



HAL
open science

Being Bretons through wrestling. Traditional gouren and identity, in Brittany

Dario Nardini, Aurélie Épron

► **To cite this version:**

Dario Nardini, Aurélie Épron. Being Bretons through wrestling. Traditional gouren and identity, in Brittany. *Ethnography*, 2021, Special Issue - Hand-to-hand Sports and Identity, 22 (3), pp.372-395. hal-03254278

HAL Id: hal-03254278

<https://hal.science/hal-03254278v1>

Submitted on 2 Dec 2024

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Being Breton through wrestling: Traditional gouren as a distinctive Breton activity

Journal:	<i>Ethnography</i>
Manuscript ID	ETH-20-0112.R1
Manuscript Type:	Special Issue - Hand-to-hand Sports and Identity
Keywords:	Breton wrestling, Brittany, Breton culture, Regional belonging, gender, masculinity, ethnography, tradition, wrestling, martial arts
Abstract:	<p>Gouren is a style of wrestling practiced in Brittany, France. It has been 'sportised' during the last century, but it still represents an emblematic tradition for those people involved who exploit its ancient origins to describe it as a distinctive Breton activity. Following the same path of Breton 'identity' – one that has been defined in opposition to hegemonic French identity – gouren is largely defined by its practitioners in opposition to the 'hegemonic' wrestling style in France, judo, viewed as an epitome of globalized sports. Through their actions and narratives, Breton wrestlers shape an alternative (pre-modern) sporting culture, promoting non-aggressive, social, and non-hierarchical attitudes over radical competition, athletic performance and personal achievement. Accordingly, gouren is associated with 'old-fashioned' ideas of masculinity, strength and related values, that serve to root the practice in the idealized past of Brittany – even now that women are actively involved in gouren.</p>

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

Being Breton through wrestling: Traditional *gouren* as a distinctive Breton activity

Gouren, a ‘traditional sport’

In Brittany, a region in the northwest of France, about 1600 people today participate in a wrestling tradition that boasts ancient origins in the area. Breton wrestling (*gouren*) is a local style of grappling practice that has been gradually ‘sportised’¹ starting in the late 1920s and early 1930s (Épron, 2008). It nonetheless retains a strong connection to its roots, which – according to popular belief – date back to the Celtic occupation of the Armorican peninsula between the fourth and sixth centuries. However, recent studies (Épron, 2008; Nardini, 2016a; 2020) suggest that this narrative is the functional result of a (re-)‘invention of tradition’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) that took part in the last century, more than a precisely coherent re-enactment of it. As such, *gouren* is ‘traditional’ in the sense that anthropologists use the term. In other words, its status as ‘traditional’ reflects not only ‘transmission’ and dogmatic reproduction of the activity as it was performed in the past, but also the active and not-strictly-corresponding ‘reception’ of it in the present (Lenclud, 1987; Shils, 1971).

In fact, *gouren* has been continuously transformed during the twentieth century, and subject to especially profound reform on two specific occasions. These patterns of change correspond with the main political and socio-cultural regional movements that transpired in Brittany during the twentieth century. In the first case, Docteur Charles Cotonnec founded the first official *gouren* federation, the Fédération des Amis des Luttes et des Sports Athlétiques Bretons (FALSAB) in 1930. For Cotonnec and his contemporaries, a central federation was critical for adapting the old tradition to the modern sports model and transforming *gouren* into an attractive and pedagogical/hygienic discipline.² Cotonnec and the FALSAB endeavoured to save and transmit Breton culture to the new generations, after a period – from the end of the nineteenth century to the first decades of the twentieth – when the institutions of the *Troisième République* had strongly promoted a shared French consciousness, language and belonging over Breton specificities (Croix, 2008; McDonald, 1990). More specifically, Cotonnec sought to build the ‘sport national Breton,’³ giving Breton people their own *éducation physique* that was adapted to their regional character and local heritage. Importantly, this practice was distinct from the

1
2
3
4 *gymnastique* that the French state promoted in schools, in order to produce disciplined and
5 salubrious French citizens and workers (Épron and Fuchs, 2013; Épron and Robène, 2006).⁴
6
7

8 The second case of decisive transformation occurred in the 1960s and 1970s, when a young
9 Breton wrestler named Patrig Ar Goarnig further adapted the practice. Goarnig's efforts to
10 reform *gouren* took place in the wake of the concurrent cultural and political movement for the
11 revaluation of Breton culture (Le Coadic, 1998; Postic et al., 2003), and should be understood
12 in this context. As Goarnig himself has observed, his changes aimed to emphasize the
13 connection of *gouren* to its 'ancestral spirit' (Goarnig, interviewed on July 24, 2012 by Dario
14 Nardini) and its Celtic and regional roots. Through Breton wrestling tradition, he sought to
15 resist the 'cultural genocide France had imposed on Brittany' (Patrig Ar Goarnig, interviewed
16 by Aurélie Épron on May 16, 2007).⁵ He also wanted to organize a more structured and
17 effective way of transmitting knowledge of *gouren* as, by the mid-20th century, local interest in
18 *gouren* was waning (Épron, 2008; Jaouen, 2005). To address these challenges, Goarnig
19 consciously blended traditional and modern elements. On the one hand, he fostered the
20 connection of *gouren* with its past and Breton culture by giving Breton names to the *gouren*
21 techniques, organizing a 'bardic'/Celtic symbolic, and re-establishing a link to the rural past of
22 Brittany with the so-called *Mod Kozh* – 'old-fashioned' – tournaments (Épron, 2008; Nardini,
23 2016a, 2020; Philippe, 2005). On the other hand, Breton wrestling adopted several features that
24 were already consolidated praxis in other sports. For example, Goarnig adopted standardized
25 teaching and training methods for *gouren*, and introduced coloured strips on Breton wrestlers'
26 shirts to indicate their progressive technical level (Épron and Nardini, 2019). Both of these
27 implementations were more or less explicitly inspired by the teaching methods and structure of
28 Eastern martial arts, which were becoming more widely practiced in France in the same period.
29 In particular, many innovations stemmed from judo, which was becoming the direct competitor
30 of *gouren* in the region, as Ar Goarnig himself told Aurélie Épron (Patrig Ar Goarnig,
31 interviewed by Aurélie Épron on May 16, 2007).⁶
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48

49 As these events demonstrate, Breton wrestling has undergone considerable changes in its
50 rules, functions, structure, technique and symbols during the last century. Moreover, these
51 changes have embodied the social, demographic, economic and cultural changes that affected
52 the region and the nation in the same period, as well as reflecting the 'sporting model' that has
53 simultaneously inspired the reorganization of physical activities in France (Tétart, 2007).
54 Nowadays, Breton wrestling is a traditional practice that has adopted sportive and contemporary
55 features in order to survive those changes. As such, *gouren*'s organisers and practitioners have
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4 avoided converting it into an inert museum piece, as has happened to other Breton games from
5 the past (Épron, 2008; Nardini, 2016a).

6
7
8 Innovation and ‘sportisation,’ therefore, have been critical for the survival of the practice to
9 the present day. However, and without contradictions, *gouren* still captivates its practitioners
10 precisely because of its indelible associations with Breton culture and ‘identity.’ In fact,
11 ‘tradition’ and innovations have been converging, constitutive driving forces for the vitality of
12 the practice in the present. In this **article**, we show that *gouren* represents a way of ‘feeling
13 Breton’ in contemporary Brittany. **First, we look at how Breton wrestlers collectively describe**
14 **and perform *gouren* as an old, authentically Breton activity – including as it was developed into**
15 **a modern sport. Then, we discuss how the origins of *gouren* help to reinforce and reproduce**
16 **traditional masculinity in Breton wrestling today, even though women’s participation is**
17 **significantly growing. We also describe how *gouren*’s ‘culture’ and values are oppositional to**
18 **other wrestling styles, namely judo, viewed as the epitome of globalized sports – and, indeed,**
19 **the globalized world. Finally, we show how this narrative and performative sporting ‘frame’**
20 **functionally depicts *gouren* as the product of a pre-modern, and therefore different (Breton),**
21 **representation of strength, masculinity, and the body. Finally, we demonstrate why this link to**
22 **regional identity is central in the ethnographic field and in the biographical trajectories of many**
23 ***gouren* practitioners. People participate in Breton wrestling for various reasons: it is fun,**
24 **healthy and social; it stimulates conviviality; and it can express virtuous sporting values. Yet**
25 **inextricably, their involvement is also grounded in identity performance: *gouren* represents a**
26 **living and engagingly carnal way of feeling Breton, and doing Breton-ness, in modern times.**
27 **‘I’ve done Breton dance before, a few lessons of Breton language, but what I felt different in**
28 ***gouren* is that it is a living practice, while in dance you just need to learn fixed movements, that**
29 **you reproduce in festivals, for tourists. [...] The value of *gouren* is that it is a modern activity,**
30 **but it has deep roots in the past’ (A., interviewed by Dario Nardini on June 26, 2012).**
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50

51 **Breton wrestling and Breton-ness**

52
53
54 **Breton wrestlers collectively define the meaning of their practice in relation (in opposition)**
55 **to other ‘sporting cultures’ (Bausinger, 2006), and especially judo. This can be seen by critically**
56 **reflecting on the ambiguous ethnographic positioning of Dario Nardini, who approached the**
57 **study of *gouren* while being a long-term judo practitioner. This process clearly embodies the**
58
59
60

1
2
3
4 historical definition of ‘Breton culture’ as a relational (oppositional) reaction. In particular,
5 Breton culture exists in opposition to political efforts to construct and popularize a common,
6 shared French identity – efforts that commenced in the last years of the nineteenth century
7 (Bertho, 1980; Le Coadic, 1998; Meyer, 2003; Simon, 1999). In fact, according to consistent
8 ethnographic analysis on different European and French regions (Bourdieu, 1980; Bromberger
9 and Meyer, 2003; Chevallier and Morel, 1985; Fournier, 2006; Macdonald, 1997), regional
10 identities are understood here as ‘imagined,’ relational and processual communities (Anderson,
11 1983) that are also defined in negative terms.

12
13
14
15
16
17
18 This ‘negative’ identification has been particularly effective in Brittany, where local
19 inhabitants have historically perceived the central Nation-State’s unifying actions as attempts
20 to erase local traditions, costumes and practices (Bertho, 1980; Le Coadic, 1998; McDonald,
21 1990; Meyer, 2003; Postic et al., 2003; Simon, 1999). These suspicions precipitated the two
22 main political and socio-cultural reactions in the region during the twentieth century – to which
23 have corresponded the main reforms of *gouren* as we described above. The first, more militant
24 and conservative response, took hold in the inter-war period (Bougeard, 2002; Déniel, 1976).
25 Conversely, the second response emerged in the 1950s and flourished more broadly in the 1960s
26 and 1970s. This latter movement was more progressive, and generally focused on rediscovering
27 Breton cultural distinctiveness – especially in music and dance (Geslin et al., 2010; Le Coadic,
28 1998). At present time, Breton culture and the representations linked to ‘Breton-ness’ are more
29 related to the free choice of a distinctive way of living.⁷ This concept of ‘Breton-ness’ is
30 sensitive to the local dimensions, traditions, human relationships and emotions; it stands in
31 contrast to a globalized world where economy, rationalism and consumption are perceived to
32 control emotions and contractually orient relations (Delon, 2007; Nardini, 2016a; Simon,
33 1999).

34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46 From this perspective, Delon (2007) argued that we should view Breton-ness as a local
47 means of re-enchanting the experienced world, in response to the disenchantment we are
48 exposed to in late-capitalism.⁸ Choosing to be Breton corresponds to the feeling of giving a
49 deeper meaning to one’s relations – with other people, with what one does, and with the
50 environment where one lives. Therefore, besides being defined in opposition to the French
51 centralism and cultural hegemony,⁹ Breton culture is now characterized in opposition to
52 Western globalization, consumption and standardization. However, as Fournier (2006) showed
53 for Provence, in Brittany this opposition is carried out in bivalent, apparently contradictory
54 ways. Breton people are perfectly conscious to participate in both the French nation and

1
2
3
4 Western capitalism. They do not see their Breton-ness as a radical, essentialist alternative to (or
5 denial of) the national administration or globalized economy. Instead, being Bretons is a
6 specific, virtuous way of being French in a globalized society.
7
8

9 This negative, but nonetheless ambivalent, dynamic also helps to define *gouren*'s 'sporting
10 culture' (Bausinger, 2006). Consider on the one hand a generalist emic representation of *current*
11 *sports*, with judo as the epitome of this category. Breton people perceive these sports as
12 expressions of the disenchanting globalized Western society. They seem to emphasize athletic
13 performance over social relationships, competition over cooperation, personal achievement
14 over social and cultural values, and vertical hierarchy over participation. Conversely, Breton
15 wrestling is viewed – and lived – as an authentic and meaningful tradition. For Bretons, *gouren*
16 is a practice through which human emotions and values, social relationships, cooperation, and
17 a real sense of community are collectively built and conveyed.
18
19

20 As Hermann Bausinger (2006) showed, organized physical activities are cultural and
21 historical products, that emerge from a certain social context and in a specific moment. As such,
22 these activities inevitably reflect some aspects of the whole society. Simultaneously, however,
23 they also act as relatively autonomous social fields, such that they contribute to *producing*
24 culture – indeed, a 'sporting culture.' Bausinger's approach is apposite in the case of Breton
25 wrestling. On the one hand, Breton wrestling represents an expression of contemporary Breton
26 society, a culture with its specificities but which remains in all respects an integral part of
27 French-European society. On the other hand, it constitutes a social environment where Breton
28 culture – and the values and representations ascribed to it – are collectively defined and (en-
29)acted as fundamentally different from Franco-European values and representations.¹⁰ In other
30 words, *gouren* is an activity where difference is made, and belonging underpinned. Drawing on
31 Herzfeld's (1997) concept, Breton wrestlers dynamically contribute to strengthening Breton
32 'cultural intimacy.' By performing, organizing, describing and interpreting their wrestling
33 activities in particular ways, Breton wrestlers collectively participate in defining – and
34 performatively *doing* – Breton-ness. This process takes place in a context where being Breton
35 is not the consequence of significant structural (social and economic, or ethnic) distinctions
36 from Paris and the Nation, but rather a choice. Breton-ness is therefore a political choice to
37 adopt a specific way of being, one inspired by idealised and patrimonialised representations of
38 the past and of cultural identity.
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

An old Breton tradition

While Dario Nardini was carrying out his fieldwork on Breton wrestling,¹¹ a long-term wrestler and teacher of the Rennes-based *Club de gouren* told him: ‘Look, this technique is called the “*klied*,” and it’s specific to *gouren*. You can’t find it in other disciplines.’ He was teaching Nardini one of the fundamental movements of Breton wrestling, which consists in hooking the opponent’s leg, using your ankle and knee as leavers. Forbidden in other, similar grappling practices (such as judo), the *klied* is considered an emblematic and distinctive technical gesture of *gouren* (using ‘distinctive’ in the sense of Bourdieu, 1984).

During her fieldwork, Aurélie Épron has worked as a *permanent* (a salaried trainer and promoter of *gouren*) for the Morbihan Departmental Committee of the *Fédération de Gouren*. In this capacity, she took part in different federal meetings during the 2004-05 season in which *klied* was the subject of discussion. The technique was reported to cause knee injuries, and indeed some members of the Federation considered it dangerous for the wrestlers’ safety. Other members, however, argued that the technique needed only to be ruled and controlled. Ultimately, this latter perspective carried the day: in a decisive meeting in 2005, the Federal Committee approved the maintenance of *klied* in *gouren* competitions, for its distinctive and unique significance to the practice.

Klied is a technical principle that can be applied in different situations, movements and directions in order to throw the opponent to the ground on his shoulder blades. Its successful execution marks a ‘*lamm*’ – the equivalent of the *ippon* in judo – and wins the match. In each of these variations, it can be performed both in a dynamic and more static situation – that is, taking advantage of the opponent’s movement, or looking for a more stable stance in order to exert more strength. In this latter variation, *klied* is called *mod kozh*, which means ‘old-fashioned’ in Breton language. As the *gouren* teacher explained to Dario Nardini in the Club of Rennes, the static variation of *klied* is called *mod kozh* because ‘you need strong lower-back muscles to perform this variation of the technique. The peasant wrestlers used to do the *klied* this way, for they worked out their lower-back muscles on a daily basis working on the farms.’

This claimed agrarian association reflects an extensive mythologizing effort from the actors involved in *gouren*. The explanation of *klied*’s heritage serves to root the practice in an idealized and ennobling past. Indeed, Breton wrestlers unhesitatingly place the origin of *gouren* within two different, not always historically precise but rhetorically converging moments: in the age of the Celtic migrations in the Armorican peninsula, between the fourth and sixth

1
2
3
4 centuries; and in the rural environs of nineteenth-century Brittany, which still inspire most of
5 the traits ascribed to the idea of Breton culture and identity. These narrative origins of *gouren*
6 closely correspond to the historical and cultural construction of the ‘idea of region’ (Bourdieu,
7 1980; Bromberger and Meyer, 2003) and a ‘regional culture’ (Meyer, 2003) in Brittany.¹²
8
9

10
11 Accordingly, the *kliked* narrative corresponds to the convenient idealization of the past of
12 *gouren*. It is part of a collective ‘invention of [*gouren*] tradition,’ a process that started in the
13 late 1920s with the work of Cotonnec and is still ongoing. Through this process, *gouren*’s
14 guardians have aimed to describe the practice as an indisputably old, authentically Breton
15 activity – even as it was being transformed into a modern, competitive sport. The idealization
16 of *kliked* sits uneasily alongside questions of contestant safety. Throughout its history – and in
17 the present – the Federation has continually discussed and implemented safety measures.
18 Within the ‘*gouren* family,’¹³ moreover, trainers, referees and practitioners are responsive to
19 questions regarding safety. They point to the control and lack of aggressiveness in Breton
20 wrestling as a point of difference with judo and other sports. For all this openness and general
21 appreciation of safety, however, *kliked* has remained. In spite of the potential danger it poses
22 for athletes, it persists because it constitutes an invaluable ‘profit of distinction’ (Bourdieu,
23 1984: 175).
24
25

26
27 In this way, *kliked* is emblematic of both *gouren* and its associated meanings. In the sporting
28 ‘frame’ (Bateson, 1987) that characterizes *gouren*, a throwing gesture such as *kliked* becomes
29 an essential, distinctive and valuable technical gesture. Indeed, these abiding associations are
30 common to many other combat or wrestling practices. In the context of combat, sporting
31 movements are not simply the most effective means of defeating an opponent according to the
32 rules, but cultural gestures (Bruant, 1992), ‘*techniques du corps*’ (Mauss, 1973), that gain their
33 meaning within the sporting frame. In this way, a punch thrown in the boxing ring becomes a
34 jab or an uppercut, rather than simply an act of aggression; a throw performed according to
35 specific bio-mechanic and aesthetic standards becomes an *ippon*; and a leg-hooking technique
36 carried out on a sawdust arena becomes a *kliked*. More generally, boxing has become the ‘noble
37 art,’ judo the ‘gentle way,’ and Eastern combat systems have been called *martial arts*. It is not
38 only the rules, or the biomechanics of a movement that ontologically render a sporting gesture
39 ‘aggressive’ or ‘not aggressive’, ‘dangerous’ or ‘safe.’ As Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois
40 (2004) showed for non-sporting contexts, equally important is the way this gesture is performed
41 and received in the exegetical, performative and narrative ‘frame’ in which it takes place. These
42 acts of performing and receiving ultimately determine how the gesture is understood and
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4 interpreted – and consequently perceived and experienced – as dangerous or safe, aggressive
5 or fair.
6
7
8
9

10 11 **A male Breton tradition** 12

13
14 While the discourse surrounding *gouren*'s ancient roots accentuates its rural, pre-modern
15 heritage, it also has other significant effects. Notably, this narrative helps to reinforce and
16 reproduce the traditional masculinity of Breton wrestling in the present day. In fact, *gouren*
17 remained an exclusively male practice until the 1970s, when women first claimed an active –
18 rather than ancillary – role within its structures (Épron, 2008; Épron and Jollivet, 2007). As a
19 result, women have been afforded only a marginal role in shaping social and cultural
20 representations of *gouren*. They struggled to find a legitimate position and recognition in the
21 practice throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and in 2019/2020 still only represent 23-25% of the
22 members of the Fédération de Gouren. Moreover, only one third of them regularly take part in
23 competitions, compared to 60% of the registered men.¹⁴
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31

32 Nor is participation the only sphere in which women remain at *gouren*'s margins. Women
33 were under-represented in the official rhetoric and federal publications about *gouren* – notably
34 magazines such as *Gouren infos* and *Gouren mag*, and later a website.¹⁵ In this history of
35 *gouren*, women have played subordinate and passive roles: rather than practitioners, trainers or
36 administrators, they are spectators, supporters, or 'ring girls' who carry the trophies (Épron and
37 Jollivet, 2007). From the 1970s, women episodically took on administrative roles within the
38 Federation, Clubs or competitions. Some accounts did note the influence of a few pioneering
39 figures, such as wrestlers' mothers, girlfriends or friends. Nevertheless, this acknowledged
40 influence did not affect *gouren*'s heritage and representations at that time (Fraisie, 1998). In
41 fact, women were not always explicitly, but firmly marginalized until the late-1980s, when
42 *gouren*'s administrators and institutions finally started to gradually recognize women's
43 practice. While the FALSAB was enrolling women wrestlers during this period, it was not
44 organizing their practice. There were no competitions, no weight categories, and no technical
45 training for women. Simultaneously, the competing federation founded in the 1960s by Patrig
46 Ar Goarnig was refusing to register women at all.
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57

58 Since the 1980s, women have progressively claimed a position as active participants in
59 Breton wrestling – albeit in often-circumscribed ways. In 1986, the *Commission Feminine*
60

1
2
3
4 (Women's Commission) of the *gouren* Federation was founded. To some extent, these
5 concessions to women were linked to the contingent need to legitimate the practice in a
6 changing social context. It is unlikely that society at large would have safeguarded, supported,
7 funded and promoted a sportive activity where women were unreservedly excluded (Épron,
8 2008, 2012; Épron and Jollivet, 2007). Even so, ethnographic interviews with those involved
9 and analysis of federal magazines confirm that the Commission's influence remains limited.
10 Notably, the Federation has encouraged its initiatives only when they are seen to support the
11 entire *gouren* community. Even the roles women took on generally correspond to a gendered
12 division of tasks: they are secretaries, assistants, and so on. Moreover, women have – for the
13 most part – not reached the higher positions in the Fédération de Gouren, or in the Departmental
14 Committees. This absence is not without exceptions, but – in *gouren*'s past and its present –
15 women in leadership positions remains very much the exception.¹⁶

16
17 Of course, women's contingent role is not a specific trait of *gouren*. Instead, it is a common
18 aspect of most sports traditionally considered as 'male' activities in France (Baillette and
19 Liotard, 1999; Mennesson, 2000; 2005a) and the (Western) world (Hargreaves and Anderson,
20 2014; Messner and Sabo, 1990). In this regard, *gouren* is not dissimilar to judo (Guérandel and
21 Mennesson, 2007) and other 'male' wrestling practices. Once again, the difference resides in
22 the narratives that render *gouren* a traditional, 'pre-modern,' rural – and therefore necessarily
23 masculine – wrestling activity.

24
25 As a consequence of this construction, women do not possess any collectively-defined
26 female role models within the practice itself. Therefore, in defining themselves as women in a
27 'male' practice, they have turned to the social patterns of sexual differentiation that exist *outside*
28 of the practice. Accordingly, they have 'tactically' (De Certeau, 1988) defined their gender
29 identities in *gouren* according to 'specific combination[s] of biographic and relational
30 transactions' (Mennesson, 2005b: 64). These actions have resulted in the possibility of
31 expressing several female identities in *gouren*, without disturbing its hegemonic definition as a
32 male activity (Épron and Jollivet, 2007). However, ethnographic observation has demonstrated
33 that *gouren*'s social context has shifted significantly in the last 20 years, and is still undergoing
34 rapid change in the present day. The development of the competitive structure of *gouren* in the
35 last 20 years has finally brought the technical knowledge and skills of men and women to an
36 even level.¹⁷ This development has in turn made it possible to evaluate women's actions, style
37 and means of involvement in *gouren* on the basis of their sporting efficiency, rather than their
38 conformity to feminine roles and qualities.

1
2
3
4 In spite of these changes, the masculine sporting model in *gouren* – one that prioritizes ‘old-
5 fashioned,’ functional strength – continues to be reproduced in recent years. For example, one
6 of the most popular publications on Breton wrestling of the last 20 years, by Léna Gourmelen
7 and Jean Daniel Bourdonnay (2005), included only seven pictures of women out of the 130
8 images printed. More importantly, these seven images emphasized the identifiably ‘feminine’
9 social traits such as friendship, grace, and elegance; they avoided depicting ‘overly aggressive’
10 or intense wrestling scenes in which women were protagonists. Instead, these silences
11 demonstrate that the ‘masculine body’ and masculine representations still constitute the
12 normative measure against which ‘other’ bodies should be compared to in Breton wrestling.
13 Most actors involved in *gouren* – practitioners, as well as institutions, trainers, and so on –
14 collectively contribute to reproducing this normative image. For instance, the Federal symbol
15 portrays two wrestling figures engaged in combat, and emphasizes the power, dynamism and
16 elevation of their movements. Conversely, the symbol of the Commission Féminine depicts, in
17 a cartoon style, two infantilized women wrestling in a harmonious way. Indeed, their
18 movements evoke dance more than wrestling.
19

20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
As we have seen, the practice of *gouren* is deeply affected by the representations and
narratives that outline its ‘imagined’ tradition and history. For instance, men and women
typically engage in a slightly different performance of the ritual oath – known as the *Serment* –
and handshake they exchange at the beginning of each *gouren* competition. After pronouncing
the *Serment*, wrestlers promise to ‘offer to my partner | My hand and my cheek.’ The partners
– they refer to one another as partners, rather than opponents – are therefore expected to
exchange a handshake and a cheek kiss. However, while women do not hesitate to literally offer
their cheeks to their partners, some men try to make this gesture more virile by avoiding kissing
each other and reciprocally touching their foreheads (Épron and Nardini, 2019).¹⁸

This gendered divide is also apparent in the practice of particular technical movements. In
the *gouren* clubs observed, throwing techniques that require more strength than agility to be
executed – such as the ‘old-fashioned’ variation of *klied* described above – are ‘naturally’
considered by wrestlers as a male prerogative. Therefore, even if women and men exercise
together and follow the same training methods, they actually perform their technical gestures
according to the respective ‘role’ (Goffman, 1959) and the expectations associated with being
women in a ‘masculine’ sport. Accordingly, only expert women that regularly compete and
train in competitive-oriented clubs try ‘hard’ (Mennesson, 2000) moves, while others believe
such techniques are not suitable or even achievable. Instead, they conform to more ‘feminine,’

1
2
3
4 graceful ways of wrestling.¹⁹ In this way, women are implicitly excluded from the possibility
5 of using *gouren*'s narratives to legitimate their engagement in the present (Rouquier, 2002).
6 Being shaped as both a product and a field of re-production of the traditional masculine
7 characters, the *gouren* 'tradition' has only constituted a heritage for men in the last century. In
8 fact, notwithstanding the rapidly changing status of the practice in the past few decades, only
9 men have had the opportunity to use *gouren*'s heritage 'as a resource' (Hafstein, 2012: 503) to
10 (re)produce normative discourses on what it means to be Breton wrestlers, and what it means
11 to be (Breton) men.
12

13
14 The apparent inconsistency between a male tradition and women's (welcomed) recent
15 participation clearly highlights the ambiguous – and in some ways contradictory – nature of
16 *gouren* as a 'traditional sport.' As it has been described above, *gouren* is not a traditional game
17 or a modern sport, but rather a traditional game *and* a modern sport. In fact, while the distinctive
18 reference to the practice's ancient origins designates men as the legitimate practitioners, the
19 sportive normalization of *gouren* and the changed context in which it is practiced have led to
20 women's participation. These contradictory forces have changed the social composition of
21 Breton wrestling, but not its gendered legacy and representations. The result is a sometimes-
22 incongruous admixture of old-fashioned narratives and representations alongside an
23 increasingly 'modern' activity and social context.
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38

39 **An 'alternative' sporting culture**

40
41
42 Axiomatically, the Breton peasants to which the narrative of 'old-fashioned' *kliked* refers to
43 are self-evidently *male* peasants,²⁰ agrarian workers who would have confronted each other
44 after daily work, or on the occasion of rural and religious celebrations. Accordingly, this
45 narrative functionally depicts *gouren* as the product of a pre-modern and therefore *different*
46 representation of strength and masculinity.
47
48
49

50
51 Representations of strength in Breton wrestling are rhetorically linked to a functional,
52 incidental and not radically aesthetical conception of strength. This idea is supposed to derive
53 from the idealized past of the practice, when physical strength was considered as both a tool for
54 – and a consequence of – hard work, rather than a purpose intentionally and systematically
55 pursued through rigorous training (Andrieu, 1988; Vigarello, 1988). In contemporary Euro-
56 American society, the *mise-en-scène* of the athletic body has gained notable and evident
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4 aesthetic and sensual connotations (Bausinger, 2006; Le Breton, 1990). The narcissistic,
5 sensual aspects of the fit and strong masculine body as an attractive body – epitomized by
6 contemporary activities such as ‘fitness’ (Sassatelli, 2010), crossfit (Yaniga, 2018), and others
7 – is now part of the wider sporting phenomenon.²¹

8
9
10
11 As is the case in other disciplines (see for example Sherouse, 2016), *gouren* essentially
12 breaks out of this orientation, while rediscovering or reproducing – at least at the level of
13 discourse – a different, ‘old-fashioned’ representation of strength. This representation is linked
14 to the idealized past of *gouren*, when – we are to suppose – the peasants involved in wrestling
15 appreciated strength within in the functionalist paradigm of instrumental effectiveness (Robène
16 and Léziart, 2006: 13). These ‘pre-modern’ representations of strength and the masculine body
17 in Breton wrestling do not have clear and well-defined characteristics. Instead, they are more
18 accurately imagined as the generic attribute of vigor stereotypically attributed to the Breton
19 peasants. Indeed, these representations are mainly defined in opposition to those traits that are
20 perceived – from an emic point of view – as the more ‘modern’ features of modern sports. As
21 previously discussed, these differences are most pronounced in the way narratives of *gouren*
22 actively reject the aestheticization of the (male) athletic body that is prevalent in mainstream
23 sports.

24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34 In light of the above, it is clear that – in the age of cultural hegemony of the aesthetic duty
35 of a beautiful body – Breton wrestlers still emphasize the rural and popular values of a strong
36 and productive body (Épron and Huruguen, 2008: 10). ‘Empruntant à la tradition des jeux
37 populaires et résistant à l’uniformisation des pratiques sportives, [*gouren fait*] du corps, vu
38 comme force, un instrument privilégié de l’expression de soi et du groupe social’ (Guillou,
39 1985: 359).²² In this sense, Breton wrestling extends to the present ‘l’ancien régime corporel
40 de la “force rustique”’ (Lacombe, 1993: 221; *the bodily ancien régime of the rustic strength*),
41 or ‘force utile’ (*useful strength*) as Anne Guillou (1985: 360) defines it in her work on Breton
42 games.

43
44
45
46
47
48
49 However, this enactment and reproduction of the past is mostly conducted at the level of
50 narrative. Today, Breton wrestlers participating in *gouren* tournaments are not showcasing the
51 skills and power they developed while working in the fields. Indeed, only a few of them actually
52 earn a living as agricultural workers. Most Breton wrestlers are rather middle-class members
53 of small cities and towns in Brittany – and in any case the link between *gouren* and agriculture
54 is not structural at all.²³ The ‘old-fashioned’ representations of strength that Breton wrestlers
55 perform and claim today are therefore not exactly the same as the ones that Anne Guillou
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4 observed in rural Brittany the 1980s. On the contrary, they are retrospective ideas of those
5 earlier representations, and these new representations in turn play a decisive role in the ongoing
6 process of (re)inventing *gouren* tradition(s).
7
8

9 As it has been mentioned, this process of invention also holds within it an oppositional logic.
10 Notably, Jean-Paul Clément observed this tendency to define one's own practice *against* similar
11 alternatives when speaking of combat and wrestling sports in France. Drawing on Bourdieu's
12 (1990) concept of the relational, distinctive value of sports, Clément (1993: 375) states:
13
14
15

16
17
18 Le domaine des pratiques de combat apparaît donc comme un champ de concurrence spécifique,
19 dans lequel chaque discipline [...] s'impose (ou tente de s'imposer) en s'opposant aux autres, et plus
20 particulièrement à celles qui lui sont techniquement les plus proches [...] en proposant généralement
21 une conception novatrice du combat (Clément, 1983: 375).²⁴
22
23
24
25

26 Frequently, the 'concurrence' that Clément mentions is evidenced in the technical efficiency
27 of each combat practice. In *gouren*, however, technical efficiency is not the point. While *gouren*
28 practitioners are clearly concerned with the effectiveness of technical gestures, they are equally
29 – if not more – preoccupied with the cultural, historical, and social value of what they do.
30 *Gouren* works in this sense as a patrimonial object; a 'cultural heritage,' as Valdimar Hafstein
31 (2012) describes it.²⁵ Following Hafstein (2012; see also Bendix, 2009), its cultural and
32 historical aspects are actively mobilized as inherently instrumental resources.
33
34
35
36
37

38 The competitive, athletic, sporting features of *gouren* are still fundamental, in the bivalent
39 logic of a 'sporting tradition' that we have described above. The centrality of these features is
40 evidenced, for example, in the enthusiastic participation of a selection of Breton wrestlers in
41 the Championnat d'Europe des Luttes Celtiques. Nevertheless, when practitioners are asked
42 why they practice *gouren* and not judo or any other activity, they stress its 'traditional'
43 relevance more than its 'sporting' features. In fact, from the latter point of view, *gouren* cannot
44 compete with other, more widely practiced activities that are structured through established
45 international and professional competitive organizations. Compared to these other activities,
46 however, *gouren* endorses an alternative sporting culture that promotes sociability over
47 confrontation, fun over ascetic dedication and extreme athletic performances, and conviviality
48 over personal achievements. To a large degree, these features explain its appeal. As an expert
49 *gouren* practitioner told Nardini:
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4 A few years ago, while I was throwing my partner in the finals of the [*gouren*] Breton
5 Championships, I heard him saying: ‘Well done!’ This is the *gouren* spirit, you know. When we
6 wrestle, we spare no effort, it is still a competition, but we are able to acknowledge the other’s skills
7 in *gouren* – and this is not necessarily true in other sports. [...] We call our wrestling partners
8 ‘*émules*’ [‘partners’], and not ‘opponents,’ because ‘*émules*’ are people that, even if they’re stronger
9 than me, I’m grateful to them because I know they will help me to improve. *Gouren* is a community
10 where we can improve together (G., interviewed on July 20, 2012 by Dario Nardini).
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18

19 **A judoka on the sawdust: The heuristic ambivalence of expertise**

20
21
22 As previously mentioned, *gouren* has an ambivalent relationship with judo. On the one hand,
23 judo has been the main reference point in *gouren*’s transformation into a competitive and
24 institutionalized sport. Simultaneously, however, judo represents ‘the main competitor of
25 *gouren* in the social and political struggle for the enrollment of practitioners, the allocation of
26 public spaces and funding, etc.’ (Nardini, 2016b: 20). This tension has emerged because judo
27 was – and is – both the closest grappling style to *gouren*, and the most popular competitive
28 martial art in France and Brittany. In fact, from a formal, bio-mechanical point of view, judo
29 and *gouren* are remarkably similar. The one clear point of difference is ground-fighting, which
30 is part of judo competitions but forbidden in Breton wrestling. This distinction notwithstanding,
31 the commonalities are extensive. In both judo and Breton wrestling, competitors aim to throw
32 the opponent on his/her back by grappling his/her jacket above the belt (with different scores
33 for a throw depending on which part of the body first touches the ground, the fluidity of the
34 motion, etc.). Both judo and *gouren* competitions are organized in age, skills and weight
35 categories, and rules overlap in many points. Throwing techniques are also close – except for
36 *kliked*. In fact, many Breton wrestlers are or have been judokas, and it is relatively easy to turn
37 (and return) from one style to the other. The most successful *gouren* champion of recent years
38 was a judoka when he was young. Dario Nardini, who was a competitive judo practitioner when
39 he started his fieldwork, easily adapted his expertise in order to regularly train and compete
40 with Breton wrestlers.
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54

55 Nonetheless, people involved in Breton wrestling describe their practice – and the way it
56 informs their lives – as being profoundly different from judo. As another *gouren* trainer told
57 Nardini during an interview,
58
59
60

1
2
3
4 *Gouren* is an activity that has roots. It has a meaning [...]. Tradition is the sense of *gouren*. In the
5 end, it is pretty similar to judo... but it also has something more! [...] When I teach *gouren*, I also
6 explain its history, and its peasant origins. Frequently, I explain that through the example of the *prise*
7 *du sac* [the ‘bag move’], that is a *gouren* technique derived from the peasant-wrestlers’ way of
8 carrying their working bags (A., interviewed on July 26, 2012 by Dario Nardini).
9
10
11
12
13

14 In light of this ambivalent attitude towards judo, the judo expertise of Dario Nardini was not
15 always an advantage. On the one hand, it helped him to enter the practice of *gouren* and conduct
16 what Wacquant (2006) called an ‘observant participation.’ Conversely, it sometimes provoked
17 wariness among the other social actors. In fact, judo is still the negative term that defines what
18 *gouren* is-not in Breton wrestlers’ narratives. They describe it as an aggressive practice, while
19 *gouren* is inclusive and more convivial. Moreover, the training routines and learning methods
20 are seen as collective activities in *gouren*, while judo’s hierarchic divisions are viewed as a
21 despotic, authoritarian imposition. These attitudes are evident in interviews with participants.
22 One interviewee suggested, ‘There is not a Master in *gouren*, as you have in judo. There is not
23 the Big Black Belt that teaches. People are immediately involved in a collective situation of
24 transmission’ (A., interviewed on July 26, 2012). T., a judoka who had started to train in *gouren*,
25 told Dario Nardini: ‘when I started to come here, I even struggled to understand who the teacher
26 was, the trainer, the figure that supervises the training!’ (interviewed on July 1, 2012). ‘I was
27 happy to follow my son in this interest [in *gouren*], because I found it less risky than other
28 disciplines such as judo, that is more focused on [athletic] performance’ (P., interviewed on
29 June 24, 2020).
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40

41 Curiously, the values that *gouren* actors evoke to distinguish their practice, are often the
42 same ones that judokas assert around the world. ‘Friendship and mutual prosperity’ – a
43 quotation from the founder of judo, Jigoro Kano – is adopted and repeated in most judo training
44 halls. Similarly, many of the central values that the French judo federation and clubs promote
45 – ‘L’amitié’ (friendship), ‘la sincérité’ (honesty), ‘l’honneur’ (honour), ‘le respect’ (respect)
46 and ‘le contrôle de soi’ (self-control)²⁶ – are strikingly similar to those espoused in *gouren*’s
47 *Serment*. Nor is this an isolated instance. The ‘Charte des valeurs du gouren’ – a kind of
48 manifesto of the *gouren* spirit adopted by the *gouren* Federation – recognizes ‘l’honneur,’ ‘le
49 respect,’ ‘la solidarité’ (solidarity), ‘le lien à la Bretagne’ (connection with Brittany),
50 ‘l’authenticité’ (authenticity) and ‘tolérance et humanisme’ (tolerance and humanism) among
51 the central qualities of the practice.²⁷
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4 What *gouren* practitioners are rejecting in judo, rather, is its supposed status as the epitome
5 of global modern sports – albeit this is a characterization that does not necessarily correspond
6 to reality. According to this perspective, judo exemplifies both French and Western globalized
7 culture, to which Breton culture has historically referred in defining itself. More specifically,
8 judo is framed as an expression of contemporary French culture and society, and as such it
9 carries with it the values of globalization, standardization, individualism and so on. Conversely,
10 *gouren* is understood as the epitome of a more authentic connection with history, as well as
11 possessing a strong local dimension and links to the wider community.
12

13 Accordingly, the differences in technique between the two wrestling styles are held as proof
14 of the judo's aggressive 'nature,' especially compared to the chivalric values that inspire Breton
15 wrestling. *Gouren* is wrestling, its practitioners claim, rather than a brawl or fighting. According
16 to Guy Jaouen (2005: 22), an ex-wrestler who published many works on Breton wrestling, the
17 absence of ground fighting in *gouren* may originate from the code of chivalry, which prohibited
18 attacking an opponent when he was on the ground. In this way, *gouren* techniques gain ethical
19 value. They become the clear, undisputable proof that *gouren* is still a noble activity,
20 uncorrupted by the decadence of modernity and the perils of modern sports. These techniques
21 are seen as fundamentally un-modern, and therefore evidence that *gouren* exists apart from
22 modern sports' competitive attitude and individualism, aggression, professionalism, money,
23 doping and corruption. 'In *gouren* we have never wrestled on the ground, and this makes us
24 pride, dignified. When our opponent is on the ground, we wait until [s]he stands up again. We
25 don't want to brutally assault him[/her]; this savagery is not part of *gouren*' (C., interviewed on
26 May 24, 2012).
27

28 Ethnographic observation showed that all the people involved in the practice of *gouren* –
29 notably practitioners, trainers, referees, federal members, spectators and institutions – actively
30 and collectively strive to uphold these assertions through their own deeds. The atmosphere in
31 the Club of Rennes – where Nardini has trained – is relaxed, participative and inclusive. While
32 they engaged in their practice in a committed manner, there was not an extreme focus on the
33 athletes' performances. All the Club members, especially the more regular practitioners, always
34 sought to promote social opportunities beyond training hours – dinners, drinks, events in which
35 we took part together, and so on. With some exceptions when something very important was at
36 stake (see, for instance, Nardini, 2016b), competitions often became opportunities for play and
37 conviviality. This does not mean that winning or losing is not important to Breton wrestlers, of
38 course; but competition and personal achievement are not *collectively* defined as the main goal
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4 in *gouren*. As such, those involved are collectively and consistently reproducing an alternative
5 'sporting culture.' The distinctive value of this culture is dialectically established and reinforced
6 through several interconnected mechanisms: through the narratives that explain and orient the
7 practices; through the social environment in *gouren* clubs; and by the manner in which technical
8 gestures – sometimes the *same* gestures that are performed in judo – are collectively taught,
9 described, and performed.

10
11 In this way, Breton wrestling actors collectively participate in the process of building a
12 performative and narrative 'frame' (Bateson, 1987; see also Hamayon, 2016). This frame
13 determines a particular 'mode of action' (Houseman and Severi, 1998) in which Breton
14 wrestlers' actual gestures take on a particular meaning. Therefore, what is truly important in
15 *gouren* is not the uniqueness of its techniques and rules, but rather the way that the people
16 involved 'appropriate' those rules and techniques (Wendling, 2002) and make sense of them.

27 28 **Conclusion: Breton wrestling as a way of being Breton**

29
30
31 Building on Joseph Alter's understanding of (Indian) wrestling 'as a system of meaning'
32 (Alter, 1992: 4), in this paper we have interpreted *Gouren* as a 'a dramatically public text'
33 (Alter, 1992: 9) and a 'medium through which [the people involved] think about themselves
34 and [...] make sense of their world' (Alter, 1992: 19). However, unlike Indian wrestlers, being
35 a Breton wrestler does not imply strict adherence to a regimen of diet, exercise and abstinence.
36 Nor, indeed, does it require the radical and ascetic commitment that many contemporary
37 athletes display. Breton wrestling instead represents a political criticism of the French sporting
38 system. For Breton wrestlers themselves, this system is understood as an expression of the
39 disenchanted globalized Western society, in which personal athletic performance is valued over
40 social relationships, competition over cooperation, and vertical learning over participation. In
41 opposing these values, practitioners of *gouren* dramatically enact the 'role' of the Breton
42 wrestler – a role that draws on narratives progressively organized during the last century. In
43 this way, Breton wrestlers are able to characterize *gouren* as a 'traditional sport' – that is, both
44 a modern sport *and* a traditional Breton game. They thereby contribute to defining both a Breton
45 way of wrestling, and of being, in the present.

46
47 As Appadurai (1996: 12) has suggested, the concept of cultural difference should be viewed
48 as 'a contrastive rather than a substantive property of certain things.' In this view, 'culture is a
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4 pervasive dimension of human discourse that exploits difference to generate diverse
5 conceptions of group identity' (Appadurai, 1996: 13). Being Breton in contemporary France
6 does not reflect any essential or hereditary character – be it geographical, ethnic, or linguistic.
7 Breton-ness does not *precede* the process of self-definition; it is not something that is first
8 inherited and then determines the way a person lives and thinks. On the contrary, it corresponds
9 to a set of representative features that have been historically *chosen* as 'identity marks' and are
10 eventually re-enacted in the present. As a consequence, to be inspired (or not inspired) by these
11 features, to live (or not live) as Bretons, is the consequence of a choice – a political choice, in
12 the broader sense of the term. Exploiting the distinctive history and heritage of Breton
13 wrestling, its practitioners enact, and simultaneously help to shape, diverse (Breton)
14 conceptions of sport, sociability and Breton-ness. At the same time, moreover, they are
15 performing, enacting and shaping identities pertaining to masculinity, strength, hand to hand
16 confrontation, loyalty, 'honor,' physical culture and sociability.

17
18 To conclude, Breton wrestling today constitutes a 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998).
19 As people train and learn *gouren* together, they also identify the cultural attributes associated
20 with Breton-ness. In this way, they learn how to be Breton (wrestlers) in globalized France.
21 This learning takes place at various levels: knowledge is inscribed within the body (Wacquant,
22 2006), beneath the level of consciousness (Bourdieu, 1990), and within the *habitus* that athletes
23 embody through training and dedication (García and Spencer 2013; Spencer, 2013). Yet
24 equally, Breton wrestlers rely on an existent narrative plot. They (re-)enact this narrative as a
25 legacy of the past, while they continue to adapt it to the evolving social and cultural context of
26 contemporary Brittany. In this sense, Breton wrestling is – to evoke Clifford Geertz's (1972:
27 26) influential expression – 'a story [Breton wrestlers] tell themselves about themselves.'

28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
¹ The term 'sportisation' has been proposed by Norbert Elias (1971) and then used by many scholars to identify the process of normalization and institutionalization of the traditional 'games of the past,' that have progressively become the 'sports of the future' (Pfister, 2004). Adopting an excessively linear perspective, scholars such as Allen Guttman (2004) have understood these transformations as a straight passage 'from ritual to record.' In recent times, however, anthropologists and historians have shown the empirical realities where these transformations are carried out can be very complex, and cannot be described according to a universal evolutionary model (Besnier and Brownell, 2012). For many contemporary physical activities, sports *and* games, sportisation *and* traditionality look to be constitutive and complementary forces, instead of oppositional concepts (Saumade, 2011). This has been shown for *gouren* by Nardini (2020).

² This process was undertaken following the example of existing regional athletic federations such as the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) (see Épron, 2018; Nardini, 2020).

³ As he himself wrote in FALSAB (1933: 34).

1
2
3
4
5
6 ⁴ Regarding physical education and its political exploitation in France, see among others: Andrieu (1999);
7 Arnaud (2000); Tétart (2007).

8 ⁵ Goarnig adopted a militant position towards *gouren*. In particular, he denounced what he saw as the
9 connivance of the FALSAB regarding national symbols and institutions. In his view, *gouren* should have
10 been preserved as an expression of Breton culture specifically, as a living means of resisting the acculturation
11 that France had imposed on Brittany and Breton people starting from the second half of the nineteenth century
12 (Ar Goarnig, interviewed on July 24, 2012 by Dario Nardini). For this reason, Goarnig broke away from the
13 FALSAB in 1964 and founded another *gouren* federation.
14

15 ⁶ Martial arts from Eastern Asia, and especially judo, were rapidly adopted in France starting from the 1930s
16 (Brousse, 2005). Judo has subsequently gained a central place in the national sporting panorama, and in
17 French (and Breton) society as a whole. This was especially evident from the early 1970s, when judo was
18 invested with relevant pedagogical purposes (Clément, 2001; Guillotin, 2001). Since then, the number of
19 judo practitioners has tripled (Martin, 2011: 81), and France has become – after Japan – the nation with the
20 best international competition record. In 2009, judo was the most-practiced martial art/combat sport in
21 France, and – with more than 580,000 members – the French judo federation (the Fédération Française de
22 Judo) was the country's fourth-largest Olympic federation by membership (Martin, 2011: 37). According to
23 Martin's (2-11: 40-44) detailed analysis, this is particularly true in the Northern part of France.
24

25 ⁷ 'Free' in that it does not depend on any social, economic and/or structural condition that characterizes
26 Brittany as different from the rest of France.

27 ⁸ The term 'disenchantment of the world' is borrowed by Max Weber (2004), but it is used here in the
28 commonsense perception of the world being dominated by economic rationality and profit.

29 ⁹ 'Hegemony' is used here in the sense of Gramsci (1992), so as to indicate the relations of subordination
30 and domination that organize the relations and interactions of everyday life.
31

32 ¹⁰ Breton wrestling is neither a spectacle nor a drama *stricto sensu*. As such, Breton wrestlers do not 'play'
33 characters on a dramatic stage for an audience, as is the case in professional wrestling (Barthes, 1972; Levi
34 2008). Instead, Breton wrestlers are simply 'playing' themselves. Indeed, following Goffman's dramaturgical
35 reading of social interaction (Goffman, 1959), *all* individuals perform the 'role' they play in social
36 interactions and strategically project particular images of themselves.
37

38 ¹¹ This article is based on two rounds of fieldwork. The first, which focused on the history of Breton wrestling,
39 was carried out by Aurélie Épron from September 2002 to January 2008. The second, strictly ethnographic,
40 was undertaken by Dario Nardini from February to September 2012. Épron has worked extensively in local
41 archives, as well as taking part in training and other activities of the Comité de Morbihan of the *gouren*
42 Federation. Nardini has observed and participated in the training and social activities of the *gouren* club of
43 Rennes, as well as in federal *gouren* competitions and events.

44 ¹² As previously mentioned, and as Nardini (2020) has shown, the concept of 'region' in Brittany is not based
45 on precise geographical and/or ethnic boundaries (Bromberger and Meyer, 2003). Rather, it is a
46 'construction' (Bertho, 1980) based on cultural 'representations' (Bourdieu, 1980) that identify Breton
47 people, and in which they identify themselves. This construction embodies the cultural representations
48 ascribed to Brittany since a range of social actors – among them folklorists, artists, residents and regionalists
49 – began to establish a stereotypical image of the region in the last years of the eighteenth century, and more
50 extensively in the nineteenth (Bertho, 1980; Meyer, 2003).
51

52 ¹³ Many people involved in this research refer to the social environment of *gouren* in this way.

53 ¹⁴ We thank the Fédération de Gouren for kindly sharing these official statistics with the Authors.

54 ¹⁵ URL: < <http://www.gouren.bzh/spip.php?article1106> >; < <http://www.gouren.bzh/> >.

55 ¹⁶ The Morbihan Committee was driven by a woman from 2000 to 2004, and the management of the Breton
56 team for the international competitions has been recently assigned to a woman. As of 2020, two of the *gouren*
57 Federation's seven salaried employees are women. Moreover, women feature since 2016 in the Federation's
58 structure.
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6 ¹⁷ Since 2001, for example, women have been included in the *Championnat d'Europe des Lutttes Celtiques*
7 (**European Championships of Celtic Wrestling**). This event sees the practitioners of different wrestling styles
8 from various European regions that claim a common (and sometimes 'invented') Celtic tradition – Austria,
9 Canary Islands, Great Britain, Ireland, Iceland, the Spanish regions of Cantabria and Leon, Scotland, and
10 Sardinia – confront each other in the wrestling styles of *glima* (Iceland), back-hold (Scotland) and *gouren*
11 (Brittany).

12
13 ¹⁸ In France, cheek kissing is the typical method of greeting and bidding farewell. However, this behavior
14 changes according to the city/region, and follows sexual patterns. In fact, while cheek kissing is very common
15 in interactions involving at least one woman (woman/woman, or woman/man), it is not as prevalent between
16 two adult men – except if they are relatives, or close friends.

17
18 ¹⁹ The precise attitude and approach depend on the club, the trainer and the individual's approach. As
19 previously stated, this reality reflects the distinctively gendered experience of participating in *gouren*: while
20 men can rely on collectively-defined role models in learning how to wrestle like a man, women need to find
21 their own way to be a woman in Breton wrestling.

22
23 ²⁰ The actors apply a very general meaning with the term 'peasants.' It refers to the rural workers that are
24 supposed to be, after the Celt ancestors, *gouren*'s fathers.

25
26 ²¹ This cult of the attractive male body is perhaps exemplified in the spectacle of Cristiano Ronaldo baring
27 his abdominal muscles when exulting after a goal. However, this phenomenon is much more ubiquitous. For
28 example, in 2000 Anne Saouter (2000: 34) stated that 'Le rugby [en France] est un sport où le corps est
29 valorisé, non dans une perspective esthétique comme chez les athlètes, mais dans une perspective
30 fonctionnelle' ([In France,] **rugby is a sport where the body is valued, not from an aesthetic perspective, like
31 with track-and-field athletes, but from a functional perspective**). (Unless otherwise noted, all translations are
32 our own). Only one year later, a calendar portraying the players of a Parisian rugby team in nude, erotic poses
33 was launched with great success (URL: < <http://www.dieuxdustade.com/fr/accueil> >).

34
35 ²² **Borrowing from the tradition of popular games and resisting the standardization of sporting practices,
36 [gouren makes] the body, seen as strength, a meaningful instrument for the expression of the self and the
37 social group.**

38
39 ²³ As Maryon McDonald (1990) has shown studying Breton language revival in the 1980s, people in Brittany
40 are increasingly proud of their rural origins. Indeed, this pride has flourished in part *because* agriculture is
41 no longer their only path in life. As a consequence, the negative, stigmatizing stereotypes attached to Brittany
42 as an underdeveloped rural area were finally turned into distinctive, identifying marks (Bertho, 1980; Simon,
43 1999).

44
45 ²⁴ **The field of combat sports appears therefore as a specific field of competition, in which each discipline
46 [...] imposes (or attempts to impose) in opposition to others, and more specifically those that are technically
47 similar [...], by generally proposing an innovative conception of combat.**

48
49 ²⁵ In fact, in 2012 the Fédération de Gouren – together with the FALSAB – applied for *gouren* and other
50 traditional Breton games to be included in UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage lists.

51
52 ²⁶ URL: <https://www.ffjudo.com/les-valeurs>.

53
54 ²⁷ URL: http://gouren.bzh/IMG/pdf/Charte_de_valeur_du_Gouren_final.pdf.

1
2
3
4
5
6 *References:*
7
8
9

10 Alter JS (1992) *The Wrestler's Body: Identity and Ideology in North India*. Los Angeles:
11 University of California Press.

12 Anderson BR (1983) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of*
13 *Nationalism*. London; New York: Verso.

14 Andrieu G (1988) *L'homme et la force*. Joinville-le-Pont: Actio.

15 Andrieu G (1999) *La gymnastique au XIXe siècle ou la naissance de l'éducation physique:*
16 *1789-1914*. Paris: Actio.

17 Appadurai A (1996) *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*.
18 Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

19 Arnaud (2000) *Les athlètes de la République: Gymnastique, sport et idéologie républicaine,*
20 *1870-1914*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

21 Baille F and Liotard P (1999) *Sport et virilisme*. Montpellier: Association Osiris.

22 Barthes R (1972) *Mythologies*. New York: Farrar.

23 Bateson G (1987) A Theory of Play and Fantasy. In: *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected*
24 *Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology*. Chicago; London:
25 University of Chicago Press, pp.183–198.

26 Bausinger H (2006) *Sportkultur. Sport in der heutigen Zeit*. Tübingen: Attempto Verlag.

27 Bendix RF (2009) Heritage between Economy and Politics: An Assessment from the
28 Perspective of Cultural Anthropology. In: Smith L and Akagawa N (eds) *Intangible Heritage*.
29 London: Routledge, pp.253–269.

30 Bertho C (1980) L'invention de la Bretagne: Genèse sociale d'un stéréotype. *Actes de la*
31 *recherche en sciences sociales* 35(1): 45–62.

32 Besnier N and Brownell S (2012) Sport, Modernity, and the Body. *Annual Review of*
33 *Anthropology* 41(1): 443–459.

34 Besnier N, Brownell S and Carter TF (2018) *The Anthropology of Sport: Bodies, Borders,*
35 *Biopolitics*. Oakland: University of California Press.

36 Bougeard C (2002) *Bretagne et identités régionales pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale*.
37 Brest: CRBC.

38 Bourdieu P (1980) L'identité et la représentation: Éléments pour une réflexion critique sur
39 l'idée de région. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 35(1): 63–72.

40 Bourdieu P (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge:
41 Harvard University Press.

42 Bourdieu P (1990) Programme for a Sociology of Sport. In *In Other Words: Essays Towards*
43 *a Reflexive Sociology*. Cambridge: Stanford University Press, pp. 156–167.

44 Bromberger C and Meyer M (2003) Cultures régionales en débat. *Ethnologie française*
45 33(3): 357–361.

1
2
3
4 Brousse M (2005) *Les racines du judo français: Histoire d'une culture sportive*. Pessac:
5 Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux.

6
7 Bruant G (1992) *Anthropologie du geste sportif: La construction sociale de la course à pied*.
8 Paris: PUF.

9
10 Chevallier D and Morel A (1985) Identité culturelle et appartenance régionale: Quelques
11 orientations de recherche. *Terrain*, no. 5 (October): 3–5.

12
13 Connell RW (2005) *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

14
15 Clément JP (1983) La pratique de l'aïki-do en France: "contre-culture" ou "avant-garde"
16 culturelle? In: Société Française de Sociologie du Sport (ed) *Sports et Sociétés*
17 *Contemporaines. VIIIe Symposium de l'ICSS, Paris, 6-10 Juillet 1983*. Paris: Société Française
18 de Sociologie du Sport, pp.375–81.

19
20 Clément JP (2001) Les arts martiaux et la société française: Sociologie historique de
21 l'implantation du judo et de l'aïkido. *Daruma* 8–9: 175–199.

22
23 De Certeau M (1988) *The practice of everyday life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

24
25 Dine P (2012) *Sport and Identity in France: Practices, Locations, Representations*. Oxford;
26 New York: Peter Lang.

27
28 Elias N (1971) The Genesis of Sport as a Sociological Problem. In: Dunning E (ed) *The*
29 *Sociology of Sport: A Selection of Readings*. London: Cass, pp.88–115.

30
31 Épron A (2008) *Histoire du gouren*. PhD thesis, Rennes: Université Rennes 2.

32
33 Épron A (2012) La féminisation de la lutte bretonne (*gouren*): Héritage culturel et
34 transformation des identités sexuées. In Aceti M and Jaccoud C (eds.) *Sportives dans leur*
35 *genre?: Permanences et variations des constructions genrées dans les engagements corporels*
36 *et sportifs*. Bern: Peter Lang, pp. 19–32.

37
38 Épron A and Huruguen J (2008) Le gouren reinventé, du renouvellement des mises en jeu
39 des corps aux redéfinitions des fonctions du corps à corps. *Esporte e Sociedade* 3(7): 1–29.

40
41 Épron A and Jollivet E (2007) Le corps féminin en gouren: Entre exception culturelle et
42 marginalité. *Corps* 2: 31–36.

43
44 Épron A and Nardini D (2019) Symbols and belonging. Breton wrestling as an expression
45 of Breton history and "identity." *Etnografia e ricerca qualitativa* 3: 317–342.

46
47 Épron A and Robène L (2006) Le Docteur Cottonec: apôtre de la culture physique et
48 rénovateur du Gouren. *Mémoires de la Société d'Histoire et d'Archéologie de Bretagne*
49 LXXXV: 253–79.

50
51 FALSAB (1933) *La lutte bretonne Organisation et règlement*. Lorient: Imprimerie du
52 Nouvelliste du Morbihan.

53
54 Fournier LS (2006) Le discours régionaliste en Provence (France): Un mode paradoxal de
55 légitimation du politique. *Journal des Anthropologues*, 104–105: 247–264.

56
57 Fraisse G (1999) *Les femmes et leur histoire*. Paris: Gallimard.

58
59 García RS and Spencer DC (2013) *Fighting Scholars: Habitus and Ethnographies of Martial*
60 *Arts and Combat Sports*. London; New York: Anthem Press.

Geertz C (1972) Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight. *Daedalus* 101(1): 1–37.

- 1
2
3
4 Geslin C, Gourlay P, Monnier J-M, et al. (2010) *Histoire d'un siècle: Bretagne 1901-2001: L'émancipation d'un monde*. Morlaix: Skol Vreizh.
- 7 Goffman E (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday.
- 9 Gourmelen L and Bourdonnay JD (2005) *Gouren: Lutte et défis d'un sport breton*. Spézet: Coop Breizh.
- 11 Gramsci A (1992) *Prison Notebooks*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- 13 Guérandel C and Mennesson C (2007) Gender Construction in Judo Interactions. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 42 (2): 167–186.
- 16 Guillotin W (2001) *L'implantation du judo en Ille-et-Vilaine*. Bachelor's dissertation, Université Rennes 2, France.
- 19 Guillou A (1985) Les jeux bretons: Mise en scène du corps chez les ruraux. *Ethnologie Française* 15: 359–368.
- 21 Guttman A (2004) *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports, Updated Edition*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- 24 Hafstein VT (2012) Cultural Heritage. In: Bendix RF and Hasan-Rokem G (eds) *A Companion to Folklore*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 500–519.
- 27 Hamayon R (2016) *Why we play: an anthropological study*. Chicago: Hau.
- 29 Hargreaves J and Anderson E (2014) *Routledge Handbook of Sport, Gender and Sexuality*. Oxford; New York: Routledge.
- 31 Herzfeld M (1997) *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State*. New York: Routledge.
- 34 Hobsbawm E and Ranger T (1992) *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 37 Houseman M and Severi C (1998) *Naven or the Other Self: A Relational Approach to Ritual Action*. Leiden; Boston: Brill Academic Pub.
- 40 Jaouen G (2005) *Les luttes celtiques de Bretagne et du Cornwall: Du jeu ou du sport?* Pontivy: Confédération FALSAB.
- 43 Lacombe P (1993) *Corps enchaînés, corps déchaînés: des cultures corporelles d'hier et d'aujourd'hui, en Bretagne (1870-1990)*. PhD thesis, University of Brest, France.
- 45 Le Breton D (1990) *Anthropologie du corps et modernité*. Paris: PUF.
- 47 Le Coadic R (1998) *L'identité bretonne*. Rennes: Terre de brume; Presses Universitaires de Rennes.
- 50 Le Coadic R (2012) Tout est bon dans le Breton. *Ethnologie française* 42(4): 697–709.
- 52 Lenclud G (1987) La tradition n'est plus ce qu'elle était...: Sur les notions de tradition et de société traditionnelle en ethnologie. *Terrain* 9: 110–123.
- 54 Levi H (2008) *The World of Lucha Libre: Secrets, Revelations, and Mexican National Identity*. Durham; London: Duke University Press.
- 57 Macdonald S (ed) (1997) *Inside European Identities: Ethnography in Western Europe*. Oxford: Berg.
- 59
60

1
2
3
4 Martin G (2011) *Essai sur les territoires du judo en France*. Phd thesis, Université Michel
5 de Montaigne - Bordeaux III, France.

6
7 Mauss M (1973) Techniques of the Body. In: *Economy and Society* 2(1): 70–88.

8
9 McDonald M (1990) “We Are Not French!”: *Language, Culture, and Identity in Brittany*.
10 London; New York: Routledge.

11
12 Mennesson C (2000) “Hard” Women and “Soft” Women. The Social Construction of
13 Identities among Female Boxers. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 35(1): 21–33.

14
15 Mennesson C (2005a) *Etre une femme dans le monde des hommes: Socialisation sportive et*
16 *construction du genre*. Paris: L’Harmattan.

17
18 Mennesson C (2005b) Les “formes identitaires” sexuées des femmes investies dans des
19 sports “masculins.” *Science & Motricité* 54: 63–90.

20
21 Messner MA and Sabo DF (1990) *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist*
22 *Perspectives*. Champaign: Human Kinetics.

23
24 Meyer M (2003) Vers la notion de “cultures régionales” (1789-1871). *Ethnologie française*
25 33(3): 409–416.

26
27 Nardini D (2016a) *Gouren, la lotta bretonne: etnografia di una tradizione sportiva*. Cargeghe:
28 Editoriale Documenta.

29
30 Nardini D (2016b) Gouren, the Breton Way to Wrestle. *Stadion International Journal of the*
31 *History of Sport* 42: 13–30.

32
33 Nardini D (2020) Between Tatami and Sawdust: The Ambiguity of Breton Wrestling Sites.
34 *Anthropological Quarterly* 93(2).

35
36 Nicolas M (1982) *Histoire du mouvement breton*. Paris: Syros.

37
38 Pfister G (ed) (2004) *Games of the Past - Sports for the Future? Globalisation,*
39 *Diversification, Transformation*. Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag.

40
41 Philippe T (2005) *Lamm! Essai d’analyse structurale du Gouren (Lutte bretonne) à travers*
42 *les péripéties fédérales et règlementaires de la période 1963-1982*. MA dissertation, Université
43 Rennes 2, France.

44
45 Postic F, Laurent D, Simon J-F et al. (2003) Reconnaissance d’une culture régionale: la
46 Bretagne depuis la Révolution. *Ethnologie française* 33(3): 381–89.

47
48 Robène L and Léziart Y (2006) *L’homme en mouvement: Histoire et anthropologie des*
49 *techniques sportives. Tome 1*. Paris: Chiron.

50
51 Rouquier A (2002) De la caricature à l’absence, les femmes ont-elles droit au passé? *Lunes*,
52 18: 6-14.

53
54 Saouter A (2014) “Être rugby” *Jeux du masculin et du féminin*. Paris: Maison des Sciences
55 de l’Homme.

56
57 Sassatelli R (2010) *Fitness Culture: Gyms and the Commercialisation of Discipline and Fun*.
58 London: Palgrave Macmillian.

59
60 Saumade F (2011) Le rodéo américain sur la frontière du sport et de la tauromachie, ou de
la diffusion considérée comme un système de transformations. *Ethnologie française* 41(4):
655–665.

1
2
3
4 Scheper-Hughes N and Bourgois P (2004) Introduction: Making Sense of Violence. In:
5 Scheper-Hughes N and Bourgois P (eds) *Violence in War and Peace*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp.
6 1–31.
7

8 Sherouse P (2016) Skill and Masculinity in Olympic Weightlifting: Training Cues and
9 Cultivated Craze in Georgia. *American Ethnologist* 43 (1): 103–115.
10

11 Shils E (1971) Tradition. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13(2): 122–159.
12

13 Simon PJ (1999) *La bretonnité: Une ethnicité problématique*. Rennes: Terre de Brume;
14 Presses Universitaires de Rennes.

15 Spencer DC (2013) *Ultimate Fighting and Embodiment: Violence, Gender and Mixed*
16 *Martial Arts*. London: Routledge.
17

18 Tétart P (ed) (2007) *Histoire du sport en France, du Seconde Empire au régime de Vichy,*
19 *Tome I*. Paris: Vuibert.
20

21 Vigarello G (1988) *Techniques d'hier et d'aujourd'hui. Une histoire culturelle du sport.*
22 Paris: Laffont.
23

24 Wacquant L (2006) *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*. Oxford: Oxford
25 University Press.
26

27 Weber M (2004) *The Vocation Lectures: Science as a Vocation, Politics as a Vocation.*
28 Indianapolis: Hackett.
29

30 Wendling T (2002) *Ethnologie des joueurs d'échecs*. Paris: PUF.
31

32 Wenger E (1998) *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge:
33 Cambridge University Press.

34 Yaniga AE (2018) *Forging Elite Fitness: CrossFit and the Biopolitical Imperatives of*
35 *Health, Becoming, and Female Muscularity*. MA dissertation, University of California–Irvine,
36 USA.
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 **Reviewer #1** Comments:
4
5
6
7

8 *A. How do you evaluate the quality of the article (e.g. its originality, relevance, etc.)? What are its*
9 *main strengths and weaknesses? How does it contribute to the broader aims of the Special Issue (max*
10 *1000 characters)?*
11

12 The main strength of this article is to provide evidence from a local Breton point of view concerning
13 the broader aim of the special issue: it provides a good insight on the way Gouren wrestling
14 contributes to the building-up of regional Breton identity. The article also brings interesting ideas
15 concerning regional sporting techniques and gender issues. Another good point is to work on the way
16 a specific sporting practice reveals more general cultural patterns (in the part concerning the Breton
17 conceptions of strength for instance).
18
19

20 There are some attempts to link the Breton material with the larger Euro-US occidental context (e. g.
21 in note 13). However, this could be reinforced by explaining better how the standards of French sport
22 organizations are challenged (or not) by this case-study. In this respect, the comparison with judo is
23 interesting but it should not be conducted on technical and symbolical bases only. It would be good,
24 for the international audience, to explain the specificities of the French sporting system and the ways
25 the Gouren is involved (or not) in this system.
26
27

28
29
30 *B. How do you evaluate the methodological adequacy of the article (max 1000 characters)?*
31

32 The article is based on a long-term ethnography through which the authors have become familiar with
33 the regional Gouren practitioners. There is a lot of good quality material here. The analysis of the
34 language and of the technical terms of the Gouren are especially convincing. It would have been
35 interesting to quote more the Gouren officials and to see how they think their practice as being
36 distinctive from other sports.
37
38

39 An institutional and a sociological approach would greatly improve the article, helping to answer
40 questions such as: Who are the Gouren people? Do the Gouren people use alternative ways of
41 organizing their sport? If not, why do they have to follow the mainstream French “Federal”
42 organization? What do they think about this issue of trying to be specifically Breton but being more
43 or less forced to use the national French dominant sport policies?
44
45
46

47 *C. How do you evaluate the style of the article? Is it clear, well-structured and readable? (max 1000*
48 *characters)?*
49

50 The style of the article is clear and well-readable. The structure of the demonstration is good.
51
52

53 P. 2: give the date of the foundation of Falsab (around 1920?)

54 P. 10-11: why is Bourdieu translated but not Guillou and Clément?
55
56

57 *D. How do you evaluate the knowledge of relevant literature revealed by the article? What are its*
58 *main strengths and weaknesses from this point of view and how could the weaknesses be overcome*
59 *(max 1000 characters)?*
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

There is a strong theoretical background at the beginning using the “invention of traditions” pattern. I believe this background should be used again in the conclusion. The conclusion, indeed, needs rewriting. The references to Lévi-Strauss, Hamayon and Mauss come too late. They could appear in footnotes somewhere but they are not at their right place in the conclusion. I suggest it would be much better to come back to the initial theoretical background in order to show how the Gouren example contributes to the aim of the special issue, answering the question “how does the Gouren contributes to being Breton today and to the buiding-up of a regional sense of belonging in Bretagne?”.

For Peer Review

Reviewer #2 Comments:

A. How do you evaluate the quality of the article (e.g. its originality, relevance, etc.)? What are its main strengths and weaknesses? How does it contribute to the broader aims of the Special Issue (max 1000 characters)?

Main strengths: Interesting sport contrast (judo vs. gouren), and the authors clearly are experts (although they could more effectively establish the parameters and contexts of their field research). This fits well within the context of the combat sports focus for the special issue, so this is an appropriate venue.

Main weaknesses: The main claim of the article is that gouren is an example of a invented tradition that ends up reprising masculine values. There are some puzzling elements here, such as how the rural Breton past ends up standing for egalitarian, non-individualistic / solidarity and functional farm strength (the authors don't quite explain why gouren has taken on this selective set of values, since they don't do much to explain the broader background of Breton and its sociological, political, and economic elements contribute to this configuration of sportive attributes). Also, the authors uncritically rely on the fraught concept of "hegemonic masculinity," which is an unnecessary distraction that prevents them from spelling out what "masculinity" (and "femininity") mean in this cultural context.

B. How do you evaluate the methodological adequacy of the article (max 1000 characters)?

The authors could do more to explain how long and under what conditions they studied this phenomenon. Also, they could do more to explain how they evaluated the broader circumstances of contemporary Breton life beyond the sport context.

C. How do you evaluate the style of the article? Is it clear, well-structured and readable? (max 1000 characters)?

Very readable, but repetitive (esp. in terms of the theoretical dimension). The theoretical claims are very typical and not innovative (i.e. invented tradition, sport as sanctuary of an imagined past, etc.) and at times are structuralist readings that make me think more might be going on here than they say (if judo is the "other" to gouren...how do other sports and gendered practices relate to both of those activities, particularly in a mediatized world? How much force do the institutions of gouren really have in shaping its gendered readings? And does winning / losing really not matter, as they claim – what is fun here, and why should fun be "opposed" to competition? And so forth...)

D. How do you evaluate the knowledge of relevant literature revealed by the article? What are its main strengths and weaknesses from this point of view and how could the weaknesses be overcome (max 1000 characters)?

Strengths: nice use of French sources re: sport. I found there to be a distinct lack of literature on wrestling, particularly from other contexts (Joseph Alter, Mark Hann, Heather Levi, and many others). Right now this comes across as a very narrow presentation of the sport – I think the authors could enrich the gender angle and the "tradition" angle by providing more on the particular trajectory of Brittany (as background) and on what makes gouren different from other cultural contexts. I had the feeling that the authors had already made substantial analyses of gouren, and that this was a rather

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

short and cursory article that lacked serious comparative substance or theoretical conviction. In other words, I found that they weren't saying anything new or compelling, although they are experts on the sport (or game...). I would be interested in seeing what they might have to say about gendered sport attitudes in France and Western Europe more generally, rather than simply leaving this article to be about Breton alone (which, frankly, they don't fully discuss! Too much is assumed).

For Peer Review



The 'maout', the trophy of the Mod Kozh tournaments (ph. Dario Nardini)

1219x1828mm (72 x 72 DPI)

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60



A backward klicked (ph. Dario Nardini)

1828x1219mm (72 x 72 DPI)



Women wrestling at the Monterfil Mod Kozh Trounament, 23rd July 2012 (ph. Dario Nardini)

1828x1219mm (72 x 72 DPI)