



RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE TRANSFER OF "NAVETANE" PLAYERS: REASONS OF INTERNAL MOBILITY IN A POPULAR FOOTBALL LEAGUE

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Abstract

"Navetane" is a popular football championship that mobilises several thousand players (players, managers, supporters, marabouts, etc.) every year in Senegal. The sportical and cultural association (SCA) that represents the club was considered as a "neighbourhood affair". Staying loyal to it is sacred. Consequently, any transfer to another club was seen as a betrayal. This study is therefore interested in the factors that influence the navétane player to change SCA in this championship today. Through the study of this internal mobility, this article intends to contribute to a better understanding of the logic behind this phenomenon. The research is based on a documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews with players and managers of the navétane. The results show that, in addition to economic motivations and the ambitions of a professional sports career, navétane players seek recognition and symbolic retribution from the inhabitants of their neighbourhood.

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Introduction:-

The Senegalese sports landscape is unique in that, in addition to the competitions organised by the Senegalese Football Federation, there is a popular football championship, commonly known as "navetane", which takes place during the school holidays. With 10,690 clubs, 300,000 members and more than 50,000 matches played each season, navétane is the most important sports movement in Senegal¹. Its scale has led to many actors (political, economic, sporting and social) taking an interest in it for various reasons (Fall and Tine, 2019 ;Diandy, 1999).

While Senegal is the third African country exporting players to European professional leagues, 16th in the world with 203 expatriate players (Poli et al., 2019), it should be noted that the vast majority of these expatriate players have played in the popular Navetane league (Baller, 2014). The latter has always served as a springboard for players, some of whom, without having played in the national football federation's competitions, have been directly recruited by European football clubs. For example, of the 22 Senegalese internationals who took part in the 2002 World Cup, almost all of them played at least once in the Senegalese league, while only three of them once wore the jersey of a Senegalese Division 1 team. This is the case of some celebrities such as El Hadj Ousseynou Diouf (double African golden ball), Henri Camara (second scorer of the Senegalese national team) and Tony Mario Sylva (former goalkeeper of the national team). Moreover, it should be recalled that Sadio Mané, current double African

¹<https://fr.allafrica.com/stories/202009030317.html>

gold ball was spotted by a scout of the academy General Foot during a match of navatane in 2009². Even today, the popular navetane championship is scrutinised by foreign recruiters and continues to supply players to the clubs of the Senegalese professional football league.

At the beginning of the 1960s, the main thing was for young people to participate in navetane tournaments and have a useful and enjoyable holiday. Later on, ambitions were raised. Honorable participation to the exclusion of any early elimination causing shame to the inhabitants of the neighbourhood was the credo. The leaders were ready to "sacrifice everything" for the success of their SCA, which they described as a "family" and a "tight-knit group of people" (Ndiaye 1982). Each inhabitant fiercely defends the honour of his neighbourhood by pushing his SCA, by all means, towards victory. This task was devolved to the players from the neighbourhood, who had to give their all for the team to be victorious. In this context, changes in CSAs have often led to tensions and conflicts across the country, both between teams (or neighbouring neighbourhoods) and between different cities and regions (Baller, 2014). Indeed, SCAs are teams of proximity, embedded in a territory, and there was a kind of "ban on playing in another neighbourhood association, on pain of betrayal" (Mbaye, 1998: 147).

However, nowadays, as in professional football, the mobility of players and coaches is increasing (Mballo, 2019). As an example, it is interesting to note that the number of players transferred from one SCA to another, which was 956 in 1983, had risen to 4058 by 2008. In the 2021-2022 season, the Digital Resignation Management Platform recorded 6904 resignations of players who transferred to another SCA (ONCAV, 2022). The question then is to find an explanation for the extent of this mobility of players in this movement where "loyalty to one's SCA is sacred" (Mbaye, 1997: 238). In other words, what motivates navétane players to change clubs?

This study attempts to understand the logic behind the internal mobility of navétane players, i.e. the transfer of players from one SCA to another.

Methodology:-

Before presenting the methods of investigation used in this work, we feel it is essential to present the "navétane" movement, the most popular in Senegal (Fall, 2018), which is the framework of this study.

Framework of the study: the Navetane movement

The "navétanes"³ are popular practices that took place during the long school holidays that coincided with the rainy season, during which, in addition to agricultural activities, young people essentially engaged in cultural and sporting activities (wrestling, dancing, games). This gave rise to informal football tournaments involving young people from neighbouring streets, which later evolved into inter-neighbourhood meetings. For a long time, the Navetan movement was described as a "wild sporting practice", an "unorganised practice" or an "informal practice" (Kane, 2005), but it gradually became more structured. Its scope led the political authorities to regulate it and to integrate it into the official system of state sports activities from 1973 onwards with the creation of the National Organisation for the Coordination of Holiday Activities (NOCHA)⁴, which was recognised as being of public utility in 1996.

The navétane championship is structured in a pyramidal manner. At the base are the Sportical and Cultural Associations (SCA) representing the neighbourhood or village clubs. Several SCAs are grouped into ZONES which, in turn, are affiliated to a Departmental Organisation for the Coordination of Holiday Activities (DOCHA)⁵. The latter are federated into a Regional Organisation for the Coordination of Holiday Activities (ROCHA)⁶. Finally, the National Organisation for the Coordination of Holiday Activities (NOCHA), at the top of the hierarchy, is the umbrella organisation for all regional bodies (ROCHA).

Methods of investigation

Two research techniques were used in this study: a literature review and interview surveys conducted in the Dakar and Thiès regions between April and July 2022.

²<https://www.afriquesports.net/foot/comment-sadio-mane-a-ete-repere-par-generation-foot-lon-sait-tout-desormais>

³The word "navetane" comes from the word "nawète" which means wintering in Wolof (the most spoken local language in Senegal).

⁴ In french : Organisme National de Coordination des Activités de Vacances (ONCAV)

⁵ In french : Organisme Départemental de Coordination des Activités de Vacances (ODCAV)

⁶ In french : Organisme Régional de Coordination des Activités de Vacances (ORCAV)

In addition to the work previously carried out in the context of dissertations and theses on player mobility, we consulted general literature on the migration of sportsmen in general and footballers in particular. Official publications of the NOCHA and ROCHA providing information on navétane were also used. These secondary sources were complemented by a scan of local print media and internet publications.

The desk study was complemented by semi-structured interviews with 11 navétane leaders (the General Secretary of NOCHA, 1 ROCHA President, 1 Zone President, 2 SCA Presidents, 2 SCA General Secretaries and 3 Supporters Committee Presidents) and 26 players. The interviews were conducted on the basis of two guides (one for the players and one for the leaders of the navétane movement). Each guide is divided into several parts: identification and function of the interviewee, general information on the organisation (SCA, Nocha, Docha and Zone), the situation of transfers in navétane, issues at club level.

Of the 37 interviews conducted, 24 were conducted in a face-to-face meeting with the interviewee and 13 were conducted by telephone. Having obtained the agreement of the actors interviewed, the interviews were recorded and their full transcription contributed to a better reproduction of the richness of the exchanges. We subjected all our collected data to a thematic content analysis (Bardin, 2007). In order to preserve the anonymity of the interviewees, assumed names are used in this research.

Results Of The Stud:-

The purpose of this section is to present the reasons that motivate players to change clubs. Several reasons were identified in the course of this research.

Frustration in the SCA of origin

Frustration was mentioned by several of the players interviewed to explain their departure from their local SCA. This is the case of Samba, who said: "I was not allowed to play in my neighbourhood, even though I was one of the players who turned up very early for training. And when you see that on the day of the games you are only a substitute and sometimes you are not even on the match sheet, you are frustrated. So we end up looking elsewhere" (Badji).

Indeed, insufficient playing time is a very common problem in the responses obtained. The player is sometime frustrated when his managers do not let him play enough or at all, which he often perceives as a lack of recognition of the efforts he makes. "For me, navétane is a game where all players must be considered on an equal footing, you can't always play the same players. At the beginning of the season, for example, the coach makes me play because all the players have not yet arrived in the village. But as soon as the others arrive, he puts me aside. I see this as a lack of recognition from the coach" (Bouba).

Also, players who feel uncomfortable with their SCA because of the attitude of the coaches and managers often decide to change clubs. This is the case when the management does not trust a player enough or when the player is in conflict with the team.

When a SCA has too many players, coaches are forced to make a selection. The players not selected will try their luck elsewhere and, in most cases, the leaders will not object to the departure of these players. They migrate to SCAs with fewer players, such as those being created in new districts, which struggle to gather young people capable of defending the team.

The quest for recognition or "mobility for evidence".

Sometimes the reason for changing clubs is that a player who is excluded from the starting line-up, because he is considered less good, prefers to go to another team in order to prove to his home SCA that he is not appreciated. They know that a good performance 'elsewhere' regularly finds a positive echo in the eyes of the management of their home SCA. An undisputed 'first team' status acquired through a good performance in the host SCA allows the player, on returning to his home SCA, to claim a new position that he did not necessarily have before his departure. This new status then allows the player to obtain a position that he would not have had the chance to get without this "mobility for evidence". "When I left JappoSCA, which is my local team, to go to MankoSCA, some of the managers said "too bad he has to go elsewhere", he has no place in the team. Their attitude gave me more strength because I had to show them that I have a place in the team, more than the others. Thank God! I was the scorer of Manko,

everyone was talking about me in the Zone. The following year, the president called me to play number 9 at JappoSCA " (Lamine).

Thus, "going to play in the team of the neighbouring district is a way for the player to assert his identity ... he wants to prove his 'true' value to his ex-leaders whom he has left but with whom he remains linked" (Mbaye, 1997: 238). For, generally speaking, these players who leave the SCA remain supporters of it, paying the same dues as those who have remained in the local team.

In sum, these internally mobile players are more likely to be looking for a SCA where their talents will be recognised by managers and fans. Thus, the intrinsic motivation of competence would incorporate, in the navetane model, sporting status for recognition. The primary object of the Navetane player's passion seems to be not only football, but also the need for affirmation, the desire to be recognised. SCAs thus play a fundamental role in the affirmation of local neighbourhood or village identities (Diaw, 1994).

Stimulation and challenge

One of the reasons why some navetane players change SCA is because they want to play at a level of competition that suits their talent. Indeed, when they play in a locality where the level is not high enough, they would like to play at a higher level and therefore go to zonal competitions located in big cities like Dakar, Thiès, Louga. Moussa says: "It's true that my original SCA is the team from my neighbourhood, which is in a village. There the level is not high. The teams in my area are weak. To improve my performance, I had to look for an SCA in the department of Mbour. A friend of mine with whom I share the same team at Demba Diop high school suggested I join his SCA. The competition is more intense there". Thus, the search for a high level can be linked to the objective of challenge, which is put forward by players to explain their mobility, mainly to competitions taking place in big cities. "I didn't have anything left to prove at the Effuillo SCA. So I needed new challenges. That is why I left Effuillo to join an SCA in Ziguinchor" (Bodian).

It is important to note that a sporting experience in a new context can be stimulating (De Jong, Fawcett, 1981) for the navetane player. This stimulating factor reported in the interviews is generated by a new sporting challenge. It is therefore stimulating. "But as I always say, I play for my neighbourhood but sometimes I have the desire to go and discover something else and compete with other good talents. It's more exciting" (Assane).

This constant search for the best level in the player appears to be an important factor of stimulation for some of the individuals interviewed, but it is also an opportunity to gain greater visibility.

From the quest for visibility to the access to the status of "almost Pro"

Some players want to join another SCA with a higher standard and playing in the big cities in the hope of getting more exposure to the general public and the media. Their objective seems to be clearly to catch the eye of coaches and scouts in order to get transfer opportunities in the professional league or abroad. "Navetan is a showcase to get to the top level. That's why I don't give priority to money. I accepted to play in Khandalou SCA of Reubeuss because I am aware that many opportunities can be offered to me from there" (Ibou). Omar mentions the possibilities that can come from his exposure to the media and the feeling that this popularity provokes: "the matches are show on the YouTube channels of the SCA but sometimes matches are shown on television".

This exposure to the public (spectators) and indirectly (media spectators), as well as opens up opportunities for them at the level of the clubs of the Senegalese League of Professional Football or those of foreign championships. It is undoubtedly for this reason that Sadio Mané had to leave his agricultural and forest region in the extreme south of Senegal to come and play the "navetanes" in the department of Mbour, 80 km south-east of Dakar. It was because of this geographical mobility that a local talent scout spotted him and directed him to the Generation Foot academy. Navetane players are increasingly aiming for a professional football career, encouraged also by the success of the national team and the growing presence of Senegalese players in Europe (Baller, 2014). Assane even believes that playing in Dakar 'is a step towards the professional league because you have a better chance of being spotted by scouts'. Modou underlines the popular enthusiasm of competitions in the capital on a player: "if I chose to play in Dakar, it's the stadiums... it's between fifteen thousand and twenty thousand spectators during the matches, it's another atmosphere and there it's almost as if I were a professional". This search for an 'almost professional' status through mobility is in line with Praicheux's point of view, which links these two notions (Praicheux, 1998). This

possibility of achieving 'almost professional' status is one of the factors that attracts some navétane players to the big cities.

The pecuniary motivation or economic benefit

Studies have shown the importance that money plays in the mobility of people. For Ravenstein (1889) "the most important factor [in the study of migration] is the economic motives of the actors"(1889: 286, in Piguet, 2013: 142). Today, the term 'mercenaries' is much more commonly used to refer to navétane players who see money as their main motivation for mobility. However, it is important to note that the amounts received from these transfers vary from one player to another, from one area to another. Some, like Matar, emphasise the modest and symbolic nature of the compensation received: "what we receive for playing in these SCAs is nothing, it is just a sum that allows us to meet our needs during the season". Others, like Assane, believe that: "Personally, I didn't ask for less than 75,8 USD (50 000 FCFA⁷). I managed to get 227,9 USD (150 000 FCFA). But this amount depended on the region. The further away from the capital, the lower the price". The financial claim of the recruited players depends on the supposed or real financial standing of the SCA that wants to recruit them. For Mballo (2019), each SCA in Dakar, depending on its financial means, its ambitions, its objectives or the performance that the player can bring to it, determines a range to set a sum for the recruitment of a player, and the number of players to be recruited for the season. While some SCAs spend 12-28% of their budget on recruitment to strengthen their squad with allowances ranging from 151,7 USD (100 000 FCFA) to 534,2 USD (350,000 FCFA), in others, amounts can be negotiated up to one million (Mballo, 2019). In fact, in the SCAs that aspire to play in the national phases and those that wish to join the professional league, the amount of bonuses paid to mercenary players reaches one million CFA francs. In general, these are players who come from football academies and those from clubs playing in the championships (organised by the amateur and professional football leagues) who have not played more than five matches. These mercenary players are mostly offensive players, capable of making a team win. They also have a highly prized status and a privileged financial consideration.

The interest of players in changing SCAs can only rarely be reduced to a financial issue. Indeed, some of the players interviewed did not mention the financial factor as a source of motivation for their mobility. This is the case for Ibou, who confirms that "the search for money was never the reason I changed SCAs". This result is in line with various studies that have already been carried out, particularly on football, emphasising that migratory movements are not limited to economic factors (Elliott, Maguire, 2008).

From change of domicile to the splitting of SCAs

With the galloping urbanisation in Senegal, construction is intensifying throughout the country, leading to the creation of new neighbourhoods around the cities. The young inhabitants of these new neighbourhoods, who are the result of residential mobility, mostly think about creating a SCA, which becomes an element of socialisation and identification for the inhabitants (Mbaye, 2017). "I had to change my SCA after we moved to Keur Masssar. My family lives here now, so it's normal that I play in the neighbourhood SCA" (Serigne).

While for many newcomers, these newly created SCAs make it possible to establish an emotional relationship with the neighbourhood, a platform for identification, for others, the change of residence does not lead to a complete break with the SCA of their former neighbourhood. For Seck (1998), even if they no longer live in the neighbourhood, they continue to be members of the SCA in their place of origin and take part in all the activities, no matter how far away they are. Nothing can make them lose their identity as a member of their neighbourhood or ex-neighbourhood SCA. As a result, young people are attached to their SCA by very strong ties that make it difficult for them to break them.

It should also be noted that the old districts, beset by a growing number of newcomers, end up seeing their SCA split up because of an overabundance of players or governance problems. Moreover, Niang (1995) notes that in the navétane movement very few SCAs merge with others, whereas several SCAs emerge by splitting from other existing teams. While these splits make it easier for young people to find positions in a new team, they very often lead to strong tensions between supporters who now see each other as rivals.

⁷ FCFA is the currency of the Francophone Community of Africa

The quest for a victory to strengthen social cohesion

The relationship of the inhabitants of a district with their sports and cultural association is very close to the one they have with their family. For this SCA president interviewed: "We only have this neighbourhood that is everything to us. We are like members of the same family and we have to do everything to defend the honour of our neighbourhood, even in sport". At the level of the SCA, the stakes are very high for the supporters, their honour, their reputation and a good part of the money they had invested in their team are at stake. For this reason, the SCA no longer hesitate to call upon talented players living outside the district. Thus, this local mercato of Navetane, which some interviewees call 'mercatane'⁸, is used by SCA leaders not only to bring back to the fold players from the neighbourhood who had left to sell their talent elsewhere, but also to recruit players with confirmed talent in order to strengthen the team and enable it to go as far as possible in the Navetane championship competitions. Very often, "the SCA would bring in a striker or a great goalkeeper who could help them win the match" (Mballo, 2019: 43). This operation of recruiting talent to strengthen the local team in the event of a very important and decisive match (derby, qualifying match, etc.), corresponds to a sporting logic of improving the team's performance (Brocard, 2015).

From material benefits to symbolic rewards for mercenaries

The offers that SCAs make to mercenary players are rarely solely monetary in nature. Beyond the amount allocated to the recruitment of a player, we can have parallel expenses related to the rental of rooms for some for their accommodation, and catering (Mballo, 2019). "For accommodation, some teams could offer it to us. If the player makes a transfer from one city to another, then the team necessarily does everything to give him accommodation, at least a room. Or it's a manager or a player who puts him up. For example, when I was playing in Guediawaye, I was offered a room to myself because I came from Mbour" (Pathé). As if to reinforce this, Edou adds: "We are in good conditions. The president has rented a fully equipped house to accommodate us". This accommodation is usually accompanied by catering and transport. "A friend of mine took me in, he put me up in his house. As for food, I share the family meal. The team takes care of my transport" (Matar).

In addition to the bonuses received by the mercenaries, many players demand sports equipment. The purchase of one or more pairs of shoes seems to be commonplace in the navétane today. "I changed my SCA because of a problem of means. Ndiodéma, which is my local ASC, does not have many resources, no good jerseys, no shoes. I went to another SCA, Diambars, where they offered me two pairs of shoes" (Momar). "In my new SCA I was offered three pairs of shoes (2 pairs for training and 1 pair for matches. This is good because after the navetane, I participate in many football tournaments with the pairs of shoes I was offered" (Sidy).

In addition to material gains, another type of reward should be added: symbolic capital, which can be defined as the amount of recognition, legitimacy and consecration accumulated by a social agent within his or her field. This definition implies that this capital is symbolic in that it depends on the appreciation of peers. Mballo (2019) points out that for the greatest pleasure and pride of some players was to come as a 'saviour', by scoring goals or being very decisive during the match, thus expanding their fame and affection towards the public of that locality. "In the neighbourhood, we are valued by the people. They look up to us and congratulate us in the street. The children admire us. The fans come to us" (Souleye).

Some players seem to enjoy the privileges of being a 'commando saviour': "In my new SCA, people have a high regard for me. They take really good care of me. They offer me a lot of things. As far as girls are concerned, many of them are courting me". With great physical effort, they have forged a place for themselves in the heart of the host community, where they are recognised, valued and supported by the community. Their sense of belonging to a group and the way in which they believe they are positively perceived strongly influences their self-esteem and self-confidence. Compliments from spectators and residents of the host SCA's neighbourhood are highly sought after as they reinforce the player's position as a distinguished sportsperson with specific sporting qualities.

Conclusion:-

The navetan, which used to embody a social ideal based on the principles of 'selflessness', is no longer a privileged space for 'free' commitment and self-giving. However, our study has shown that not all players who support mobility are looking for a form of gratification. Indeed, called 'mercenaries' or 'commandos' in navetan jargon, players who leave one SCA for another seem to be driven by various motivations. The navétane sports space favours a wide

⁸The contraction of the words 'Mercato' and 'Navétane'

variety of factors such as signing and match bonuses, material benefits, symbolic reward for access to 'star' status with associated social benefits, etc. The desire to change clubs also stems from frustration generated by various factors within the original SCA on the one hand, and on the other hand, from a real desire of young players who aspire to be professional footballers and for whom Navetan represents a showcase allowing them to have a better visibility both with the managers of the clubs of the Senegalese professional football league and with the recruiters of European clubs.

The recruitment of talented players allows SCAs to pursue two types of objectives: on the one hand, the reinforcement of their territorial identity, and on the other hand, the achievement of sporting objectives.

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