means of dying. Sébastian panics and when the police and the firemen arrive, he is yelling over and over again, "Maman t'es où? je suis devenu fou!" (162). [Mom, where are you? I've gone crazy!] As a result of their actions, Djamel, Farid, and Sébastian all spend a year in prison; Sébastian never goes back to school, his soccer career is basically over, and he spends twenty days in a mental hospital for a breakdown from which he never quite fully recovers (164-65).

On the other hand, Sébastian's friend Jean has the game of his life that Sunday and goes to the *centre de formation* where unfortunately he fails during that last steps because he is too nice, according to Sébastian, and keeps passing the ball instead of showing off his own skills (162). Jean ends up living in the south of France, playing third division soccer and teaching (166). As it turns out, only one member of the team Sébastian used to play with ever makes it to the Première Division (168). Since neither Sébastian, the rebellious but tremendously gifted player, nor Jean, the good student and

likewise talented player, can make it to the professional leagues much less stardom, the novel seems to suggest that something is not working. For the character of Sébastien, that something is life in the *banlieue*, national education, failed social initiatives of integration, and hitching all his dreams to only soccer, all issues that Thuram points out in his preface to the novel. On the flip side, for the character of Jean being a kind and generous team player backfires, which suggests that the broken something is a soccer system wherein the idea of team sports and fair play are trumped by star power, showmanship, and cutthroat competition even at lower levels. Of course, both characters still bear responsibility for their actions and choices, but *Banlieue noire* suggests that they are also limited by their environment and that the dream of making it big in sports comes true only very, very rarely.

IV. *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*

Fatou Diome's novel similarly underscores the rarity of smashing success for soccer hopefuls, but she focuses on the situation of players from developing countries. Many of her characters, on the margins of the so-called Western world, have distorted visions influenced by neo-colonialism of the opportunities available there, visions that result in a kind of blind worship of all things French. The opening pages of *Le ventre de l'Atlantique* introduce these themes of the novel. First, there is the topic of soccer fans whose devotion crosses into the religious: in the very first paragraph, Salie, the narrator, is watching the semi-final match between Italy and Holland in the 2000 European Cup, and as Holland threatens to score, she thinks, "Oh! mon Dieu, faites quelque chose! Je ne crie pas, je vous en supplie. Faites quelque chose si vous êtes le Tout-Puissant!" (Diome

11). [Oh! my God, do something! I'm not yelling, I'm begging of you. Do something if you're the All-Powerful!] On a deeper level, her questioning of God's omnipotence links to age-old questions about religion such as if God is all powerful, why is there evil in the world and why do bad things happen? Salie's descriptions of the difficulties of village life on her home island of Niodior, off the coast of Senegal, bring such problems into view. Furthermore, in light of her descriptions of deep-rooted social and economic problems, if God were working on those issues, why would such a supreme being be concerned with a soccer match? Secondly, there is the idea of the "bug mental," as presented by Salie when she tries to explain to her readers why she is watching soccer when she does not even like the sport that much nor the particular star, Maldini, for whom she is cheering: "Alors, puisque je n'écris pas une lettre d'amour à Maldini, pourquoi je vous raconte tout ça? Eh bien, parce que tous les virus ne mènent pas à l'hôpital. Il y en a qui se contentent d'agir en nous comme dans un programme informatique, et le bug mental, ça existe" (12). [So then, since I'm not writing a love letter to Maldini, why am I telling you all this? Well, because all viruses don't lead to the hospital. There are those that are content to act on us as on a computer program, and mental bugs do exist.] These mental bugs, foibles of the human race, are exposed throughout the novel. Finally, there is the status of the people of the island of Niodior, off the coast of Senegal: "Là-bas, depuis des siècles, des hommes sont pendus à un bout de terre, l'île de Niodior. Accrochés à la gencive de l'Atlantique, tels des résidus de repas, ils attendent, résignés, que la prochaine vague les emporte ou leur laisse la vie sauve" (12-13). [Over there, for centuries, people have been hanging from a bit of earth, the island of Niodior. Hanging on to the gums of the Atlantic, like bits of residue from a

meal, they wait, resigned, for the next wave to sweep them away or leave them alive.] The image of these people as forgotten food in the teeth of the Atlantic works on a few levels: they are the neglected of the world, on the margin both geographically and economically; and they are expendable, human refuse to be washed away at the world's will. The image of the Atlantic swallowing up African bodies also recalls the horrors of the slave trade and particularly the Middle Passage when those who were sick, had died, or were thought of as too much ballast were dumped into the ocean by those in charge of the slave-carrying vessels. Images of slavery recur in the novel not only in relation to the world economy but to soccer and illegal immigrants' situations in their adopted countries.

The vectors of fanatic devotion, mental bugs, and marginality converge in the person of Madické, Salie's half-brother, who still lives in the village on Niodior that Salie left over ten years ago to go live in France. Madické is young, impassioned for soccer and particularly for the Italian player Maldini, and desperately wants to leave Niodior to play soccer in Europe. Ultimately, he would like to have the chance to watch and possibly meet the AC Milan star he so admires, so he is willing to settle for playing for a French team and thereby be closer to his hero (Diome 115-16). For much of the novel, Madické refuses to listen to either his sister or his soccer coach and tutor, Monsieur Ndétare, about the perils of emigration to France, especially as an illegal immigrant. Madické's *bug mental* is not simply about soccer, however, but also about the colonization of the mind, the exploitation of Africa, Africa's position in the globalized marketplace, embourgeoisement, and ways out of poverty. In turn, these are all mixed up with soccer.

Madické's friends venerate French soccer clubs and the French national team because they venerate all things French, prompting Salie to note:

Pourtant, la télévision montrait d'autres grands clubs occidentaux. Mais rien à faire. Après la colonisation historiquement reconnue, règne maintenant une sorte de colonisation mentale: les jeunes joueurs vénéraient et vénèrent encore la France. A leurs yeux, tout ce qui est enviable vient de France. (52-53)
[Yet, the television also showed other big western clubs. But nothing doing. After the historically recognized colonization now reigns a sort of mental colonization: the young players have venerated and still venerate France. In their eyes, everything that is enviable comes from France.]

The young men Salie describes clearly display the symptoms of the "bug mental" of mental colonisation, attributing greatness to the former (physical) colonizer and everything coming from it. Because of this bug and their own circumstances in Senegal, they want to get to France, but, "pour des petits prolétaires analphabètes comme eux, il n'y avait pas trente-six chemins possibles" (91) [for little illiterate proletarians like them, there weren't many ways of going about that]. Soccer presents itself as the best solution in their eyes, but much to the chagrin of M. Ndétare, whose Coubertin-inspired rants about loving sports for sports' sake earn him only accusations of ignorance and classism (92-92). M. Ndétare's cautionary tale about another young soccer hopeful named Moussa provides insight into the novel's analysis of soccer and its role in the global marketplace.

Moussa begins life on Niodior, but as the only male child in a poor family, quits high school due to lack of funds and the need to provide for his family (95). He moves to the nearby city of M'Bour where he finds work as a fisherman and also begins to play soccer with the city's squad: "Très rapidement, il se fit remarquer par Jean-Charles

Sauveur, un Français qui se disait chasseur de talents pour le compte d'un grand club français. Qui a dit que le bon Dieu est sourd?" (96). [Very quickly, he was noticed by Jean-Charles Sauveur, a Frenchman who claimed to be a talent scout on the payroll of a big French club. Who said that the good Lord was deaf?] Diome's choice of name for the character of the talent scout is both telling and ultimately ironic: in French, "sauveur" has the meaning of both a life-saver or -preserver, but also when capitalized the sense of Saviour or Redeemer. The Frenchman, and through him France—and one could probably assume the white man, too—comes to the "rescue" of the African; one is reminded of France's *mission civilisatrice* when the country began to colonize other parts of the world.³⁵ In this instance, minds are swayed by the promise of a better life, of stardom, of a "salaire mirobolant" (96) [staggering salary]. Sauveur pays for Moussa's plane ticket; forks out for a new birth certificate so that Moussa, actually aged 20, is eligible to join the junior team at the training center; and he even seems to grease the palms of various bureaucrats to faster obtain Moussa's visa (96). It is not too much of a stretch to say that Moussa is bought.³⁶

Yet the young man does not quite seem to realize the weight of his situation in the beginning. He still sees Sauveur as a savior: "Sous l'oeil paternel de Jean-Charles Sauveur, Moussa se sentait investi d'une mission sacrée. Il ne devait pas faillir, Sauveur attendait impatientement qu'il confirme ses talents pour rentabiliser son investissement"

³⁵ In his examination of African soccer players' migrations, John Bale likewise points out how these migrations "follow predictable patterns of former colonial relations" (234), and also how the "systematization of recruitment, migration and work of African footballers can be read as a form of neocolonialism and exploitation in the well worn European traditions of scrambling for Africa" (237). He also draws a parallel between the European farm teams in Africa that cultivate and process players and "the plantation system of colonial Africa" (237). His reading makes explicit the treatment of African bodies as materials to be refined and shipped abroad—as commodities (238).

³⁶ Esmeralda ties the practice of scouting for soccer talent in the *banlieue* to the practice in Africa, and both to the slave trade, as Diome does (146).

(97). [Under the paternal gaze of Jean-Charles Sauveur, Moussa felt invested with a sacred mission. He must not fail, Sauveur was waiting impatiently for him to confirm his talent in order to make his investment profitable.] The first sentence harks back to colonial discourse and the French construction of Frenchmen as paternal caretakers of the child-like Africans and the *mission civilisatrice* that was seen by some French as a sacred duty. The second phrase, however, emphasizes the economic aspects of this mission and sets up Moussa as a mere monetary adventure, not a human being. A European investment in a black body clearly recalls, once again, slavery.

Moussa realizes this commodification of players as he watches the soccer market on television at the center:³⁷

Moussa s'indignait de ce marchandage de joueurs et finissait par délirer sur les prix faramineux des transferts: le Real Madrid a acheté ce gars à tant de millions de francs français! La vache! Combien cela peut-il bien représenter en francs CFA? Au moins de quoi s'acheter cinq villas avec piscine sur la côte dakaroise! Même s'il s'amusait à calculer en s'imaginant au coeur d'une telle transaction, ce procédé d'esclavagiste ne lui plaisait guère. Mais il n'avait pas le choix, il faisait maintenant partie du bétail sportif à évaluer. Moussa savait qu'à défaut de se faire engager dans le club qui misait sur lui, il devrait lui-même rembourser à Sauveur les frais engagés, billet d'avion, pots-de-vin, frais d'hébergement, de formation, etc. (97-98)
[Moussa was made indignant by this bargaining over players and ended up delirious over the mind-boggling prices of transfers: Real Madrid bought some guy for so many millions of French francs! Man! How much could that be in francs CFA? At least enough to buy oneself five villas with pools on the Dakar coast! Even if he had fun making calculations while imagining himself at the heart of such a transaction, this slave-driver process didn't please him at all. But he didn't have a choice, he now was part of the sporting cattle to be evaluated. Moussa knew that if he

³⁷ The *mercado*, or transfers, occur twice a year—in winter, usually during the month of January; and in summer from the end of the Champions' League, usually June, until the end of August. During this time, teams can trade, buy, or sell players.

wasn't hired by the club that was eying him, he would have to reimburse Sauveur himself for the costs incurred, the plane ticket, the bribes, housing costs, costs of training, etc.]

Moussa sees clearly at this moment that player recruitment and formation, hiring and transferring, is remarkably similar to the slave trade. Men are reduced to bodies to be bought and sold based on physical exertion, and profits are made off of those physical performances.³⁸ The choice of “procédé d’esclavagiste” and “bétail sportif” to describe the international soccer recruiting machine makes the anecdote’s point clear. Finally, even if the soccer stars are getting paid a lot of money for their trouble, these salaries are obscene compared with the conditions of Moussa’s homeland of Niodior, as argued in Salie’s rants against Coca-Cola and Miko earlier in the book, and the ridiculousness of buying five villas when his family can’t even eat regularly. The fact that Moussa is expected to pay back Sauveur if he fails to make the team shows the whole recruitment scheme to be indentured servitude.

At the recruitment and training center in France, Moussa discovers the hardships of both winter weather and the racism of his fellow recruits, who are, for the most part, white (99). In stark contrast to the image of the French national team of 1998 and to the myth of integration through team sports, “Au centre, l’esprit d’équipe, on s’en torchait” (99). [At the center, team spirit, one wiped one’s ass with it/didn’t give a damn about it.] Gone are Coubertin’s ideals of sacrificing oneself for one’s team, of soccer as a moral finishing school and social apprenticeship. Instead, each player competes against the

³⁸ Complaints have been made about the American National Football League’s “combine,” during which potential players are stripped to their underwear and paraded in front of team recruiters and coaches (Silver). Thomas P. Oates reads the combine in terms of this objectification of players, and pays close attention to power dynamics and how these are embedded in the phenomenon of primarily white coaches and owners looking at the primarily dark bodies of the players who are stripped, measured, and paraded before them. In his reading, the homoerotic is closely tied with the history and ongoing complexity of American race relations.

other recruits for the few open spots on the squad, meaning that “Les quelques places du grand club s’arrachaient à coups de crampons et d’intimidations” (99). [The few places in the big club were fought over/gotten with rakes of the cleats and intimidation.] Formerly instruments of unity, cleated soccer boots are now tools of warfare used to cut down the competition and secure personal gains. Moussa is unnerved by such competition, unused to the lack of camaraderie and mutual respect. The narrator notes, “[L]à-bas, chez lui, on lui avait appris qu’il ne fallait pas envier, jalouser, ni même rivaliser, que seul Dieu accorde à chacun ce qui lui est dû dans l’existence” (99). [Over there, in his homeland, he had been taught that one must not be envious or jealous, or even engage in rivalry, that God granted to each what he was due in his existence.] The cooperation and resignation thereby implied as existing in *niodiorois* society is constructed in opposition to the cutthroat capitalistic world of French soccer recruitment camps. The world Moussa came from seems idyllic next to the competitive, individualistic one he now finds himself in.³⁹

It is not simply the fact of such vicious competition that disconcerts Moussa, but its form. The narrator writes that Moussa loses his abilities when his teammates yell at him, and lists a full page of insults from them that Moussa endured.⁴⁰ They call him “négro” and Tarzan; tell him the soccer ball isn’t “une noix de coco;” and doubt his knowledge of Paris and who Pigalle was and subsequently mock him by saying, “Me dis pas que ça discute sculpture sous les bananiers!” (99-100) [don’t tell me they discuss sculpture under the banana trees!]. The irony, of course, is that Moussa is correct about la rue Pigalle being named for the eighteenth-century sculptor Jean-Baptiste Pigalle. Further irony is to be found in Moussa’s daydreams of scoring glorious goals and how he

³⁹ Of course, the reader knows from Salie’s descriptions of life on Niodior how difficult it really can be.

⁴⁰ Bale cites some studies that show the unfortunate commonality of experiences such as Moussa’s with culture shock, abuse, and racism in development centers (239).

would celebrate these feats: “Il s’était même inventé une pose victorieuse avant les glorieux acteurs du Mondial 1998” (101). [He even invented a pose for himself before the glorious actors of the 1998 World Cup.] The 1998 French team, as discussed earlier, was widely construed to be representative of a new, diverse, tolerant France, so the narrator’s allusion to the team in the context of Moussa’s exclusion on the basis of his race and nationality highlights how the *black-blanc-beur* slogan rang, and continues to ring, hollow for many players in France. For Moussa, the dream is deferred.

In the end, Jean-Charles Sauveur proves to be a false savior after all. When Moussa fails to progress adequately, he is cut from the training center and Sauveur demands that his investments be repaid. Since Moussa’s visa has expired, Sauveur sends him to work illegally on a ship run by a friend of his who will send Moussa’s salary directly to Sauveur until the debts are paid off (102). Moussa has one night to pack and think about his situation, during which he notes that Sauveur has even taken the masks he brought with him that decorated his room. It is this realization that seems to shake him out of his stupor: “Amer, devant ces murs vides, l’infortuné sembla soudain se réveiller d’une longue torpeur: « Merde, il m’a piqué tous mes masques sacrés, se dit-il. Ce gars est un vrai rapace. [»]” (102-3). [Bitter, before those empty walls, the unfortunate one seemed suddenly to wake up from a long torpor: Shit, he stole all my sacred masks, he said to himself. This guy is a real vulture.] Sauveur’s theft of the masks—probably as a means of appropriating some sort of payment from Moussa—is a kind of sacrilege, at the least disrespecting the context of Moussa’s possessions and possibly even turning sacred objects into a form of base currency. At another level, Sauveur’s grab symbolizes an erasure of the past, of tradition and history. This symbolism dovetails with colonial

imaginings of Africa as a continent without history, a place ripe for the taking by the colonizer.⁴¹ In another possible intertextual reference, Ousmane Sembène used mask imagery in his film *La Noire de...* to make similar points about the possession and appropriation of history and culture when Senegalese Diouanna's white French employers try to take the mask she has brought with her.

Moussa's shock at Sauveur's audacity and his trepidation about the labor arrangement give him pause. He thinks about running away, but is kept from doing so by a letter sent to him by his father that urges him to get a real job instead of playing soccer, to not be so individualistic, and to think of his family (103-4). Moussa's sense of duty to his family propels him onto the boat despite his strong suspicion that "ces gens-là vont me tuer à la tâche et ne me donneront jamais un centime, j'en suis certain" (103) [these guys will kill me with work and will never give me a cent, I'm sure of it]. Once more, images of slavery are called up as Moussa is essentially trapped on this boat, fed badly, and worked hard (105). He receives no pay himself, and his co-workers on the ship are referred to as his "compagnons de galère" (106) [fellow galley workers]. When he takes advantage of a layover in Marseille to see the town, he is stopped by police and asked for his papers. Moussa replies that his boss on the boat has his papers, but when the police escort him back to the ship, his boss denies ever knowing him (106). He is jailed in miserable conditions and eventually deported (107-9).⁴²

⁴¹ Anne McClintock's introduction to *Imperial Leather* analyzes one such colonial instance of the feminization and penetration of Africa by European males. Likewise, Christopher Miller, in *Blank Darkness*, points out that Africa was conceived of as a nullity, its people as incapable of thought or civilization (16-18).

⁴² The expulsion of soccer recruits brought to France and then let go, left with an expired tourist visa, was made visible in 1999 when Serge Labri, an eighteen year old Ivoirien who had been let go by the Nantes club and therefore no longer had the necessary papers, was deported. His situation led to an investigation by the Minister of Youth and Sports and eventually to some legislative changes (Abdallah 13). The United Kingdom House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Employment, the United Nations

Dominic Thomas analyzes the trajectory of another character who emigrates to France in this novel and ultimately draws his experience and Moussa's together:

The immigrant's body and the slavery topos are common features of Diome's text as she establishes further transhistorical links pertaining to the relations between Africa and France and the ongoing problem of exploitation in the competitive labor markets. Arguably though, while both the slave and the migrant worker are reduced to bodily labor, a distinction can be drawn given that the slave's body does not function as capital precisely because slavery is unpaid labor. Colonial ideology is central to this construction given that it operates as an indicator as to how raw materials and labor have served the interests of European market economies in which Africans functioned as physical laborers, a topos that is recuperated transcolonially as the immigrant's body is now also a disposable commodity. (253)

Moussa's experience never gets far beyond what could be characterized as slavery, and in the end when he is deported, his body takes on other meanings: "In this instance the African body as a commodity is declared undesirable in France now that it is marked as clandestine" (Thomas 255). Through the stories of *l'homme de Barbès*—the other migrant from Niodior—and Moussa, Diome indicts the exploitation of African laborers that has long existed, and she draws on multiple intertextual references to argue that the situation has not much changed.⁴³ Thomas argues, "The fact that such narratives have existed since the colonial period and survived into the contemporary era is an indicator as to the magnitude of the task of reconditioning with which they [African youth] are confronted" (255-56). He claims that "the central problem facing the African youth [is...] the lack of economic and social opportunities on a continent that continues to be

Commission on Human Rights, and the Sport and Freedom Association have also all conducted investigations into the situation of child footballers from Africa in Europe that often borders on, if not outright is, trafficking (Bale 240-41).

⁴³ Thomas pays careful attention to these references in his analysis of *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*.

relegated to the margins of the global economy” (256), and that as a result, these youth are easily seduced by the promises of, for example, France. They migrate but often become disillusioned. In Moussa’s case, his return to Niodior was a great disappointment, but he bravely shared his experience with his family. His bravery is not well rewarded: his family shames him, his community marginalizes him, and in the end he commits suicide (Diome 109-14).

Monsieur Ndétare tries to use Moussa’s sad story to dissuade other young men from following in his footsteps, young men who, “prétextant leur passion pour le football, se laissaient aveugler par la chimère tricolore” (114) [using their passion for soccer as an excuse, let themselves be blinded by the tricolored chimera]. Ndétare cautions them against this seduction: “Méfiez-vous, petits [...] La France, ce n’est pas le paradis. Ne vous laissez pas prendre dans les filets de l’émigration” (114). [Beware, little ones... France is not paradise. Don’t let yourselves be caught in the nets of emigration.] Moussa’s story therefore serves not only as a critique of the global soccer machine, painting a picture not usually portrayed and one opposite of the habitual success stories like those of the *Senefs* seen on the television in Niodior (50), but also more widely critiques global capitalism and exploitation. This argument is explored in detail by Thomas, and soccer is certainly a vehicle, as well as an example, that Diome uses to make this argument.⁴⁴

Diome also criticizes the discourse surrounding the 1998 French World Cup Team through Salie. Speaking of governments and political parties, Salie says of the political left in France:

⁴⁴ Diandue approaches Diome’s demystification of France and deconstruction of the dreamed-of French paradise through the metaphorical lens of the island of Niodior and its place in the Atlantic Ocean vis à vis both Africa and Europe.

Quant à leur politique d'intégration, elle vaut tout au plus pour leur équipe nationale de football. *Blacks, Blancs, Beurs*, ce n'est qu'un slogan placardé sur leur vitrine mondiale, comme une mauvaise publicité de Benetton, juste une recette: *Boeuf, Braisé, Beurré*, que les chaînes de télévision s'arrachent à coups de millions. Les étrangers sont acceptés, aimés et mêmes revendiqués seulement quand, dans leur domaine, ils sont parmi les meilleurs. *Blacks, Blancs, Beurs*, si ça allait de soi dans la société française, on n'aurait pas besoin d'en faire un slogan. Ce n'est qu'une poudre de rêve qu'on nous jette aux yeux pour nous cacher de dures réalités. (178)

[As for their politics of integration, it is worth as much as their national soccer team. Blacks, Whites, Arabs, is nothing but a slogan plastered on their window for the world, like a bad advertisement for Benetton, just a recipe, Beef, Braised, Buttered, that television channels grab for millions. Foreigners are accepted, loved, and even in demand only when, in their area, they are among the best. Blacks, Whites, Arabs, if it were self-evident, they would not need to make a slogan of it. It is only a dream powder they throw in our eyes to hide the hard realities from us.]

Salie addresses her brother and his friends in this instance, once again trying to dissuade them of the possibilities of playing for elite French clubs or even for the national French team. She highlights how the diversity of the 1998 team was used as a kind of political propaganda to advertise an image of a multiracial France that glossed over the difficulties encountered by many migrants, like Moussa, who were seen and treated as Other because they were not outstanding at whatever narrow occupation they held. Madické and his friends react to her diatribe incredulously, accusing her of making her situation in France sound worse than it is and of neglecting to propose a solution to their economic situation on Niodior.

In the guise of a solution to migration, exploitation, and economic hardship at home, Diome offers the case of Salie's little brother, Madické. After years of listening to Madické beg her and try to guilt her into sending him a plane ticket to France from

Niodior so he can come play soccer, Salie decides to send him the necessary money but on the condition that he use it to open a shop on Niodior and not to buy a plane ticket to France. This decision on her part coincides with the France-Italy final of the 2000 European Cup (Diome 209-12). Once Italy loses in overtime, Salie receives a phone call from Madické who is disappointed in Italy's loss and annoyed at his friends "avec leur manie de toujours critiquer toutes les équipes, sauf la française. Ce soir particulièrement, ils font preuve d'une totale mauvaise foi" (222) [with their mania of always criticizing all the teams except the French one. Particularly tonight, they prove their total bad faith]. Salie, having already diagnosed her brother's friends as "atteints du syndrome postcolonial" (221) [infected by the postcolonial syndrome], feels bad for Madické and decides to tell him her decision to try to console him. He is resistant to her plan, though, and argues that if Niodior is so great that she should use her money to return and open a shop herself (223). However, Salie has her reasons for not returning, ones that Madické either does not know or does not understand (224-26), and finally after a few months, tired of his arguments, she sends him the money and waits for news from him (227).

The following chapter opens in June of 2002 with the description of a young man hosting a meal and showing a soccer game on the television to a group of friends whose wildest dreams seem to have been met by the Senegalese national team, who have reached the *huitième de finale* of the World Cup and are now facing Sweden. In flashback, the narrator tells how once Senegal qualified for the World Cup, "Ndétare n'avait pas eu besoin de les chapitrer [les jeunes joueurs], ils abondaient stoïquement dans le sens de Coubertin: la participation de leurs compatriotes importait plus que les éventuels résultats" (233). [Ndétare no longer needed to admonish them, they stoically

agreed with Coubertin's meaning: the participation of their compatriots mattered more than the eventual results.] This attitude, of course, is a big change from the young men's former emphasis on soccer as a way to earn a living, with participation mattering less than winning because winning meant possible scouts and contracts and large salaries. Ndétare, as a disciple of Coubertin and therefore proponent of amateurism, has suddenly taken the upper hand in the argument between amateurism and professionalism. To everyone's surprise, however, the Senegalese team kept winning, "leur offrant, à chaque fois, comme un supplément de grace; ils [les jeunes] ne laissaient plus de savourer leurs propres commentaires sur chacun de ces matchs, devenus leurs douceurs favorites qu'ils aimaient à se servir à l'heure du thé" (233) [offering them, each time, an extra favor; they never tired of savoring their own commentary on each of these matches, having become their favorite sweets to serve themselves at tea time]. The image of the young men savoring the victories and their own analyses of the games subtly contrasts with the earlier image in the novel of young *Niodiorois* coveting Miko ice cream and Coca Cola, useless imports from overseas that they could never actually taste (37-38). This time around, the young men are producing and enjoying their own sweets in the form of their own knowledge and locally-produced soccer players, and when the Miko and Coke ads come on during this match, "La publicité [...] jeta ses filets en pure perte: les esprits nageaient ailleurs" (235). [The advertisements throw out their nets to a pure loss: minds are swimming elsewhere.] The image of the nets of the ads echoes that of the nets of migration Ndétare warned against earlier, but this time the youth are not dreaming of European or American products—their minds are focused on the present reality of Senegalese victories and are not to be caught up in manufactured desire.

When Sweden scores a goal, though, the youths' faith begins to flag and they are called by their friend Garouwalé to remember what the team has done until now. The narrator fills in the details, saying that the recent results against Denmark and Uruguay—both ties—still fill Garouwalé with pride, and that especially

depuis le grand Vendredi, la date historique du 31 juin 2002, marquée d'une pierre blanche, il n'avait plus peur de rien. Humbles, sans pub ni propagande, les Lions de la Téranga avaient détrôné les rois du monde. Déjouant tous les pronostics, ils avaient renvoyé les Bleus déguster chez eux, plus vite qu'ils ne l'imaginaient, le gâteau salé de la défaite. Ce jour-là, en Asie, loin des masques et des sorciers africains, il avait manqué à Goliath le Dieu de David. Depuis, les jeunes de l'île ont ajouté d'autres posters sur les murs de leurs chambres. (234)
[since the great Friday, the historic date of 31 June 2002, a red-letter day, he was no longer scared of anything. Humble, without advertisements or propaganda, the Lions of the Téranga dethroned the kings of the world. Foiling the prognostics, they sent the Blues home, faster than they could have imagined, to taste the salty cake of defeat. That day, in Asia, far from African masks and sorcerers, Goliath lacked the God of David. Since then, the youth of the island had added other posters to the walls of their rooms.]⁴⁵

This passage is rich in commentary and brings together several of the themes of the novel. First of all, *vendredi* is not usually capitalized in French; therefore doing so renders it special, sacred, a sort of holiday or commemoration that would go along with the day's status as red-letter—a holy day, feast day, or more interestingly a saint's day. That the Senegalese team reached such heights without publicity—here the equivalent of propaganda, another comparison Diome has drawn through the novel—also says a lot

⁴⁵ Oddly enough, Diome is mistaken about the date of this historic day; Senegal's victory over France took place on May 31, 2002. Also, France's loss to Senegal in group play did not lead directly to their exit from the tournament, as France continued in group play. However, France's loss to Senegal combined with their subsequent tie with Uruguay and loss to Denmark to cause their elimination prior to the Round of 16, which was quite embarrassing for the reigning world champions.

about priorities, and implies that a de-commercialization of soccer, if not a real amateurism, could bring benefits to teams. The image of the Lions sending the kings of the world home, a literal reference to causing the elimination of the reigning world champions, likewise works on a symbolic level as a message of anti-colonialism. Not only has Senegal fought off physical occupation, here, in the guise of refusing advertisements, they are resisting commercial and economic colonization. Additionally, when the Niodiorois youth hang posters of Senegalese soccer players alongside or over formerly idolized French players, they are finally escaping, to a certain extent, the mental colonization that Diome and her narrator have criticized throughout the novel. The fact that the Senegalese team achieved all this far from home and without sacred masks or incantations reinforces to them and their followers that not only do they not need a home field advantage to win, but that they can succeed without what narrator Salie has made clear she thinks are superstitions. Nevertheless, with the reference to God, the narrator is conceding that a sort of faith has led the team to this point, whether it be the faith of the people in the team, faith in their God, or perhaps faith in themselves.⁴⁶

Finally, Henri Camara scores and Senegal is tied with Sweden. The young man with the remote control for the television picks up the Senegalese flag next to him and waves it a bit (235), another sign that the youth are embracing their nation and team, even if “ils connaissaient peu les Sénéfs” (236) [they knew little about the Senegalese players trained in France]. During extra time, Camara scores the golden goal to give Senegal the win. Chaos ensues in the living room, and in the general joy, even Ndétare and the old fisherman—longtime enemies whose animosities are chronicled in the novel—find

⁴⁶ Interestingly, the majority of the residents of Niodior are Muslim, so the Christian imagery found in this passage and throughout the novel adds to the narrator’s self-identification as a hybrid (Diome 254-55) and to her observations about the globalization of, among other things, culture.

themselves hugging each other (237). The young man with the remote grabs his flag and without even turning off the television runs into the streets: “[I]l chantait la victoire, rappelait la légende du lion, roi de la forêt” (237). [He sang about the victory, recalling the legend of the lion, king of the forest.] His friends follow him, and in the village square with a group of drummers, they all reprise a famous song by Yandé Codou Sène:

Cette chanson à la gloire du lion, totem national, affirmant que *le lion n’aime pas le mboum* (une sorte d’épinard), *qu’il se nourrit de viande*, semblait inventée pour l’événement. À qui mieux mieux, les jeunes la chantaient en la parodiant. D’après eux, non seulement les joueurs de l’équipe nationale étaient les lions, mais, outre la viande, disaient-ils, ils se nourrissaient de buts, de balles, de dribbles et de tirs victorieux. (237-38, italics in original) [This song to the glory of the lion, the national totem, affirmed that the lion does not like *mboum* (a kind of spinach), that he feeds himself with meat, seemed to be made for this event. Each one more than the other, the youth sang the song in parody. According to them, not only were the players of the national team lions, but, besides meat, they said, the players fed themselves with goals, balls, dribbles, and victorious shots on goal.]

Their song recalls an earlier moment during the match when Garouwalé had said that the lion does not eat grass, but meat, and though already having eaten the French rooster, the Danes, and Uruguay, it was still not full and would have the hide of the Swedes (235). The lion, and through its symbolism the nation, has regained its glory, affirming that it is not a gentle grazer in the fields but an aggressive hunter gaining strength from victory. Senegalese national pride is re-claimed and reinforced by successful soccer games, but the chapter closes without an explanation of who the young man with the remote control is.

The novel’s final chapter returns to Strasbourg and Salie, who has watched the World Cup without any word from Madické. She does, however, see a documentary that

shows the mother of one of the Senegalese forwards, dancing in joyous victory, which prompts Salie to reflect on how other Senegalese children are willing to sacrifice their lives to try to get to Europe and succeed so that their mothers can dance those same steps (239-40). Her judgments are tempered by the realization that, in this day and age,

le football est un gagne-pain de choix; en fait, l'issue de secours idéale pour les enfants du tiers-monde. Mieux que le globe terrestre, le ballon rond permet à nos pays sous-développés d'arrêter un instant le regard fuyant de l'Occident, qui, d'ordinaire, préfère gloser sur les guerres, les famines et les ravages du sida en Afrique, contre lesquels il ne serait pas prêt à verser l'équivalent d'un budget de championnat. Alors, forcément, avec les victoires du Sénégal à la Coupe du Monde, les nègres de France ont chanté et dansé; pour une fois, ils se sont invités dans la cour des grands, où, en prime, on parlait d'eux en bien. (240)

[soccer is the bread-winner of choice; in fact, the ideal emergency exit for children of the third world. Better than the terrestrial globe, the round ball permits our developing nations to stop the fleeing glance of the West, that, ordinarily, prefers to ramble on about the wars, famines, and ravages of AIDS in Africa, against which they are not ready to spend the equivalent of a championship budget. So, inevitably, with the victories of Senegal in the World Cup, the blacks of France sang and danced; for once, they were invited onto the big stage, where, as a bonus, they were talked about positively.]

Salie's, and perhaps Diome's, harsh criticism of the global soccer machine acknowledges here that it is all the same a powerful draw for African youth and possibly the ideal exit for them from the Third World. In addition to individual accomplishments that can bring economic and emotional sustenance to players and their families, as shown in the example of El-Hadji Diouf's dancing mother, team accomplishments on the soccer field allow developing countries to be seen in a positive light by the rest of the world that usually dwells on their problems. This recognition allows Africans both on the continent

and in the diaspora to celebrate, to feel welcome in the world community that usually deems them unworthy and excludes them or overlooks them.⁴⁷

And yet, the narrator notes, those Senegalese in Paris who tried to celebrate their victory were often “rattrapés par leur condition d’immigrés et son corollaire: le mépris” (240-41) [caught up by their condition as immigrants and its corollary: disdain]. Thus they were made to move on by the police, not allowed to yell in wolof, discouraged from waving their flags or dancing in the streets. The narrator notes the irony of this discouragement given how the French in Dakar were allowed to party and honk horns and yell all night in 1998 due to legal situations—no need for visas, French diplomatic pressure—power issues stemming from relative riches and lack thereof, and Senegalese local hospitality (241). She likewise condemns and contradicts the efforts of certain journalists and others who attempt to co-opt the Senegalese victories for France by arguing that most of the Senegalese players train or play for clubs in France, stating, “Des maillots, oui; pas des laisses!” (242). [Jerseys, yes; not leashes!] She makes a case for the recognition of Senegalese sporting independence, and declares 2002 the “année internationale de la lutte contre la colonisation sportive et la traite du footeux!” (243) [international year of the fight against sporting colonization and the slave-trade of soccer players!]. The image of slavery is not new, but the idea of colonization in or by sports is new to the novel. It is a powerful idea, however, especially given how the youth in the

⁴⁷ Ironically, after the World Cup victory in 1998, there was significant talk about how France was now *dans le cour des grands*.

novel have been portrayed as constructing soccer, how the novel highlighted their blind following of certain teams, and how the Senegalese victories changed their attitudes.⁴⁸

Salie's criticisms are not only for countries formerly linked by colonization; after Italy's loss to South Korea and an Italian club's firing of the South Korean who played for them but who also happened to score the winning goal against Italy in the World cup, she decries the expectation of some that, in exchange for Euros, players sacrifice the opportunity to play for their home countries (244). She sees the soccer field here as metaphor for a larger problem: "Si l'Occident n'accepte même pas d'être égalé par le tiers-monde, ne serait-ce qu'en football, comment peut-on espérer qu'il l'aide à se hisser à son niveau de développement?" (244-45). [If the West does not even accept to be matched by the third world, even if only in soccer, how can we hope that it will help the third world hoist itself to the West's level of development?] Salie also calls attention to an Italian newspaper's accusations of a Dirty World Cup, and asks whether a clean Cup would be one played only by "nos invincibles maîtres européens" (245) [our invincible European masters], exposing the racist and classist attitude that poorer countries could only possibly win by cheating. For her, constructions of soccer and reactions to games reveal quite a bit about the thinking that frequently prevails around the world.

Still waiting for Madické to telephone, Salie wonders how she and Ndétare can try to dissuade the Niodiorois youth from leaving for France now that it has been revealed that twenty-one of the twenty-three players on the Senegalese national team have been playing in French clubs (246-47). She calls on the players themselves to reveal the reality of their lives to the youth:

⁴⁸ Bale details how the farm-team system inhibits sporting development or creates dependent development within Africa (238). This neocolonialism in a soccer context mirrors but is also part of economic neocolonialism.

Je voudrais qu'ils décrivent à leurs frères les cendres
froides de la cheminée d'où jaillit la flame victorieuse qui
déchire les ténèbres de l'exil. Je voudrais qu'ils racontent
comment à Guingamp, Lens, Lorient, Monaco,
Montpellier, Sedan ou Sochaux—où ils jouent—, le mêmes
qui les acclament lorsqu'ils marquent un but leur font des
cris de singe, leur jettent des bananes et les traitent de sales
nègres lorsqu'ils ratent une action ou trébuchent devant les
filets adverses. (247)

[I would like them to describe to their brothers the cold
ashes in the fireplace from where the victorious flame of
victory rends the shadows of exile. I would like them to
tell how at Guingamp, Lens, Lorient, Monaco, Montpellier,
Sedan ou Sochaux—where they play—the same people
who cheer them when they score a goal make monkey
noises at them, throw bananas at them and call them dirty
niggers when they mess up a play or stumble in front of the
opponent's net.]

Salie's list of the hard realities continues, noting time spent on the bench, the difficulties and expenses of keeping papers in order, and having to pay for a visa in France when the French in Senegal do not have to (247-48). Though the narrator couches this call to action in a dream, such acts of de-mystification on the part of soccer players fit nicely into Diome's overall project of de-mystifying emigration in general, and this is a specific proposal to hold conferences where this kind of revelation can take place.

Salie also observes that the World Cup has ended and the world order has not changed; a big soccer nation, Brazil, won the Cup and history has continued along the same trajectory (249). Her bout of blues is broken up, though, by the arrival of a little package from Niodior containing a small hand-stitched cotton sack within which are three plastic sachets each enclosing a local product (249). Salie is overwhelmed with joy because the package indicates that Madické, despite his silence, is thinking of her. That same evening, Madické finally telephones and tells her that he no longer wishes to leave Niodior for France, that he would like to watch the Senegalese soccer team play in

Senegal, that his shop is doing very well, and that he was able to rent a television for the World Cup, thereby revealing to the reader that he was the mysterious young man with the remote control (251). In the space of a paragraph, then, Salie's influence on her brother is shown, and Madické becomes an example of resistance to all kinds of colonization as well as to emigration, and a positive example of success at home. The novel's sometimes didactic tone suggests that Diome herself thinks Madické might be a good example for many Senegalese youth.

Diome's overall analysis of soccer in all its manifestations, however, is more ambivalent. While she acknowledges the game's power as a way to escape poverty, she also warns against sporting colonization and the idealization of the situation of players abroad. At the same time, her characters Salie and Ndétare espouse an amateur ethos of the game and criticize global capitalism's over-involvement with the sport. Also strongly criticized is the exploitation of foreign players, whether legal or illegal migrants, and the slave trade-like system of world recruitment. Like *Banlieue noire*, then, the novel complicates simplistic notions of soccer as a panacea and trips up narratives of the game as a meritocratic vehicle. Even the structure of *Le ventre de l'Atlantique* suggests this: the novel opens with a soccer game being watched on television and its penultimate chapter is devoted to a soccer game, but the final chapter, though it includes discussion of World Cup results and their fallout, largely critiques the state of the game and emphasizes Madické's new enterprise and Salie's cultural hybridity and world citizenship. Soccer does not get the last word, and is not shown to be the best step forward.

V. Conclusions: Soccer Is Not the Answer—Or Is it?

During and immediately after 1998, France's sporting self image seemed to shift to emphasize, instead of the gallant little loser-but-with-style, "la France qui gagne" (Hare, Esmeralda, Dine). This high carried over to the European Championships in 2000, when France came from behind to beat Italy in extra time on a goal from David Trezeguet. Two years later, a rude shock awaited France in the FIFA World Cup, hosted by South Korea and Japan: Zidane was out injured, and in their first match in pool play (also the opening match of the Cup), France lost 0-1 to Senegal, a team new to the tournament. Then, Uruguay held France to a goalless draw after star striker Thierry Henry was sent off. Denmark's 2-0 win over France in France's last group game sealed the fate of *les Bleus*: they exited the Cup without even scoring a goal, earning the dubious honor of having performed the worst in a World Cup of any defending champion. They fared only slightly better in the 2004 European Cup, being eliminated in the quarterfinals by the lowly Greeks (who, despite being given as much as 150-1 odds, went on to win the tournament). French sporting self-esteem continued to slump.

These were not the only shifts, however. The 1998 victory that was supposed to crush Le Pen and the Front National did not: in the 2002 presidential elections, Le Pen, in a first for a radical right-wing candidate, advanced to the second round, drawing between sixteen and eighteen percent of the vote both times (Ministère de l'Intérieur). Le Pen's racist and anti-immigration rhetoric and the French voting public's embrace of it revealed growing rifts among popular conceptions of France's national identity and attitudes towards its changing demographics. The dreams of integration that were supposedly fulfilled by the 1998 and 2000 teams proved to be chimeric, and things did

not change in the *banlieues*. Thus, when the 2006 World Cup rolled around and France reached the final only to have Zidane expelled in overtime and France then lose in a penalty shoot out, reactions were quite different. As some had predicted, when the French team won, they were loved and embraced as representative of the “New France,” but when they lost they were individuals to be targeted for their faults.

The two novels examined in this chapter can therefore be looked at as both reactions to the euphoria and rhetoric of 1998 and indicators of the seemingly inevitable disappointment of 2006 that came on the heels of such inflated discourse. They complicate the narrative of integration that has long attached to soccer and its immigrant stars and highlight the external factors that make a journey from a difficult background to stardom and riches an exception rather than a rule. Though the backgrounds of Sébastien and Madické are very different, both novels caution against the simplistic proposal of soccer as a solution. Nonetheless, both novels do highlight some of the benefits of soccer. In *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*, participation in the game, whether on a global stage or a local one, is shown to have positive repercussions for amateurs and those teams with lower budgets. In *Banlieue noire*, soccer offers hope to Sébastien and his friends: hope of leaving the banlieue, hope of earning money, hope of visibility. Extenuating circumstances do exist in these novels, however, and it is there that the critiques of migration, integration, and the business side of soccer are seen.

**Conclusion:
Policing Boundaries, Producing Bodies**

The two football codes discussed in this dissertation have diverging histories when it comes to their players and the identities associated with them, but they both act as sites where strands of identity converge to produce particular new ones. In French rugby union, behaviors associated with specific social classes have influenced not only how the game is played but also how perceptions of the players are constructed. In part, these perceptions depend on the location of the player and his team in Paris or in the *Ovalie* and whether the player embraces his location as home and defends it, like Henri Garcia's Paparou. They also depend on the position a rugbyman plays on the pitch and how he engages himself in the game, as exemplified in Garcia's story about Pierre Danos. Nevertheless, as the Dieux du Stade phenomenon shows, these differences are shifting in significance due to globalization and commercialization. In a world where players' diets and training are more strictly controlled, where the game is beginning to emphasize more scoring, and where players are traded across continents, differences in body type, player position, and local origin are slowly losing impact.

Soccer, on the other hand, has been viewed for much longer as a melting pot that de-emphasizes differences, partly because of its wider appeal and partly because of its longer history of professionalism. Yet the discourse surrounding events in Zinedine Zidane's career demonstrates that the extent to which these differences have been

subsumed by sports teams and fans coming together is still in question, which in turn leads to interrogations of the myth of meritocracy in soccer and an examination of what it means to be French. *Banlieue noire* and *Le ventre de l'Atlantique* draw attention to the fact that, for most, counting on soccer to transcend institutionalized inequalities is unrealistic, because unbalanced power relationships persist in society that impact an individual's ability to play, and persist in soccer in general on global, structural levels of the professional sport. At the same time, however, these two novels point out that soccer can inspire individual achievement and hope, that fandom can connect people across space and cultures, and that national teams can become a needed source of positive attention and pride.

My analyses to this point have brought out connections between national identity and sports and explored how class, gender, and race intersect in the practice and perception of soccer and rugby, with those intersections sometimes even producing identities specific to time, place, and location. I have proposed sports as a new site for thinking through and reinvigorating this concept of intersectionality. Thus I have tried to show that texts, whether cultural or literary, that involve sports also participate in constructing meanings for the athletes' bodies that mark them as French, not-French, or somewhere in between. Furthermore, this marking is not static, as is shown by the conflicting examples involving Zinedine Zidane: in 1998, Zidane was a symbol of an integrated, multi-racial France; in 2006, Zidane's violence was symptomatic of his lack of integration and the acceptance of violence in less or non-integrated milieus. In this final section, I would like to briefly explore two more sports in which these complex elements produce shifting significations and boundaries of gender, class, and nationality:

boxing and cycling. These two sports are very different from soccer and rugby, yet when it comes to issues of identity, they also serve as key sites of intersection: both have long been tied up with class connotations and concerns about the nation, despite their different origins.

While long-distance cycle racing is generally conceded to have been developed by the French and the Tour de France is obviously French, modern boxing governed by the Marquis de Queensberry rules was, like the football codes, imported to France from Britain. Unlike the football games, however, it is an individual sport, and while groups may train together at the same gym or with the same coach, in the ring the fighter is alone. The lone figure in the ring is easily constructed as a symbol of the nation—like Georges Carpentier or Marcel Cerdan—or of a race, like Joe Louis.¹ In terms of history, soccer began with the upper classes and eventually sifted down to the working classes, and has even been used by the State as a method of social control; boxing followed a similar trajectory in relation to its links to class concerns. France already had *la boxe française*, also known as *savate*, which was more amateur and aristocratic when the Marquis de Queensberry rules, themselves only established in England in 1867, were introduced.² As the name of the codified rules may suggest, *la boxe à l'anglaise* appealed to a certain social demographic. This appeal did not take long to change, especially as the sport was a moneymaker. As Joyce Carol Oates puts it, “The world’s

¹ For Carpentier as a symbol of French courage battling American depravity, see Rauch. For a portrayal of Cerdan as France defying the Occupation, see the film *Edith et Marcel*. Joe Louis’s status as a national symbol was complicated by American race relations, so that his 1937 fight with Italian Primo Carnera was promoted as Italy invading Ethiopia, while his 1938 match with Max Schmelling was framed as the United States confronting Nazi Germany (*The Fight*). Louis was skeptical of becoming the symbol of a segregated country and a pawn in hypocritical geopolitics but he won nonetheless, saving the “honor” of America (*The Fight*).

² Bouchard notes that the French were skeptical of English boxing until after the first modern Olympics (172). Young describes Greek boxing and combat events in the context of the ancient Olympics (38-46), while Joyce Carol Oates provides a brief history of boxing from gladiatorial combat to the present (39-50).

consistently highest-paid athletes are American boxers but it does not follow that boxers as a class are the highest paid athletes. The very opposite is the case. Impoverished people prostitute themselves in ways available to them, and boxing on its lowest levels offers an opportunity for men to make a living of a kind” (34).³ Though her choice of words is perhaps questionable, her point about exploitation is valid. Rich boxing sponsors’ and promoters’ use of poorer men as pawns for their own gain was a concern of the French writer Louis Hémon, who had experience in boxing both as a fighter and spectator.⁴ During the first decade of the twentieth century, Hémon was living in London and wrote his novel *Battling Malone, pugiliste*, which explored the world of boxing in the United Kingdom.

Though the novel is primarily about the British milieu, it begins with a boxing match pitting an Englishman against a Frenchman, and Malone’s final match in the novel’s next-to-last chapter is against a Frenchman. The French win both fights.⁵ Julie Gaucher’s analysis of *Battling Malone*, in an echo of Pierre Charreton’s (“Avec Louis Hémon”), is that “les défaites répétitives des boxeurs anglais qui introduisent le roman de Louis Hémon ne sont pas seulement l’affaire de sportsmen passionnés mais elles concernent directement la nation” (108). [The repeated defeats of English boxers that open Louis Hémon’s novel are not only the affair of impassioned sportsmen but also directly concern the nation.] Certainly the British aristocrats in the novel believe so, as in the wake of the first defeat they set out to find the great British boxer to avenge their

³ Louis Wacquant stresses, however, that in the American context “boxers are generally not recruited from among the most disenfranchised fractions of the ghetto subproletariat but rather issue from those *segments of its working class that are struggling at the threshold of stable socioeconomic integration*” (42-43, italics in original).

⁴ According to Beaudoin, between December 1902 and October 1911 when Hémon was in London, he frequently went to gymnasiums and also boxed (119). Charreton agrees (“Avec Louis Hémon” 37).

⁵ Charreton contends that Serrurier, the boxer who beats Malone at the end, is based on Georges Carpentier, who was a young rising star at the time the novel was written (“Avec Louis Hémon” 37).

national honor.⁶ The title character, Patrick Malone, is a poor Irish youth discovered by Lord Westmount in the streets of London fighting policemen. Westmount sweeps Malone up into his car and whisks him off, determined to make a prizefighter out of the young man. In the end, Malone's dream of becoming rich, cultivated, and accepted in high society like the aristocrats who are using him is crushed and he is soon shot by Westmount's sister, a haughty woman who he believed loved him but who saw him as fit for being only a pet. The novel is therefore not only about nation and its representations, but also about social class.

Class conflict and boxing are intertwined in more recent narratives, too. In his 1995 film *La haine* that takes place largely in the Parisian *banlieues*, Mathieu Kassovitz introduces each of his three protagonists' names visually. For Saïd, this is done by showing the character tagging a CRS truck with his name; for Vinz, it is done by zooming in on the ring he wears that bears his appellation. As the character Hubert is introduced, he is shown boxing a heavy punching bag in a burned out gymnasium and a poster for one of his fights is shown plastered to a wall towards the edge of the frame. The flyer includes a picture of Hubert along with his full name and some details of the fight. Hubert's identity is thereby tied to his athletic practices, but as the burned-out state of the gym shows, this link has been disrupted. As a result, Hubert has gone back to smoking dope, taking puffs off the joint Saïd and Vinz are passing back and forth. He is angry and despondent, explaining how he had worked so hard to build the gym and a night of riots has resulted in its destruction. Later in the film when a police officer

⁶ The aristocrats' campaign could be an echo of the contemporary push in the United States to find a "Great White Hope" to strip Jack Johnson of his heavyweight world champion title, won in Australia in 1908. The American campaign, led by writer Jack London among others, culminated in Johnson fighting Jim Jeffries to defend the title in 1910—and winning. For more about Johnson, see Meunier, Reitz, and Sánchez, as well as Johnson's autobiography.

suggests that he will help Hubert get the gym back, he shrugs off the offer saying it doesn't matter anymore. Has he given up on the cops—after all they are the ones who killed his friend, an act that resulted in the riots—or on his fellow residents of the *cit *, the ones who trashed the gym and who Hubert calls *cons* as they walk through the ruins, or only on himself? The circumstances surrounding Hubert, his gym, and the riots evidence the complicated position of sports and athletes in contemporary France. For example, the text of a 1984 law regarding the organization and promotion of physical and sporting activities states that physical education and sports contribute to the fight against failure in schools and to the reduction of social and cultural inequalities (Greaves). Evidently, the government has pushed the development of sports clubs as instruments of *insertion*, as “microcosm[s] of the Republic,” but at the same time sport also has a “long established capacity to act as a focus for oppositional forms of communal self-affirmation” (Dine, “The end of an idyll?” 39-40). While the gym may have been a state-sponsored project, Hubert is able to use the boxing skills he learned there against at least one agent of the state: when he and Vinz are cornered by a CRS officer in the underground garages of the *cit *, Vinz nervously brandishes the gun he found during the riots at the cop, but Hubert simply cold-cocks the *flic* and the pals flee. Boxing has trained Hubert not to obey and respect authority, as long has been vaunted about the value of sports (see Coubertin, Montherlant), but to use his art against the powers that be in this instance.

Indeed, Hubert's economic position contrasts with the early aristocratic milieu of boxing as praised by writer Maurice Maeterlinck and, to a lesser extent, by Jean Pr vost. At the same time, however, Hubert is the more cerebral of the three central characters in *La haine*, the one depicted concretely trying to build a better life for himself and others

by getting a gym in the neighborhood, the one shown giving his drug cash to his mother and helping his little sister with her homework, the one trying to stop the cycle of violence and poverty. These actions show that he has at least a modicum of noble motivations. In fact, Maeterlinck makes it clear in his 1907 essay “Eloge de la boxe” that proper knowledge of the art of boxing sets a man apart from vulgar characters. His essay begins with a discussion of insect defense systems, placing humans far down the scale of early Darwinian development in terms of natural armor: “Nous sommes, donc, par rapport à eux [...], encore gélatineux et tout proche du protoplasme primitif” (284). [We are therefore, in relation to them, still gelatinous and very close to primitive protoplasm.] A human body is a “molle et incohérente machine, qui semble un essai manqué de la nature” (284) [soft and inconsistent machine that resembles a flawed experiment by nature], a defective shell that has pushed humanity to invent weapons in order to survive. However, the production of and reliance on weapons is a “bien déconcertante aberration” (284) [very disconcerting aberration] that must be remedied. To return to “la logique naturelle que suivent tous les autres êtres vivants” [the natural logic that all other living beings follow], we must instead use only our own bodies when attacking each other (284). People who cultivate the art of boxing would then be examples of a superior race, and further “sélection” would lead to military superiority (285). For Maeterlinck, this kind of selection is the goal of all life (285), and his thinking reflects early understandings of Darwin’s theories as well as the persistence of Lamarck’s ideas about the inheritance of acquired characteristics. Ironically perhaps for Maeterlinck’s probable logic, the poor and black Hubert uses boxing to survive in a less than noble milieu, even using only his body to defeat the armed CRS officer.

The supposed evolution from bumbling fighter to noble boxer is evident in Maeterlinck's descriptions of the two types of men. His description of a fistfight between *charretiers* underlines the crude nature of such a brawl:

deux paysans qui viennent aux mains: rien n'est plus pitoyable. Après une copieuse et dilatoire bordée d'injures et de menaces, ils se saisissent à la gorge et aux cheveux, jouent des pieds, du genou, au hasard, se mordent, s'égratignent, s'empêtrent dans leur rage immobile, n'osent pas lâcher prise, et si l'un d'eux parvient à dégager un bras, il en porte, à l'aveuglette et le plus souvent dans le vide, de petits coups précipités, étriqués, bredouillés; et le combat ne finirait jamais si le couteau felon, évoqué par la honte du spectacle incongru, ne surgissait soudain, presque spontanément, de l'une ou l'autre poche. (285-86)
[Two peasants who come to blows: nothing is more pitiful. After a copious and stalling broadside of insults and menaces, they seize each other by the throat and the hair, striking with feet, with knees, at random, biting, scratching, impeding themselves in their fixed rage, not daring to let go, and if one of them succeeds in freeing an arm, he uses it, blindly and most often into the empty air, to make little precipitous punches, narrow, stammered; and the combat would never end if the felonious knife, evoked by the shame of the unseemly spectacle, did not suddenly appear, almost spontaneously, from one pocket or another.]

Immediately following his evocation of this pathetic scene, Maeterlinck exhorts his reader, "Contemplez, d'autre part, deux boxeurs; pas de mots inutiles, pas de tâtonnements, pas de colère; le calme de deux certitudes qui savent ce qu'il faut faire" (286). [Behold, on the other hand, two boxers; no useless words, no trial and error, no anger; the calm of two certitudes that know what it is necessary to do.] Maeterlinck situates both confrontations outside any formal ring, vaunting instead a trained boxer's ability to call up his courage and expedite his adversary judiciously whenever, and presumably wherever, needed (287). *La haine*'s Hubert draws on precisely such training, but puts it to use by knocking out a police officer. Furthermore, unlike Maeterlinck's

boxer who waits for his adversary to throw the first punch (287), Hubert socks the CRS nearly on sight.⁷ Like the youth in the *banlieue* who play their own versions of soccer (Travert), Hubert has subverted sporting traditions to fit his own needs and environment. His individual situation influences how he employs his knowledge of boxing and follows the sport culture's social dictates as much as his fighting abilities influence how he reacts to events in his life. As in rugby, where the body is used as a weapon, the circuit of body-reflexive practices is key to identity formation and performance in boxing.

Jean Prévost, whose essays about rugby were examined in chapter one, also wrote a 1925 essay called "Le sens de la boxe." While this essay is not as heavily rhetorical as Maeterlinck's ode to boxing, Prévost also frames the sport as a noble pursuit: "Si la boxe est devenue le plus honoré des combats, et a mérité le nom du noble art, elle le doit aux qualités morales dont le boxeur doit faire preuve" (59). [If boxing has become the most honored of combats, and has earned the name of the noble art, it owes it to the moral qualities that the boxer must show.] In addition to morals, Prévost argues that boxing derives its noble nature from its "*noblesse corporelle*: les deux adversaires combattent par les parties nobles, ce qu'indiquent les coups défendus aux viscères, et la nature des coups permis" (59, italics in original) [corporal nobility: the two adversaries fight with their noble parts, indicated by the prohibition of blows to the entrails, and the nature of the permissible blows]. His understanding of this bodily nobility is built on his interpretation of the boxer's blows as not seeking to bruise or otherwise damage his opponent's body, but as meaning merely to disrupt the strength and "l'unité" of the opponent (Prévost 59). Once again, the supposedly proper uses of the body and its parts depend on and simultaneously produce a classed identity, much as in rugby.

⁷ Of course, the officer is armed, so it could be argued that Hubert did act in self-defense.

Furthermore, Prévost likens a boxing match to a duel, that manly aristocratic ritual of the nineteenth century (Nye, *Masculinities*). In doing so however, he, like Maeterlinck, pulls the boxer out of the ring and into the street. This tension between the supposedly aristocratic ethos of boxing and its more everyday employment and exploitation runs through literature about boxing, and echoes some of the contradicting ideas about class in French rugby that were explored in chapters one and two.⁸

In *La haine*, Hubert seems to embody some of these conflicting values, as discussed above. Yet the story of Hubert and his friends is not simply about class conflict in Paris and its *banlieues*; the characters also deal with a sense of alienation from France and a questioning of their Frenchness. The burning of Hubert's gym during the riots that open the film presages the burning of gyms, busses, and schools during the 2005 riots in France. The incidents of arson were statements against class exploitation, against discrimination, against symbols of a state perceived as oppressive or prejudiced. The larger riots were also expressions of outrage related to the debate about immigration and immigrants and their children in France, to the internal debates about and policing of perceived limitations of Frenchness. In addition to films such as *La haine*, music had been warning of the alienation and anger that permeated the *banlieues* for years before the deaths by electrocution of two teenagers sparked the November 2005 uprisings.⁹ Both of the boys killed were of immigrant origin, and the perceived police pressure that led to their deaths was quickly seized on by other youth as a reason to protest. The riots

⁸ Montherlant's poems about boxing, for example, extol the popular aspect of the crowds and deride boxers perceived as "noble" (*Les Olympiques*).

⁹ For brief reports on French artists and alienation in the *banlieues*, see Riding and Williams. On 27 October 2005 in Clichy-sous-Bois, "two teenagers fled a soccer game and hid in a power substation when they saw police enter the area. Youths in the neighborhood suspect that police chased Traore Bouna, 15, and Zyed Benna, 17, to their deaths" (Keaten).

“swelled into a broader challenge against the French state and its security forces. The violence has exposed deep discontent in neighborhoods where African and Muslim immigrants and their French-born children are trapped by poverty, unemployment, racial discrimination, crime, poor education and housing” (Keaten). Many of the problems in these neighborhoods can be read as having their roots in France’s colonial past and in long-standing debates about what it means to be French, debates that cropped up again during the 1998 and 2006 World Cups.¹⁰ The *banlieues* themselves can be seen to serve as physical reminders of the boundaries of perceived Frenchness, separating cities not only by class, but also frequently by race and national origins. The riots of 2005 were a revolt against that kind of ghettoization, against the policing of class boundaries that has become a way of policing the internal boundaries of national and local identities.¹¹ The rage glimpsed in Sébastien and his friends during their attack on the ambulance team in the novel *Banlieue noire* gives an inkling of the anger these boundaries both create and perhaps have become meant to contain or keep separate.

While the geography of the *banlieues* can be interpreted as marking out internal divisions, keeping certain sectors of the population symbolically separate from others, the Tour de France traces the external boundaries of the nation-state in part through the layout of its stages. Prior to the late 1960s, this tracing was quite literal as the Tour route hugged national borders; since then, with more fragmented and international stages, the Tour creates a “popular image of a France unified by the soil,” of France as “a land with

¹⁰ For an interesting article briefly examining the issue of what makes a person French, see Smith.

¹¹ Another manifestation of the debate over boundaries of Frenchness can be found in the twenty-five year long series of *affaires du foulard*, or Muslim headscarf controversies, of which the most recent iteration was President Nicolas Sarkozy’s pronouncement in 2009 about *burqas* having no place in France (Gabizon). Noting how the foulard fights have focused on female immigrants’ bodies, Silverstein shifts this focus and examines issues of the policing of the male immigrant’s body through sports in his article “Islam, Soccer, and the French Nation-State.”

a history,” of a France nostalgic for a time of conquest (Vigarello 475-77). Though Henri Desgrange—a cyclist, editor of the paper *L’Auto*, and founder of the Tour—thought of the race as primarily a commercial venture to crush rival sports papers, his crafting of the race rapidly took on other dimensions. Vigarello states that the symbolic element of the Tour was always “crucial: Desgrange in 1903 called [the Tour’s route] ‘a ring completely encircling France’” (470). The route maps the nation in an echo of the King’s tours, the merchants’ and apprentices’ tours, and finally the children’s book of the same name, “exploit[ing] the symbolism of circumference” (Vigarello 470).¹² The Tour was conceived as partly educational—uniting the French in shared knowledge of their country—but also as heralding progress and discovery, modern technology, a new morality, and a new athletic culture (Vigarello 471). Once its route expanded to France’s borders from the old *compagnonnage* routes, including the Alps in 1905 and the Pyrenees in 1910, the France of the Tour “became one: ringed by mountains and seas, it was protected and homogeneous” (Vigarello 475). Of course, this idea of France as one and homogeneous is a nostalgic, idealized view, but it was enthusiastically presented by Desgrange in his columns in *L’Auto* and by other journalists. Indeed, Vigarello points out how places the Tour passed through were linked to their historical significance as sites of history and exploit, or as producers of great warriors, or even as links along Napoleon’s routes (476-77). At the same time, however, journalists cast the Tour as a re-inscription of history that imbued the land it covered with new meanings: “Ainsi, peu à peu, chaque détour de la route, chaque lacet de la montagne finit par appeler l’écho d’un exploit et la figure d’un homme. Une nouvelle carte de France se dessine à l’intérieur de

¹² Reed claims that Henri Desgrange purposely named the Tour after the *Tour de France par deux enfants*, the “early Third Republic textbook that was designed to link schoolchildren’s provincial identities to an integrated French national culture and heritage” (683).

l'autre, dont les provinces sont aux couleurs des champions qui s'y sont illustrés, qui les ont illustrées" (Blondin 31-32). [In that way, little by little, each turn of the route, each hairpin of the mountain ended up by calling up the echo of an exploit and the face of a man. A new map of France is being drawn inside the other, of which the provinces are the colors of champions who become illustrious there, who illustrated them.] The Tour thus reinvents French history as it goes, giving new symbolism to the country's geography, new associations with the land for the nation's imaginary to share.

The past was not ignored, however, and the early race built on remembrance of the insults and injuries France and the French had suffered first in 1870 and then in the World Wars. In addition to rhetoric reminding its public of the country's prior great victories, another "characteristic of the early Tours was the emphasis on 'physical regeneration' for which the race became a symbol" (Vigarello 479). This regeneration was most visible in the routing of the Tour through German-annexed territories from 1906 to 1911: "Each incursion into German territory became an occasion for symbolic reappropriation. The race was a kind of homecoming" (Vigarello 479). After the First World War, "*L'Auto* designed the 1919 itinerary to symbolize France's territorial reunification" (Thompson 69). Thus another purpose of the race was "the creation of a mythical space, the description of exemplary men" (Vigarello 481). The Tour created heroes, but also necessitated heroes in an echo of how early cycling was viewed as yet another sport that could prepare young Frenchman for war and *revanche*.¹³ In the view of

¹³ The emphasis early on in modern sports on strengthening French youth so they would be ready when war was once more declared with Germany was not unique to cycling, but included gymnastics and other activities (Nye 53; Weber, "Gymnastics"). However, reflecting and reinforcing the growing importance of the bicycle to military preparedness, a few cycling clubs participated in mobilization drills (Thompson 25-26), and some even organized *brevets militaires*, special races that "generally covered set distances of 50, 100, or 150 kilometers, which had to be completed within a time limit, usually based on a minimum pace of twenty kilometers an hour. Cycling clubs also organized military cycling championships for various army

many early commentators, the racer on his bike symbolized the nation so that his efforts embodied the French condition: the rider was “both the *compagnon* of old and the modern worker with his machine” (Vigarello 472), as well as the suffering and surviving nation soldiering on after the World Wars (Thompson 110-17, 138-40), both constructions propelling the discourses around the racer and the Tour into the realm of myth.¹⁴ In fact, Barthes, in his analysis of the Tour as an epic, notes how the dynamics of the race are presented as a battle, and that the Tour, with its equipment and followers and employees, is comparable to a modern army (“Le Tour” 107).

Barthes bases such analyses of the Tour on everyday representations of the race: the riders’ nicknames, descriptions of the stages’ geography, the language used to characterize the riders. While he does not cite any particular articles or writers and while many of his examples seem to come from popular knowledge, one can nevertheless guess that the press—through newspapers, radio broadcasts, even televised reports—plays a role in the production of the Tour’s myths and meaning. The press, with its stories and images, has been deeply involved in sports myths since the rise of spectator sports at the end of the nineteenth century. The public was predominantly literate by then and had more leisure time, but since many of the sports available at the time were considered aristocratic or bourgeois or were simply beyond the financial means of most French people, as the bicycle was for a long time, people instead flocked to races, meets, or vélodromes and read about events like the various stages of the Tour de France, taking place elsewhere, in increasingly specialized newspapers (Holt 9-11, Thompson 16).¹⁵

corps” (Thompson 29). For more on the patriotic purpose of early sports, see Weber, “Faster, Higher, Stronger.”

¹⁴ For this semiotic structuring of myth, see Barthes’ *Mythologies*, especially the final essay “Myth Today.”

¹⁵ For a history of the rise of the bicycle in French popular culture, see Weber, “La petite reine.”

L'Auto-Vélo, later *L'Auto*, the paper that employed Henri Desgrange, was one of these specialized publications, and its leaders founded the Tour to avoid financial ruin by increasing readership, directing the race as a capitalistic venture with sponsors who covered the costs. *L'Auto* used its exclusive coverage of the Tour de France to showcase its image of a unified yet diverse France to the paper's growing, nationwide readership, thereby participating in the myth of national cohesion popular at the time. The paper, its race, and its own coverage of the race thus exemplify Benedict Anderson's argument that print-capitalism and the press contribute to a sense of unity across broad spaces by disseminating myths of national identity. Indeed, sport's ability to lend itself to myth meshed well with the growth in mass communications to further mythological conceptions of the nation; the Olympics and the soccer and rugby World Cups, witnessed by millions on television, are further examples of bringing together communities through sports spectacles.¹⁶

Of course, the Tour was not founded with only grand ideological motives; it is important to remember that Desgrange hoped to win readers away from his rival sports newspapers to *L'Auto* with the production of such a spectacle (one is reminded of Max Guazzini's introduction of the *Dieux de Stade*), and that the newspaper owned the Tour. This economic imperative remains largely cloaked by other concerns, as Barthes points out ("La Tour" 110-11), but if anything it has become stronger over time. As the years passed, journalists and officials on the Tour de France embraced new technologies such as radio and television, pushing them to perform better in the quests to expand race coverage and improve judging and fairness—and profit margin (Dunne). These advances

¹⁶ The sports newspaper *L'Auto-Vélo*, later *L'Auto*, and its founding of the Tour de France is a strong example of how sport, mass communication and national imaginings are often enmeshed. For the history of the paper and its race, see Thompson (17-22).

also led to the Tour becoming a bona fide national event disseminated by various media and accessible to everyone. In the latter half of the twentieth century the race's organizers expanded it to include stages in West Germany and England in the 1960s and '70s, respectively, and even celebrating the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht "by organizing stages in all of France's European Union neighbors" (Thompson 93). Yet even with these expansions and even in the twenty first century, French journalists continue to laud the Tour's power as a nation-builder. An editorial in *Le Monde* called for more transparency on the Tour, especially about doping, because the race deserved it due to the fact that it "n'est pas qu'une banale course de vélo, mais une histoire passionnelle que la France partage depuis 1903" ("Fascinant Tour") [is not only a normal bicycle race, but a passionate history that France has shared since 1903]. In this instance, the Tour de France is a partial producer of the imagined community of France, a story it has shared and that has therefore united it. Along the same lines, another journalist examined how the Tour is a "patrimoine national" because every day "il perce un coin de France [...] Un rituel qui permet de faire connaissance avec des arrière-pays méconnus, de contempler des paysages de carte postale ou de redécouvrir des traditions qu l'on croyait disparues" (Kessous, "Le Tour de France") [it uncovers a corner of France. A ritual that permits the discovery of misunderstood/ unrecognized backcountries, the contemplation of postcard landscapes and the rediscovery of traditions that one had thought lost]. Again, this vision of the Tour is nostalgic and somewhat idealistic, restricting "France" to countrysides and tradition. Another journalist goes so far as to claim that for its centennial, the Tour "peut quitter sa rubrique d'origine pour couvrir un immense champ de significations. L'histoire du Tour, à elle seule, est bien [...] une histoire de France, une histoire qui nous

convoque tous, que l'on soit ou non passionné de vélo" (Zerbib) [can leave its original rubric to cover an immense field of significations. The history of the Tour, by itself, is very much a history of France, a history that calls to all of us, whether or not we are passionate about cycling]. Once more, this is not just a bike race, but this time it is a manifestation of history, and the writer draws on Barthes' analysis of the Tour to try to make his point.¹⁷ Reed points out the commonness of such constructions: "Journalists who covered the race developed a 'historical' narrative style that helped the Tour become a sporting event that celebrated an idealized, stylized version of France's geography and history" (683). Barthes would certainly concur.

As an element of "commercialized popular culture" the Tour "provided a new medium in which provincial and national cultures met and interacted, as well as new opportunities for provincial communities to participate in fashioning France's emerging body of shared symbols and rituals" (Reed 653-54). Similarly to southwestern rugby union,

the Tour was, for Brest and some other host towns, a new arena for the expression of traditional tensions between Paris and the provinces, and the discord surrounding the race often reflected a broader cultural gulf between France's Parisian 'center' and peripheral communities. The Tour also opened new paths to cultural and economic integration. (Reed 654-55)

Therefore the Tour was not a one-way construction of the nation with the Parisian center calling all the shots; the provinces were also able to represent themselves and resist, to some extent, dictates from the center. Journalist Georges Rozet relates how, during the

¹⁷ It is interesting that contemporary journalists are still making these interpretations. The addition of the *caravan publicitaire*, the fragmenting of routes, the addition of stages in other countries, and the ceasing in 1960 of the race's course following France's borders would seem to have all shifted the Tour's meanings. Vigarello, in 1997, reads these changes as perhaps a negative omen for the Tour and its traditions (487). At the same time, however, he does note that the Tour has always created its own history and memory (491).

race's first decades, there was even a tradition of letting the local man pass through his town first, or at least in an honorable placement, "Car, si la France entière, sans distinction, appartient au Parigot, le « regional » appartient à sa province et attend avec impatience le moment de la traverser. [...] Aussi, le jour de « son » étape, le « regional » devient une sorte de personnage sacré" (128). [Because, if all of France, without distinction, belongs to the Parisian, the "regional" belongs to his province and waits impatiently for the moment to traverse it.... Thus, the day of "his" stage, the "regional" becomes a sort of sacred character.] Recognition of these individuals and through them, the provinces, helped draw attention away from Paris in an echo of southwestern rugby teams' domination of early French tournaments.

Advances in bicycle technology likewise helped shape the race (and vice versa) as the "incredible demands made on man and machine meant that success in the Tour became imperative for all ambitious riders and manufacturers" (Holt 98), leading them to develop and test machines for and during the race. Technology was not always easily embraced, however: the introduction of mountain stages in 1905 was not followed by the admission of the use of derailleurs until 1937 (Thompson 33-34) because Henri Desgrange, the founder and longtime director of the Tour, thought the devices to be for "women and the old" (qtd. in Thompson 112). In contrast, some technologies started out as acceptable and commonplace on the Tour, but slowly became taboo. Holt and Thompson concur that doping was widespread even before the First World War, but it was not until later that "pharmaceutical advances in the manufacture of stimulants made the introduction of urine sampling a necessity. This sombre side to the sport came to the fore with the full commercialisation of the Tour as a mass spectacle during the inter-war

years” (Holt 98). More recently, and after lengthy public hearings, American rider Floyd Landis was stripped of his 2006 Tour title because tests during the race had come back positive for synthetic testosterone (Macur).

Is this an example of men treating their bodies like machines, or of bodies turning into machines? Vigarello described the racer as the new modern worker (472); Rozet frequently uses mechanical language to describe riders during the first decade of the race. In other ways, however, bodies are shaped and treated differently. Vigarello notes how “the qualities attributed to champions changed dramatically over the years. In particular, the description of the ideal racer’s body was refined” (498). Prior to 1920, “Power belonged to those whose strength was visible, whose bodies were compact, robust, and rugged” (Vigarello 498). Then small and quick came into demand, followed by tall and thin. Echoing somewhat the changes in rugby men’s bodies over the years—discussed in chapters one and two—in general, “the Tour participated in a major twentieth-century transformation of the culture of the body [...]. Greater attention was paid to physical qualities and appearance. This may have been related to the growing ‘psychologization’ of behavior and perhaps, at a deeper level, to associated consumer values” (Vigarello 499). Concerns about such issues were present in Jean Prévost’s 1925 essays *Les plaisirs des sports*, in addition to worries about pollution in cities, mechanization of labor and the general negative effects of modern urban living. Henri Desgrange had earlier engaged all of these themes in his 1898 work *La tête et les jambes*, an epistolary novel that chronicles a coach’s advice to his bike-racing protégé. Desgrange warns his charge that he will be submitting to “un système” (10), a quasi-scientific venture in the formation of the ideal cyclist: “[T]u vas me servir de sujet d’étude [...] j’expérimenterai sur toi une méthode”

(15). [You will serve me a subject of study...I will test a method on you.] Employing this scientific method and drawing on information about anatomy, nutrition and hygiene, Desgrange instructs his pupil about how to develop his musculature, what to eat when and why, and even the proper manner in which to bathe. His meticulous planning and use of prevailing scientific discourses are an indication of how cycling and the bicycle itself sparked debates that reflected and reinforced discourses about hygiene, the national body and degeneration at the turn of the century. As discussed in chapter one, these concerns had led Coubertin and others to import British sports to France in an effort to improve the health of the French nation.

The coach warns the young protagonist, a fifteen-year-old boy named Henri, that his own personal journey to improvement will not be easy; he fills his first letter to the boy with warnings about the difficulties of the life of a professional cyclist. In the second letter, however, “H.D.” the coach outlines his plans for his new protégé. After discussing the mental attributes necessary in a racer, he writes:

Physiquement, c'est une autre affaire. Si tu n'es, pour le moment, qu'un grand corps sans lignes et sans formes, la nature fera son oeuvre et, je le crois, la fera dans la perfection. Nous passerons un jour entier entre nous deux la revue de ta carcasse et je t'expliquerai pourquoi j'ai en toi le plus grand espoir. Il y a dans ton ossature de la place pour des muscles puissants et souples. Le levier a la longueur voulue, les années le rendront vigoureux. (14-15)
[Physically, that is another story. If you are not, for the moment, but a large body without lines and without forms, nature will do its work and, I believe, will do it to perfection. We will spend a whole day together reviewing your body and I will explain to you why I have the greatest of hopes in you. There is in your bone structure room for strong and supple muscles. The lever has the desired length; the years will make it vigorous.]

Science is the dominant mode of thought here, but the body as a tool—a lever—is also introduced. Whereas in southwestern rugby the body was a weapon, for the coach here it will be a different kind of machine. Indeed, Desgrange emphasizes also how the protégé is to put himself and his body entirely in the care of his coach to be molded into a man and a racer, as if the coach is building a machine out of the boy. The body is a delicate mechanism, however; thus, H.D. informs Henri that the boy is not to smoke, drink, or have sex during his training (19-21). Furthermore, Henri receives specific instructions about hygiene, including how to dress (21) and how to take a proper bath (22), and he is taught about his musculature and bone structure (24-30). After three years, H.D. informs him, “Ta grande carcasse est devenue peu à peu harmonieuse; les lignes en sont nettes, régulières, élégantes, point heurtées. La force en toi n’est pas brutale. Tu es bien moralement et physiquement l’homme que je voulais te voir” (34). [Your big body has become harmonious little by little; its lines are clean, regular, elegant, and not at all abrupt. The strength in you is not brutal. You are morally and physically quite the man that I wanted to see in you.] The coach has succeeded in producing the body desired.

The didactic tone of the letters, however, suggests that Desgrange, as the author, is not simply speaking through the coach to only the boy but through the coach to a wider audience. The book is clearly a “how-to” manual for personal hygiene, manners, nutrition, and of course competitive cycling. While the coach who narrates the novel admits he was not perfect in his own training, he is nevertheless providing a model for other young men with his lessons and advice, and a model program for athletic education. He is therefore shaping not only his immediate protégé but also other hopefuls who might read the book. In this aspiration to influence, he somewhat resembles Monsieur Ndétare

from *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*, who tried to educate his players about the value of playing soccer for enjoyment instead of profit and about the dangers of illegal migration. Unlike Ndétare, however, the cycling coach's charges listen to him. In that, he is perhaps more like Paparou's coach from Garcia's stories, who reigned over his team with a whip. These men, whose power relations with their athletes vary, nonetheless have positions in supporting roles, if you will, of individual characters' performance of identities.¹⁸

For the cycling coach, the maturation of Henri's body is not the end of the process of production, however—now a cyclist must be produced by further refining the body and bodily practices. There follows more advice about eating—never set out on a ride “à jeun” (42) [while fasting]—about proper posture on a bicycle, and even more specific rules about clothing, including no loud colors, wearing lightweight shoes that do not cover the ankle, not wearing clingy bottoms, wearing layers of flannel and wool, no gloves, and sporting a cap with a short visor (47-48). The coach also advises his pupil to frequently change and wash these garments (55). There is an appropriate sort of uniform, then, for a cyclist that allows the prescribed bodily movements and amount of perspiration. Correct care of scrapes and cuts is addressed at length, including the admonition to never pick a scab (51-52).

In addition to being properly dressed and cleaned, this body must also be properly gendered according to H.D., who warns against overdoing hygiene and cleanliness to the point of becoming effeminate or turning to *coquetterie*. While he allows Henri to decide

¹⁸ I do not wish to suggest that there is some hierarchy of authenticity in sports experiences, simply that, in these particular stories, these characters are portrayed differently from the athletes they coach, and their experience of sports is portrayed separately. The experiences of playing, watching, or writing about sports are all valid ways of participating in sports culture; they simply involve varying levels of experience, discourse, and analysis. There is no one level more authentic than another; I have simply chosen to focus on discourse about athletes for my purposes.

on the cut of his own clothes and to dress in some of the latest fashion, he cautions that Henri must not become overly occupied with such matters. He also criticizes how Henri spends half an hour every day cleaning and polishing his nails and styles his moustache daily, too, claiming, “[C]es minuterics ne font pas et ne doivent pas faire partie de l’hygiène du cycliste” (54). [These details are not and must not be part of the hygiene of a cyclist.] Thus there are certain limitations implicit in the care of the body that must be respected so that it does not cross over gender and occupational lines. One wonders what Desgrange and his narrator might have thought of Stade Français’s Dieux du Stade skin care products!

The coach outlines many other constraints, too. While the boy is to eat as much as he can during the week before a big race (84), only certain foods are to be eaten during races, and only milk is to be drunk, not water or coffee (79, 81). With the money young Henri wins in races, he is to procure the services of a masseur, ensure that he is eating well and healthily, or repair or buy new racing outfits (96). H.D. even gives instructions for how to select a good masseur and why massage is an important part of cycle training (97-98). Henri is told to get eight hours of sleep a night—from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. (105)—to not be stressed at work, and to take care of his digestive system. In aid of this last admonishment, the coach describes the workings of digestion and a breakdown of the three food types (106-10). Henri is not to leave the table hungry, but not to eat until he is sick. He is to have short meals lasting forty minutes, slowly eaten, and to avoid eating food that will give him bad breath. He is provided with a possible menu for each meal, instructed to avoid foods that disagree with him, given the possibility of a vegetarian diet, and told to drink one glass of liquid per meal, either beer or milk, or wine cut with water

(111-12). Advice along these lines is repeated throughout the rest of the novel, reinforcing the coach's theories and teachings and making clear that care of the body and its proper use are of the utmost importance and can impact class and gender identity.

The final letter of the novel, however, opens up the question of what is exactly at stake for H.D. in molding his protégé. The young man has decided to stop cycling and get married, and his coach agrees that this is well and proper and that their coach-athlete relationship should now come to an end. There is a sense that the boy is now completely a man and no longer needs to be shaped by the help of an elder. This feeling is reinforced in the last lines of the novel, in which the coach states, "Mais pourquoi te faire des recommandations, tu es pour la vie désormais un homme propre, sain et vigoureux, rempli de volonté. Ton passé te défend de faire jamais partie de la catégorie des adipeux" (215). [But why make recommendations to you, you are from now on a clean, healthy, and vigorous man for life, filled with will. Your past prevents you from ever becoming part of the category of fatties.] The letter is signed, "Bien à toi, Henri Desgrange" (215). Ultimately, then, the novel is about the education and production not only of the cycling body, but the masculine body and perhaps even the ideal French body.

Of course, this is a French body that is specifically gendered and classed. The young man in question comes from a certain economic background and, once grown, occupies a specific social niche thanks to his job. Even his ability to participate in cycling—due to his years at a *lycée*, his disposable income spent on equipment, his time off from employment—relies on his socio-economic position. However, the sport reinforces his identity by displaying his expenses, in terms of time and money, in the public parks and on the roads where he trains, and by developing values judged fit for his

position by his coach and, probably, larger society. According to his coach, the proper bourgeois gentleman must not carry over his sporting endeavors into married adult life—this admonition was also present in Jolinon’s *Joueur de balle* mentioned in chapter three—nor let himself be lured too far into professionalization. He must be fed and clothed in certain ways. He is expected, in short, to perform his role as demanded, in this case, by his coach, and the advice and plans contained in the book provide a script for that performance.

The other works examined in this dissertation have all engaged, in various ways, similar kinds of scripts. In chapter one, rugby stories and characters produced models of masculinity that were hardly monolithic: Pierre Danos’s elegance challenged notions of masculinity as brute strength and ideas about class and physicality; Paparou resisted what he saw as the forces of civilization dictated by a Parisian-centered society; Sancey redefined masculine honor. The photographs in the *Dieux du Stade* series in turn play with and subvert older gender models and thereby open up rugby union culture to new possibilities for its players’ identities. Soccer, which has been portrayed as already open to some kinds of diversity, is still an arena for debates about identity involving class, race, and immigration. It has been the vehicle for discussion about what it means to be French, and the two novels examined in chapter three use the game as a way to critique social situations both in France and abroad. Though each sport has its specificities that these representation draw on, they all also seem to return continuously to a few common threads.

Modern sports in France all took shape at a time when concerns about national degeneration were rife. In addition to their more organic dissemination, the football

codes were brought over from England by educators and statesmen in attempts to form a healthier national body by whipping individual bodies into shape, mentally and physically, on the playing field. Both cycling and boxing also participated in this trend as contributors to one's health that would combat the effects of increasingly urban lifestyles perceived as making bodies soft and prone to disease. New science and knowledge about hygiene were likewise added to this convergence of concerns. However, despite the rhetoric of *revanche* and building up the nation, despite the re-inscription of history on the landscape for a national geography lesson of memory, despite the meritocratic mythology, no body could ever perfectly conform to these sometimes conflicting mandates regarding idealized Frenchness. Representations of these sporting bodies clearly illustrate this conflict, and indeed contribute to it. Pierre Danos's character provides an embodiment of debates about masculinity and class; Sébastien in *Banlieue noire* is torn between dreams of soccer and the reality of his social position; interpretations of the importance of the presence of racized bodies on the French national soccer team indicate that definitions of Frenchness remain unsettled. On the other hand, some of the works explored in this dissertation represent sports as a way to produce more distinct identities: Paparou relies on violent opposition to build his local identity; Madické's friends in Niodior are shown identifying more with Senegal after the national soccer team's stunning run in the 2002 World Cup. Yet in all of these examples, sports serve as a site where varying threads of identity come together—race, class, national origin, gender—and produce something new.

The physical and cultural demands of participation in sports mean that each sport has an active role in the shaping of these specific identities. Thus Sancey, as a rugby

forward, must have a particular body type to fit his position, and young Henri in *La tête et les jambes* must have a sufficiently long frame to power his pedals. Henri must also have the income to invest in a bicycle and cycling gear, meaning he must have a certain economic status to be a cyclist. The racist taunting of Moussa by his teammates in *Le ventre de l'Atlantique* suggests that bodies with particular skin tones and from particular places might fare more easily in soccer recruitment and training facilities. In these works, then, the serious business of representing, producing, and problematizing identities occurs through play; intersecting identities play off of each other, as do individuals' identities. Nationality, race, class, and gender are thus *at play* as well as *in play* in these sporting representations.

**Appendix:
Glossary of Rugby Terminology**

I. Positions (les postes) ¹

backs (les arrières) = players numbering 11-15²

centers, three-quarters (les centres, les trois-quarts) = #12 (inside center) and 13 (outside center)

the eight man (troisième ligne centre; le numéro huit) = #8

the first row (la première ligne [de la mêlée]) = #1-3

flankers, loose forwards (troisième ligne aile) = #6 and 7

the fly half (le demi d'ouverture) = #10

forwards (les avants) = players numbering 1-8

the fullback (l'arrière) = #15

the hooker (le talonneur/la talonneuse) = player #2; “hooks” the ball back with her foot

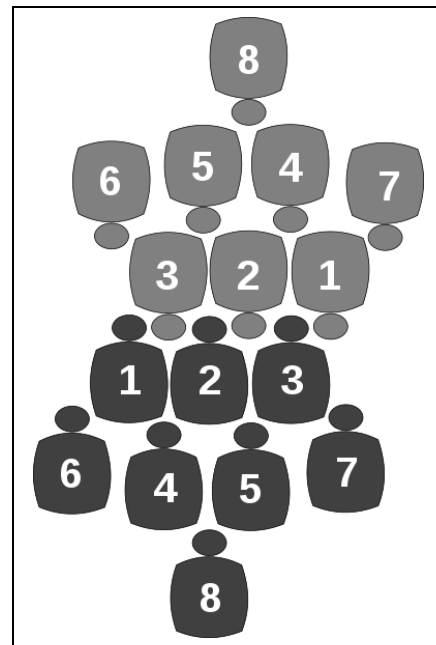
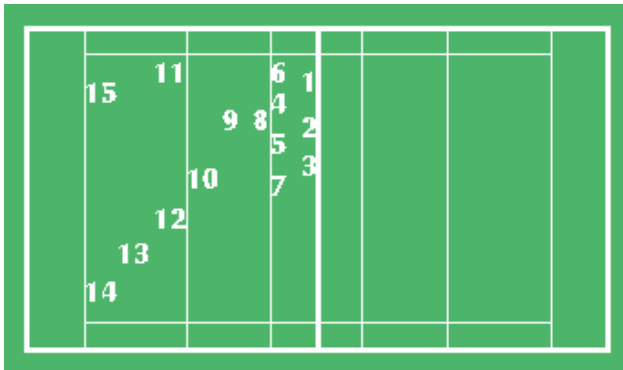
locks (la deuxième ligne) = #4 and 5; ‘lock out’ their legs to push scrum forward

the pack (le pack) = the forwards, especially the “tight five” (#1-5)

a prop (un pilier) = players #1 and 3, who “prop up” the hooker with their shoulders

the scrum half (le demi de mêlée) = #9

wings, wingers (les ailiers) = #11 and 14



¹ The names of the positions vary somewhat in English according to the country in which the game is being played. For example, the fly half and the scrum half are sometimes referred to as “half-backs” and centers as “three-quarters.” I have given the American names, as those are the ones I am most familiar with.

² In rugby, the number on a starting player’s jersey corresponds to the player’s position.

II. Actions

a conversion kick (une transformation) = After the try, worth 2 points.

a line-out (une touche) = When the ball goes out of touch (out of bounds), this is how it is put back into play. Called a line-out because the forwards usually form a corridor of at least two from each team, down which the hooker throws the ball.

a maul (un maul) = When a ball carrier is held up, without being tackled, by both an opposing player and a player from his own team, a maul is then considered formed. Players can only join in from behind the player furthest back and bound into the maul. If either team deliberately collapses the maul the referee penalizes that side. Players in the maul shove and grab for the ball and try to hand it back to their own players so that it emerges out the back of the formation while being pushed forward.

a penalty (une pénalité) = Called for various reasons. Can be taken by running or kicking the ball, and the opposing team must retreat 10 meters.

a penalty kick (un coup franc) = If kicked through the uprights, worth 3 points.

a ruck (une mêlée ouverte) = A ruck is formed when the ball is on the ground and two opposing players meet over the ball. Players compete for the ball by attempting to drive one another from the area and to “ruck” the ball backwards with their feet. Rucks commonly form at tackles, but can form anywhere in the field of play where the ball is on the ground. Handling the ball while it is in the vicinity of a ruck is a penalty offence, though modern practice permits the player who is acting as scrum half to 'dig' for the ball once possession has been secured. If the ball does not come out of a ruck after about five seconds, the referee will award a scrum to the team considered to have been moving forward in the ruck.

the scrum (la mêlée) = The eight forwards from each team bind together and push against each other. The scrum-half from the team that has been awarded possession feeds the ball into the center of the scrum from the side most advantageous for his hooker. The ball must be fed straight down the middle of the tunnel and the hookers must not contest for the ball until it is put in. The scrum is begun again if the ball comes straight out of the tunnel or if it collapses. If the scrum wheels (rotates) more than 90 degrees due to pushing, the scrum is reformed and awarded to the other side.

a try (un essai) = Worth five points. This occurs when a player touches down the ball, with control, in the opposing team's try zone.

III. Places and Things

the ball (le ballon) = of a distinct oval shape (prolate spheroid) that results in bizarre bounces. In Rugby union, it can be carried, kicked, and passed, but never passed forward with the hands.

le Bouclier de Brennus = designed by Pierre de Coubertin and named after its engraver Charles Brennus, this trophy is awarded to the team that wins the annual French club championship.

the pitch (le terrain) = the field of play, usually 100 meters by about 70 meters

goalposts / uprights (les poteaux) = set up in an “H” whose top bars are significantly longer than those supporting the transversal. Kicks must pass between the uprights and over the transversal to score.

third half / drink up / social (troisième mi-temps) = the (in)famous rugby ritual that follows every match, wherein the home team hosts the visiting side for a meal and festivities.

the try zone (l'en but) = like the end zone in American football; where the player must touch the ball down with the ball under control in order to score a try.

the 22 meter line (la ligne de vingt deux metres) = basically the ‘red zone,’ but balls that go out of touch from kicks behind this line are subject to special rules.

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