Beyond the Action
The Cultural Adjustment and Integration of African Athletes in the German Football League

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DEDICATION

In loving and evergreen memory of my parents,

Jude Irokanụlọ Ejekwu and Theresa Chinyere Onyike,

whose light continues to shine like the sun that never sets.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explored the cultural transition experiences of elite transnational African footballers in Germany, their coping and adaptation practices, and the interaction of transition with their transnational lived world. It was anchored on the theoretical argument that athletes' relocation from one cultural and sporting context to another alters their established life balance, which requires the reconstitution of self, behaviours and relationships in order to achieve career continuity and normal life functioning.

Approached from a social constructivist epistemological standpoint that individuals construct reality within embedded social structures and social practices, a qualitative research design was used to examine the research problem. Through qualitative interviews and a digital ethnography of social media, data were collected from aspiring youth footballers in Africa and elite transnational African footballers in Germany to answer the research questions.

Presented in four independent papers, the study revealed four important themes interlinking the research papers: a) While the cultural distance emanating from the wider society still remain, sporting culture related differences are narrowing for transnational African athletes because of European modelled academies training youth footballers in Africa; b) Transnational African players focus on their athletic identity while in transition which enables them to manage difficult experiences while focusing on the goal of career advancement and securing livelihood for self and family; c) Experience of otherness is both a structural phenomenon and an agentic experience of African athletes in transition in Germany; and d) a strong transnational sphere of belonging is important for African athletes' adaptation and integration.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. The research context

Literature on migration and global flows of human beings is rich and growing. A lot of the research has focused on issues such as irregular and forced migration, labour market experiences of immigrants, race and multiculturalism, and the politics of immigration. There is also a concentration of attention on precarious migrant groups, especially refugees and asylum seekers, their experiences and integration into host communities. However, elite transnational athletes, an important and growing stream of migrants from the global South to the North, have only recently started to receive research attention.

The German football league has been a destination for many of these foreign athletes. The followership of football is unrivalled in Germany, argues Winkle (2014), who writes that 'no natural or cultural event, no event of any description, no TV crime series even remotely approaches the popularity of football'. Professional football in Germany is a large economic sector that attracts strong interest among the population and generates huge revenues. In the 2016/2017 season, the top two divisions comprising of 36 clubs earned record revenues of over 4 billion euros (ESPN, 2018) and professional football 'provided a total of around 185,000 jobs in the 2018/19 season, or employment for approximately 127,000 full-time equivalents' (McKinsey, 2020, p. 17). Given the enormous opportunities above, the sector has been a major attraction for many migrant athletes. As Captured by The Economist (2013), 'just as immigrants flock to German jobs, so players join German clubs'. Striebinger (2017) highlighted that there were only seven foreigners among the

300 players that were registered in the top tier in 1963, compared to 235 (55%) of the 429 registered in the 2015/2016 season.

Africa has grown as a conveyor belt of football talent from the global South and the migration of African footballers to Europe and Germany has been on the increase in the last couple of decades (Darby, 2000; 2007a; Poli, 2006a). Despite this, research interest in African athletes in Europe has focused more on the economies of talent migration rather than on their lived experiences as agents cultivating lives across cultural spaces. Nevertheless, as African footballers increasingly move to Germany, understanding their transition and adaptation experience could add important knowledge to the burgeoning literature on migrants' experiences in German (and European) society and bridge the gap in literature on cultural transition and adaptation of transnational sports migrants.

Blecking (2016) writes that football in Germany, from the beginning, was 'a game of migrants and served to socialize marginalized groups'. Though there is within professional football inherent integration proclivities and the deliberate institutional mechanisms for integrating professional immigrant players, the transition and adaptation process for migrant athletes can be a daunting experience (Bourke, 2003). Beyond the facade of the superstar sports hero, on-pitch and off-pitch life adjustments of elite migrants in football can be very challenging and have significant impacts on the quality of their lives and careers. While 'adjusting to the demands of an intensive physical training programme', migrant players deal with 'encountering and negotiating an unfamiliar social and cultural environment' (Weedon, 2011, p. 200). This aspect of transition is rarely seen by the adoring public. Contributing to this situation is the fact that professional migrant footballers are generally seen as a special class of immigrants and are rarely associated with the difficulties of adaptation and integration faced by more precarious groups like refugees and asylum seekers.

However, Ryba et al. (2018, p. 521) note that the experiences of transnational athletes 'are hardly comparable to those of refugees fleeing violence, political prosecution, or war'. To this point, their experiences have to be situated and analysed 'within wider socio-political contexts in which cultural transitions are embedded… and their impacts on athletic migrants' (Ryba et al., 2018, p. 521).

1.2. Statement of the problem

Cultural transition has been identified as an emerging concept for articulating the life adjustments and adaptation of migrants such as transnational athletes whose lives are developed and lived across multiple cultural spaces (Ryba et al., 2016). As Ryba et al. demonstrate, for migrant footballers, 'cultural transition has important implications for the direction of their careers and also their opportunities to have a meaningful life' (2016, p. 11). Despite the surge in transnational transfers of athletes from the global South in the last couple of decades, studies investigating elite athlete's cultural transition remain very few, and more so, for the increasingly ubiquitous elite migrant athletes in Europe who come from Africa.

My research, therefore, examined the cultural transition experiences of elite transnational African footballers in Germany. It explored their transition experiences within and outside the sports context of German society. It provides an insight into the specific experiences that they face across the transition spectrum; how they interpret and make meaning of their experiences; the factors that mediate these experiences; the coping and adaptation practices in transition; and how transition interacts with their transnational lived world.

The following question guided the research: What is the cultural transition and adaptation experience of elite athletes from Africa in the German football League?

More specifically, the research aimed to:

a) Explore the key experiences that players from Africa encounter in the process of transition in German football and society, the meanings they make of their experiences and the trajectory of the experiences across their career.

b) Examine how experiences of transition and adaptation are shaped by the pre-migration factors such as cultural and athletic socialisation; the personal factors such as imaginations of mobility and motivations of migration; and post-migration factors such as migration history and host environment.

c) Examine the coping and adaptation behaviours that the athletes adopt in managing cultural transition and the nature of social support provided by their clubs.

d) Explore how African athletes balance the pressures of transition and succeeding in a competitive career alongside transnational commitments in their homelands.

Investigating these contributed to our understanding of the cultural transition of African athletes in Germany who have not received sufficient attention in the literature. Having introduced the central problem of my research, in the following section, I outline the focus of each chapter of the dissertation.

1.3. Structure of the dissertation

Chapter Two provides a definition of central concepts that framed the research inquiry and situates the current study within literature.

Chapter Three explains the theoretical framework that informed my study. The various models that were synthesized are explained in detail and the summary of the framework outlined.

Chapter Four provides an overview of the methodological reflections that guided the research. It explains the ontology and epistemology of knowledge underpinning my research, the research design and the research population. My role in the production of knowledge is also outlined and the research ethics explained.

Chapter Five presents the findings comprising of four research articles that examined the issues outlined in the research problem, presenting empirical answers to the specific research issue under investigation. Article 1 explores the social structural contexts of becoming and the imaginations of mobility through football migration among youth athletes in Africa which contributes to the experience of transition in Europe. Article 2 examines the experiences that elite African athletes encounter in the process of mobilizing self for a transnational career within the context of work and German society. Article 3 examines their coping and adaptation to transition in German football and society. Article 4 explores the transnational activities of elite African footballers in their home countries and the impact on their sporting careers and lives.

Chapter Six ties together the four research articles through an integrated discussion of the findings highlighting key contributions to empirical literature, theory and methodology. After, I propose recommendations, acknowledge the limitations of the dissertation and challenges faced and offer suggestions for future research.

2 CENTRAL CONCEPTS AND STATE OF RESEARCH

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I contextually frame the central concepts, review the state of the art on African football talent migration and athletes' cultural transition, and establish the gap which my research contributes to bridging.

2.2. Operational concepts

The concepts of culture, transnationalism, cultural transition, and integration are important in the framing of the research issue and the considerations of literature and theory. It is imperative to operationalize and place them in context with regards to what they mean and how they were used in this study.

2.2.1. Culture

Culture is one of the oldest and most used concepts in the social sciences, yet, it is difficult to define and, at times, used in an unhelpful 'deterministic' and prejudicial sense (Thiel & Seiberth, 2017). Nonetheless, culture can be a useful concept for describing collectively shared social, normative, attitudinal, behavioural and material attributes that define life within a given group. Such a group may be a nation, an ethnic or religious group, or it may also be a social sector or community of practice such as sports or football. Culture includes norms, values, attitudes, world views, belief systems, language, social structure and social roles, patterns of interpersonal relationships and material creations such as artwork, music, and technology (Samovar & Porter, 2003). There are some important features of culture. Firstly, culture is shared and is differentiated from individual idiosyncrasies. Secondly, culture is dynamic and society has the capacity to alter or build upon it. Thirdly, individuals can learn and acquire culture. Fourthly, culture has a

significant influence on individual self-concept, perception of the world and behaviour. This notion recognises culture as a social fact that structures experience (Durkheim, 1938).

Though individuals socialized within the same culture may share similar perceptions of the world, they also vary in their actual patterns of behaviour (Johnson, 2003). This is because individuals pass through unique and subjective experiences of the social world different from those of others, and also possess the capacity to reflexively act upon the structures of experience (Giddens, 1984). For instance, an individual who has degree-level education may experience and interpret the world in some ways different from another with only basic education within the same society. On the other hand, individuals from different cultures may share commonalities in some cultural elements as a result of shared class and social experiences. Nevertheless, within societies, there are structures - generally shared world views and practices - that permeate social life and transcend individual and class idiosyncrasies.

To this regard, my study conceived culture as shared ways of perceiving and relating with the social and material world constituted within collective experiences that reflexively impact on individual self-concept and behaviour. This by no means denotes fixed and inflexible structures of being and behaviour but rather, collectively shared and experienced meaning systems that interact with personal history to produce the habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) of 'dispositions' that structure rather than determine behaviour.

2.2.2. Cultural transition

Transitions are periods of considerable behavioural and psychosocial changes and adjustments arising from a change in status (Gropper et al., 2020). A transition can occur in various domains of an individual's life depending on the event that triggers it, e.g., from celibacy to marriage, barrenness to motherhood, work to retirement, health to illness, and relocation from one locality

to another, etc. Within sports, athletic transitions may involve a change in competition level (e.g., junior to senior category); change of club or transfer to another country; prolonged absence due to injury, suspension or childbirth; or active involvement to retirement. Transitions usually alter athletes' self-concept and identity as they readjust to the new realities of their careers and lived world (Kralik et al., 2006).

Cultural transition or adjustment is a type of transition that is marked by a change in cultural contexts arising from relocation. In this study, it is an experience which an athlete goes through when he or she has been socialised in a different cultural space and sports context from another in which he or she tries to re-establish career and life (Ryba et al., 2016). The change in context demands the athlete to learn new social skills, adjust to changes in sporting approach, develop new relationships within work and society, renegotiate old relationships in previous places of living, and develop new routines of daily life (Bethel et al., 2020; Ryba et al., 2016). Though cultural transitions may happen within a single country (e.g., an athlete moving from a rural setting to the urban metropolis), the focus in this study is transitions of an international nature (from the African context to the German/European context).

2.2.3. Integration

Integration is a concept that has become highly associated with migration and multiethnic national entities or multicultural social fields such as sports. Various concepts such as assimilation, social cohesion, diversity and inclusion, and multiculturalism have been used in different contexts to describe elements of the phenomenon that it represents (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013). Integration in this study is viewed from both the host society's position and from the minority's position. From the former's perspective, it involves initiatives to address barriers against participation and acceptance of minorities across different segments of social life (Modood, 2015). From the latter's

perspective, it involves accepting oneself as part of the host society (and sporting institution), committing to common norms and values, and actively participating in social/organisational life.

On the part of the society (or a sporting institution), integration involves the conscious and deliberate effort to encourage and support minorities or immigrant athletes to acquire competencies and access opportunities to participate, on an equal access with autochthonous or majority populations, in social, political and economic life (Jupp & Clyne, 2011). This entails, institutional, attitudinal and behavioural changes to accommodate minority groups. It may also entail the acceptance of difference (racial, religious, cultural, etc.) as a normal state of being, or better, where difference is not construed as different or even incorporated into mainstream social life (Nagel, 2009; Modood, 2015). In this sense, there is an acknowledgement that the majority population are themselves never homogenous, difference being the default order of society (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013).

On the part of the individual or group, it may require immigrants or minorities to invest themselves in the society by acquiring cultural knowledge (e.g., language skills, sociocultural history, civics, etc.) and actively participating in social, economic and political life (Laurentsyeva & Venturini, 2017). It involves identifying with and committing to upholding the core values (e.g., freedom, tolerance, the rule of law, economic enterprise and work, etc.) and abiding by the norms of the dominant society (Laurentsyeva & Venturini, 2017). In some situations, these may be unwritten expectations. However, they may also be formal requirements by the state in the form of certificates of good conduct, citizenship tests, proofs of subsistence, etc. (see Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community, n.d.). Integration may also be agentic and proactive where immigrants themselves make their own choices within the structures that enable and constrain possibility (Phillips et al., 2007): They define self in relation to the rest of society, exploit the pockets of

opportunities to navigate the system, pick and drop cultural attributes and propagate and mainstream own cultural markers.

2.2.4. Transnationalism

Transnationalism, like culture, encompasses many elements that are not easily fused together in a single definition. It is a phenomenon that has its roots in the intensification of other processes including cross-border migration, globalization and the internationalization of social, economic and political life (Kearney, 1995). In this social and economic order, large numbers of people migrate to live and work in locations abroad while maintaining significant contact and relationships with their origins. Transnationalism captures the phenomenon in which migrants maintain multiple cultural, social and locational spheres of belonging across national borders (Schiller et al., 1992a; 1992b). Transnationalism, does not foreclose belonging and is not in opposition to migrants' integration and adaptation to their host society (Tedeschi et al., 2020). Inherently, it carries with it the intentionality to belong, not exclusively to a single but to multiple localities and social spaces.

My study conceives transnationalism in the sports context of usage. In this sense, it manifests in athletes' cross-border mobilities in the pursuit of opportunities for career development, travels between origin and career locations for sporting and non-sporting engagements, life styles that both show newly integrated host country cultural practices and continuities of origin cultural practices and the continued participation in social and economic life in the multiple localities of belonging (Ryba et al., 2018).

Having defined the central concepts of this research, in the next section I review the state of the art on African football migration and cultural transitions in elite sports.

2.3. State of the art: African football talent migration and cultural transition research

This project is located within the broad research field of sports migration studies. The review of cultural transition literature therefore draws from across various sports as is relevant to the research problem.

2.3.1. African football talent migration research

Football was first introduced into Africa by British colonialists in South Africa in mid-nineteenth century (Alegi, 2010). By the 1920s and the 1930s, the game had spread well into the hinterlands of the continent not only as a recreational activity but in the form of organized sport (Alegi, 2010). The early stream of athlete migration from Africa started during the colonial period into the immediate post-colonial period in the 1960s mostly along colonial corridors: Morocco (starting from the 1930s) and French West Africa (in the 1950s) to France (Poli, 2006a); Portuguese East Africa to Portugal starting from the 1940s (Cleveland, 2017); and Congo to Belgium from 1960 (Poli, 2006a). The Confederation of African Football (CAF), under the pan-African and anticolonial political climate of the immediate post-independence era reacted to talent migration by adopting protectionist policies and prohibiting the use of expatriate players at the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) to retain talent at home and also to assert their nationhood (Poli, 2006a). Different African countries also set up barriers and transfer authorisation frameworks to keep the best talents at home and this saw a reduction in the migration of talent (Poli, 2006a). A third era started around 1980 when the CAF removed restrictions on the selection of expatriate players and relaxed restrictions on player transfer while the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) also instituted regulations obliging clubs to release players for international games creating advantages for countries with expatriate players (Poli, 2006a).

The 1980s saw a new wave of migration and the increased presence and the exploits of teams such as Cameroon and Nigeria, at the World Cup and the Olympics, and Ghana and Nigeria, at the FIFA youth tournaments in the 1990s. This brought a lot of global exposure for and interest in African talent (Ungruhe & Schmidt, 2020). This period marked a continuation in talent migration which has continued until the present time. The spread of football academies, some of which were funded by European capital with talent export partnerships with European clubs, intensified talent development and migration (Poli, 2006a; Darby, 2007b). Though earlier waves of migration were mostly followed through former colonial corridors, more recent flows show 'a more diffuse spatial distribution across the European football industry and to emerging professional leagues in South and South-East Asia and the Middle East' (Darby et al., 2022). However, talent migration from Africa, especially to Europe, has mostly been dominated by West and North African countries, while East and Southern Africa remain underrepresented (Ungruhe & Schmidt, 2020; Darby et al., 2022).

Though literature on football migration from Africa is still limited, interest in understanding this growing group of migrants has been on the rise. Pioneer literature focused on macro-level dynamics of the global economy and core-periphery relations (Darby, 2007a; 2007b; 2007c; 2000; Poli, 2006a; Poli, 2006b; Agergaard & Botelho, 2014). More recently, attention has started shifting towards the agency of African migrant athletes and their experiences in Europe (Ungruhe, 2016; Darby & Van der Meij, 2018; Esson, 2013; 2015a; 2015b; Ungruhe & Esson, 2017; van der Meij & Darby, 2017; Büdel, 2013). Some others have studied the impact of migration of African football talent on the development of football and society in Africa (Poli, 2006a; Darby et al., 2007; Darby, 2012; Acheampong et al., 2019; Acheampong, 2019).

Focusing on the structures of the global economy, Darby (2000; 2007c), Darby, Akindes, and Kirwin (2007) and Poli (2006b) examined African talent migration within the broader framework of the asymmetric global capitalist and neocolonial economic relations with the periphery. Poli (2006a) used the geographies of African football migration to illustrate the core-periphery connections and the relationship with colonial legacies. Agergaard and Botelho (2014), while still approaching the migration of African football talent to Europe from the lens of the structure of the global economy, examined the push and the pull factors behind talent migration. They explained the factors as limited opportunities in African economies and the wages and opportunities available in European football, respectively.

In more recent studies, interest has shifted towards the agency and experiences of the athletes. This shift in focus recognizes that both structural realities and the players' own aspirations play important roles in the enactment of the migration story. Moving away from analytical frameworks of exploitative North-South economic asymmetries, van der Meij and Darby (2017) examined the decisions made by aspiring footballers (together with their families) in Ghana to migrate to local academies as part of a broader international migration and livelihood strategy. Esson (2015a) studied the agency of trafficked African football athletes who, in literature and policy, are often problematized as victims. Through ethnographic data collected from trafficked athletes, Esson demonstrated that many 'trafficked' athletes are actively expressing their desire for spatial and social mobility through migration. Esson (2013) showed how Ghanaian youth took to football as a strategy to navigate around an economy where schooling no longer guaranteed employment. Ungruhe (2016) explored the interactions of the structure and agency of African football migrants in the construction and experience of the migration project, maintaining that it has to be understood within the framework of a broader 'culture of migration' (p. 1770) where migrants hope to translate

their success abroad to status at home. Ungruhe and Esson (2017) maintained that the involvement of young West African males in football migration projects represents a 'social negotiation of hope' and an attempt to overcome widespread 'social immobility'.

Focusing on destination experiences, Büdel (2013) carried out an ethnographic study of the professional career imaginaries of young football migrants from Nigeria living in Istanbul and how such imaginaries structure and sustain the construction of hope, mobility and transition. Ungruhe (2013) explored the othering of African players in Germany based on their physical attributes, and Scott (2015) explored racial discrimination of African and other black footballers in Sweden. Agergaard and Ungruhe (2016) and Agergaard and Ryba (2014) highlighted the precarity experienced by African players during and after their careers.

On the other hand, the transnational lived world of migrant African athletes has been studied through remittances and charity activities in their homeland. Acheampong (2019) and Acheampong et al. (2019) explored the ways in which elite African football migrants invest their wealth in socially beneficial causes by building hospitals, schools and football academies. Ungruhe and Agergaard (2020) highlighted the role of remittances to family and kin and other commercial investments of African footballers in post-athletic livelihood planning.

In summary, the literature on African football migration research is relatively nascent but growing. Early research approached the phenomenon mostly from macro dynamics of the global economy explaining it as core-periphery exploitative relations. More recently, the shift has been towards micro approaches that explore the interactions of social structures and the agency of the athletes. In the succeeding section, I review research literature on the experiences of athletes in cultural transition.

2.3.2. Cultural transition in elite sports: athletes' experiences

As elite athletes move across borders in pursuit of career opportunities, mobilities are enacted that present encounters with new cultural contexts (Ryba et al., 2016; Agergaard & Ryba, 2014). These experiences emerge from the 'ruptures of meaning' within old and new life schemas and dislocations of established routines and 'social networks' (Ryba et al., 2016, p. 5). These ruptures occur both within the sports context of work and the wider cultural environment (Ryba et al., 2016). Within sport, though rules and standards create a homogenized sporting framework which makes athletes' migration seem 'a within culture transition', there still exists variations in approaches across cultures and clubs in playing styles, coach-player relationship, etc. (Ryba et al., 2016, p. 5). Outside of work, athletes have to renegotiate old relationships or establish new relationships and routines and acquire new cultural competencies to fit into the larger society (Ryba et al., 2016). Migrant athletes, therefore, encounter these renegotiations of meanings and relationships as they move across national boundaries and cultural contexts.

Brandão and Vieira (2013) used the case of Brazilian footballers to show how early socialisation in a given culture impacts on migrant athletes' acculturation and adaptation when they move overseas. They maintain that the cultural emphasis in Brazil that football is an art and that the footballer's abilities are innate qualities that are not outcomes of training impacts on how Brazilian footballers prepare, not just for football, but for life in general. With data showing the rate of return within a year of migrating abroad, they argue that Brazilian players are generally ill-prepared for the extensive adjustments required for adapting to demanding and alien cultural contexts. They also noted their struggles with language, weather and food. Similarly, Agergaard and Ryba (2014, p. 236) highlighted that North American and West African female footballers in Scandinavia struggled with various issues including 'style of play, weather, language, and culture'.

Schinke et al. (2013) studied the acculturation of elite athletes within various sports in Canada, contending that athletes may experience the challenge of 'navigating two worlds' and 'acculturation loads'. Expanding on this, Schinke et al. (2016) found four major thematic acculturation experiences among transnational migrant athletes in Canada: '(a) navigating the sport system without local support; (b) adjusting to new sport programs and training approaches; (c) dealing with cultural differences; and (d) searching for balance' (p. 36). Khomutova (2016) underscored the challenges of sporting cultures and orientations, noting that 'individualism' is a major source of friction in multicultural teams between athletes from North America and those from Western Europe in the 'collectivist' sporting cultural context of Europe.

Experiences of discrimination and racism are common for immigrant athletes, whether within the club or the wider society (Jowett & Frost, 2007; Ungruhe, 2013; Agergaard & Ungruhe, 2016; Khomutova, 2016). Black players face a lot of racial stereotyping as lacking in work ethic and positive attitude or as having 'natural talent' which reduces their qualities to physical attributes (Jowett & Frost, 2007; Ungruhe, 2013; Agergaard & Ungruhe, 2016; Khomutova, 2016). As a result, racial othering has been found to downgrade the value of African players or produce frustrations for the players as they fight to live up to their assumed natural attributes (Jowett & Frost, 2007; Ungruhe, 2013; Agergaard & Ungruhe, 2016; Khomutova, 2016). For solidarity or identity, immigrant players may form bonds with other immigrants within the team which may lead to 'ethnic subgroups' and impact on team relationships negatively (Khomutova, 2016, p. 870).

Onwumechili and Akpan's (2019) unique inquiry into the experience of intranational migrant athletes in Nigeria expands on the balancing act that confronts migrant athletes. Their study revealed useful findings on how African athletes deal with managing familial obligations and their highly mobile careers. They revealed that the players have to simultaneously bother about the

demands of their careers and that of financially providing for family and relatives they left behind, occasionally borrowing to meet their remittance obligations. This, they write, stems from the communal orientation of African life, and that 'the remittances demonstrate taking care of family members who may have helped in the footballer's upbringing' (Onwumechili & Akpan, 2019, p. 9). Gmelch and San Antonio (2001) shed light on the impact on family life of the high spatial mobility of baseball players in the United States. They maintained that such frequent movements create a lot of challenges for their spouses and children who have to frequently re-establish their lives in new localities, find new housing, schools and healthcare providers. Roderick (2012) provides further insight into the disruptions to and tensions in family life caused by the frequent transfers of football players. He writes that due to the reluctance of some spouses to move, many players commute long distances to training at new clubs or develop arrangements where they spend time partly with family and partly at the new location. A major reason for such reluctance is the emotional disconnections with familiar others and routines and the loneliness that accompanies relocations. Such tensions with family relationships he argues, may not be unrelated to the higher than average divorce rates of footballers' marriages (Roderick, 2012).

Differing career opportunities and job security experienced by migrant athletes have also been acknowledged. Agergaard and Ungruhe (2016) argue that African players' transition is marked by different manifestations of precarity and job insecurity, especially for those arriving for the first time from Africa. They note that 'players may have little idea what will happen to them after their possible transfer and recruitment to clubs abroad, while club managers and coaches may not know very much about the player' (Agergaard & Ungruhe, 2016, p. 71). This lack of knowledge of each other sets in motion the other manifestations of precarity. In many situations, the players arrive on trials or initial short-term contracts in which case, should they fail to earn long-term contracts, they

are left with 'neither rights to employment nor permits to stay in the destination country' (Agergaard & Ungruhe, 2016, p. 72). Agergaard and Ryba (2014) examined the transition phase at the termination of the athletic career for transnational athletes in Scandinavia. The experience at this stage is a combination of structural contexts and individual agency. Among athletes from North America, they found a wider scope of choice and more opportunities to pursue post-playing careers within and outside of sports, enabled by their strong social capital and social networks and opportunities in their home countries. For African athletes, their 'limited agency' is manifested in the uncertainty and lack of clarity of future plans and the propensity to play on for much longer (Agergaard & Ryba, 2014, p. 239).

In summary, experiences of migrant athletes range from the psychosocial to the sociocultural. The former involves navigating shifting worlds of meaning, the disruption of family and romantic relationships, loneliness, and the uncertainty and insecurity of an athletic career. The sociocultural involves acquiring the capabilities for a meaningful life and career, such as learning a new language, adapting to new playing styles, diet, new attitudes and work ethic, and the experiences of othering and discrimination from team members and the wider society. Other experiences are environmental relating to variations in weather and climate which may affect psychosocial well-being and athletic performance.

2.3.3. Managing cultural transition in elite sports

The 'ruptures of meaning' brought about by the encounter of cultures and the disruptions of relationships as athletes enact transnational migration necessitate renegotiations of meanings and relationships (Ryba et al., 2016). Adaptation considerations may emerge very early in the transnational migration project. Athletes may make decisions of where to go depending on how they see the prospective destination as a cultural and career fit taking into consideration factors

like language, climate, racial attitudes and playing style (Ryba et al., 2016). Prior to migration, athletes make a lot of effort in learning about the new location, the cultural context, the club and team-mates, what type of world to expect, and also to prepare their minds (Ryba et al., 2016). To achieve this, athletes rely on various resources including formal and informal social networks such as agents, family members, friends-of-friends and other athletes (Ryba et al., 2016; Agergaard & Ungruhe, 2016; Agergaard & Ryba, 2014).

At a psychological level, athletes may ‘activate psychosocial mobility that is necessary for navigating diverse meaning systems and negotiating cultural practices’ (Ryba et al., 2016, p. 7). Psychological adjustments may be in the form of the excitement to experience something new or the downplaying of anxieties by interpreting migration as a temporary situation after which they return to their ‘normal’ existence (Ryba et al., 2016) or as an opportunity for adulthood and independence from parental and community pressure (Ryba et al., 2015).

Schinke et al. (2013) identifies cultural learning as one of the ways through which immigrant athletes acquire the competencies to fit into their new setting. This process could be shared between athletes and team-mates and coaches where both parties make an effort and support each other in learning about themselves. Team-mates could support new athletes in learning the language or about the city; coaches could adopt communication strategies that aid communication beyond the use of spoken words; and athletes may become more open to learning about their new context (Schinke et al., 2013). Sporting institutions themselves may make adjustments to accommodate cultural nuances of migrant players, such as the use of a common language, cultural learning and diversity programmes (Schinke et al., 2007; Sophia & Tamara, 2007; Duchesne et al., 2011; Ryba et al., 2016). Another source of learning for immigrant athletes is through making connections with other immigrant athletes (Schinke et al., 2013). Immigrant athletes may share

experiences of how they have dealt with their own challenges or join networks of other immigrants (e.g., player associations, friendship networks) who share similar backgrounds for both learning and for psychosocial support.

Racial othering can be a source of discrimination and negative experiences, as noted by Ungruhe, and Agergaard and Ungruhe. However, players could also adapt to such othering by instrumentally employing it to advance their careers (Ungruhe, 2013; Agergaard & Ungruhe, 2016). Stereotypes of African players as 'natural', 'strong' and 'fast' could become qualities that they utilise in enacting career mobility and negotiating better contract conditions (Ungruhe, 2013; Agergaard & Ungruhe, 2016).

To deal with homesickness and loneliness, Ryba and Stambulova (2013, p. 10) write that immigrant athletes 'keep physical, virtual and imaginary ties with their homeland, such as maintaining citizenship and membership on the national team; keeping in touch with family and friends; and following news via various modes of media'. They may also recreate the sense of belonging and atmosphere of home by re-embedding themselves into social groups similar to the ones at origin community, such as a church (Agergaard & Ryba, 2014), or by recreating their surroundings in the image of their home (Prato et al., 2021). The being 'here' and 'there' simultaneously produces a home away from home enabling athletes to concentrate on confronting the demands of their athletic career (Agergaard & Ryba, 2014).

For athletes in a relationship, spouses and partners may support this process through meaning-making where the relocation is interpreted by the wife as a 'trade-off' for the player to realise a career with a short lifespan (Roderick, 2012, p. 324). In addition, cultural norms that prioritise the man's work (Roderick, 2012; Gmelch & San Antonio, 2001) or that husbands have to be 'breadwinners' (Ryba et al., 2015, p. 52) provide a meaningful context for immigrant athletes and

their spouses in managing the disruptions arising from relocation. In some other contexts, athletes and their spouses may decide on alternative living and residence arrangements (Roderick, 2012; Onwumechili & Akpan, 2019). On relocation and the challenge of finding housing, schools and connecting to other services as healthcare, athletes may find help from support provided by their social networks (Ryba et al., 2016). Such networks are usually agents and clubs who provide athletes with a wide array of services and support (Poli, 2010; Ryba et al., 2016).

In summary, adaptation involves a set of practices that begin prior to relocation as athletes try to gain knowledge of their prospective destination and make decisions based on supposed fit. It also involves cultural learning and meaning-making as well as the renegotiation of old and new relationships, while institutions, social networks and family may provide various support to the athletes.

2.3.4. The gap in literature and the additionality of the current project

Studies on cultural transition in elite sports oftentimes consider migrant athletes as a whole without emphasis on origin and host culture contexts on transition and adaptation. My study unpacked this bunch by focusing on a group with relatively similar cultural backgrounds (elite African athletes) and within a common national culture (Germany). Few studies that have solely examined African athletes have only focused on a specific experience. For instance, Agergaard and Ungruhe (2016) focused only on their job insecurity and career precarity, while Ungruhe (2013) focused on their experience and instrumental leveraging of racial othering. My project considers African athletes' cultural transition experiences across issues and life domains.

No study has holistically examined the interaction between transition and the transnational lived world of African athletes. Acheampong (2019) and Acheampong et al. (2019) examined giveback activities of African athletes and Ungruhe and Agergaard (2020) analysed remittance and

investments in relation to post career livelihood. However, athletes' transnational engagement goes beyond giveback activities or remittances. Issues such as participation in the national team or engagement with political issues in homeland have not been considered, nor has the impact of their transnational lived world on their ongoing careers been analysed. My research made contributions to cover this gap.

Having situated the current project within the literature, in the next section, I detail the theoretical framework of my research.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Introduction

The theoretical framework provides the lens through which a phenomenon may be described, explained, predicted, or understood (Varpio et al., 2020). It shapes research inquiry by informing the assumptions about the reality under investigation and the elements of interest within a phenomenon. My study was articulated through an integration of approaches. The acculturation framework, the cultural transition framework, the human adaptation to transition model, and the integration-transnationalism interaction framework provided the analytical lens through which the central questions of this project were articulated and examined. These approaches were relevant for this study because they explain the factors and processes involved in the individual's development across cultural spaces, life stages and situations as experienced by transnational migrants such as elite African athletes in Germany. In the following sub-sections, I describe these approaches in detail and synthesize the main theoretical points as applied in this study.

3.2. The acculturation framework

The acculturation framework is a general model for understanding cross-cultural contact rather than specifically within a sports context. Nevertheless, it provides a 'skeleton into which illustrative studies could be inserted' (Berry, 1997, p. 26). It offers useful conceptual and analytical frames for understanding cultural transitions in the careers of transnational athletes whose lives are constituted and lived across cultural spaces (Ryba et al., 2018). Berry (1997; 2005) and Berry et al. (2002) examine how individuals (e.g., elite African athletes in Europe) who have been raised in a different culture from that in which they try to re-establish a new life respond to social stimuli within their new cultural setting. Berry et al. (2002) argue that behaviour is influenced by cultural

contexts of the individual's socialisation. Transiting from one culture (and sport context) to another in the process of migration comes with the need to adapt to new cultural expectations and ways of life (Berry, 1997). This is the experience of elite sports migrants working in an industry with high transnational mobility (Agergaard & Ryba, 2014). Berry (1997) examines how adaptation to cultural transition occurs in the lives of immigrants through acculturation. Citing Redfield et al., he explains acculturation as 'those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups' (Berry, 1997, p. 7). Though, the concept of acculturation embodies a neutrality that the changes which happen when cultures encounter may go both ways, nevertheless, it happens within asymmetries of power and influence (Berry, 1997, p. 8). Athletes in transition would undoubtedly have less power and would mostly need to adapt to the culture within and outside the sports context of the host society (Ryba et al., 2016).

What is common to all groups in a cross-cultural contact, Berry (1997) argues, is that they all experience a process of acculturation. This suggests that though athletes in transition may undergo most of the changes and adaptation, clubs, institutions and the wider society also undergo changes to accommodate their presence (Schinke et al., 2013; Ryba et al., 2018). For individuals in transition, variations occur in 'the course, the level of difficulty, and to some extent the eventual outcome of acculturation' (Berry, 1997, p. 9). The process of acculturation is accompanied by some 'social and psychological outcomes' (Berry, 1997, p. 12). These outcomes may be learning new behaviours - 'culture learning' - or unlearning of old ones - 'culture shedding', which could occasion 'culture conflicts' resulting from the incompatibility between old and new behaviours. Culture conflicts produce 'acculturative stress' when individuals find it difficult to learn or unlearn

behaviours (Berry, 1997, p. 13). However, when the individual finds it difficult to cope with learning new behaviours due to the magnitude and speed of change, it may lead to 'psychopathology' which manifests in mental and emotional health problems such as 'depression and incapacitating anxiety' (Berry, 1997, p. 13). For an athlete, this would mean an inability to carry out athletic obligations and a normal life.

Acculturation produces coping behaviours among individuals or groups which may lead to long-term adaptation. Berry (2005, p. 709) defines adaptation as 'the relatively stable changes that take place in an individual or group in response to external demands'. Adaptation may be immediate or long-term. Berry (1997) writes that early short-term changes may be disruptive, but on the long-term, most individuals find acculturation generally positive. Acculturation 'fit' is achieved, when both the acculturating individual and the dominant culture encourage integration and assimilation. In the sports context, it would entail a fit between the athlete, the club, and the wider society. Adaptation is of three major types – psychological, sociocultural, and economic (Berry, 1997, p. 14). Psychological adaptation relates to 'psychological and physical well-being' while sociocultural adaptation involves 'how well an acculturating individual is able to manage daily life in the new cultural context' (Berry, 2005, p. 709). Economic adaptation refers to 'the degree to which work is obtained, is satisfying and is effective in the new culture' (Berry, 1997, p. 14).

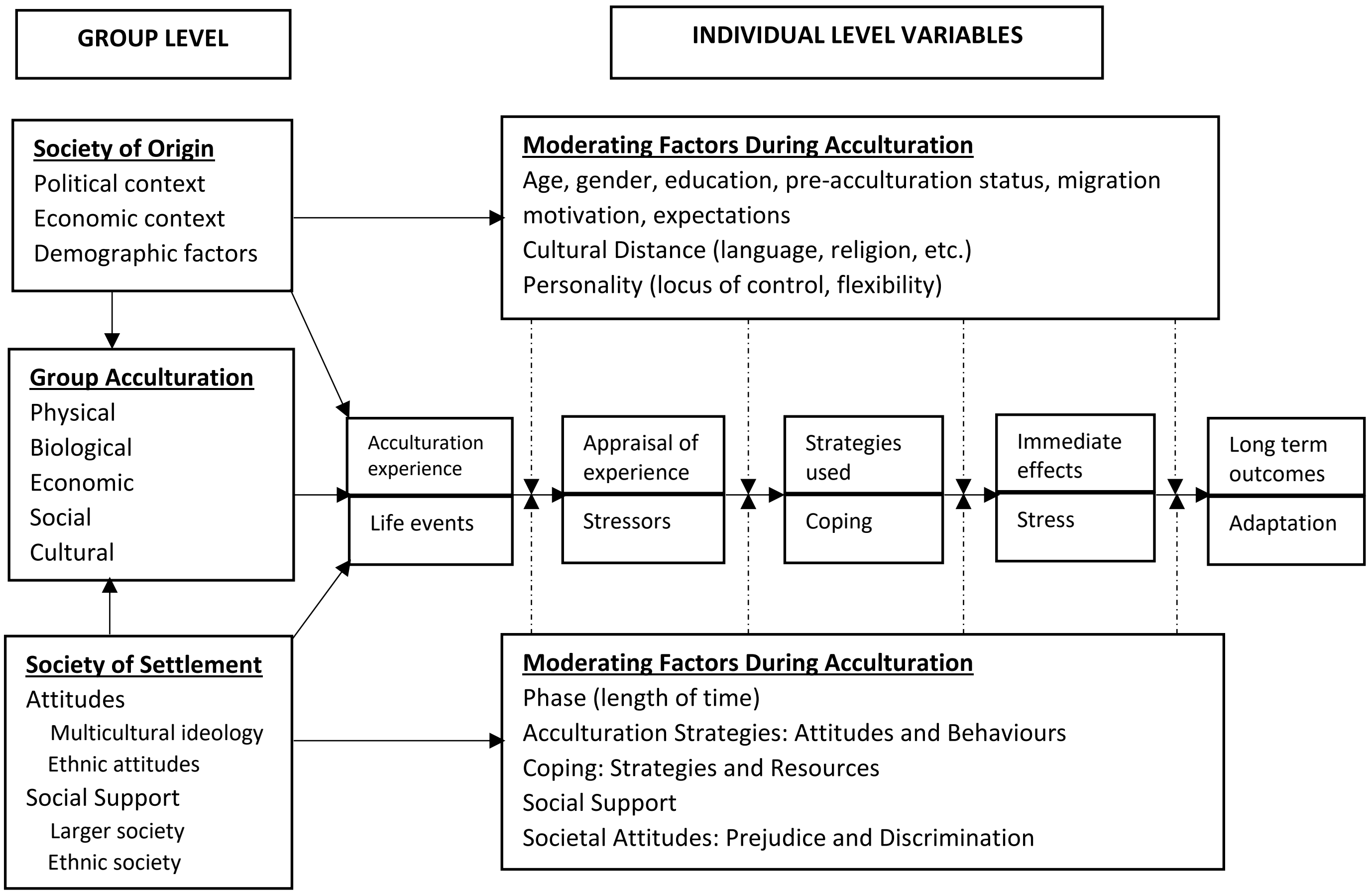
Berry (1997) develops a framework that outlines the matrix of factors that may shape the acculturation process of immigrants. The matrix includes 'situational variables' and 'personal variables' (Berry, 1997, p. 14). Situational variables are factors that reside in the society or the group (e.g., attitude towards minorities, social support within the club, language of training, type of transfer or contract, etc.). Personal variables are traits or capabilities of the acculturating athlete

(e.g., language competency, age/stage of athletic career, migration motivation, degree of identification with the athletic self, etc.).

Important in the situational factors are the ‘society of origin’ and the ‘society of settlement’ (Berry, 1997, p. 16). Origin community embodies the cultural traits that the individual carries on which determines his or her ‘cultural distance’ from the settlement community, and also a set of political, economic and demographic conditions faced by the individual prior to emigration which may determine the degree of ‘voluntariness’ (e.g., availability or lack of athletic opportunities at home) of the emigration and the ‘migration motivation’ (e.g., chance to earn a playing contract and a living) (Berry, 1997, p. 16). Society of settlement determines attitudes of the dominant group towards immigrants (e.g., presence or absence of racial discrimination) (Berry, 1997, p. 17). These personal and society factors provide a context through which athletes’ acculturation process is experienced.

The African cultures in which migrant African athletes are raised constitute different cultural contexts from the one in which they live and work in Germany. This fits well into the variations in the situational context of an origin society culture and host society culture as explained by Berry (1997). With regards to Berry’s concept of personal variables, every athlete constitutes a unique biography with respect to age/career stage, migration history and athletic formation. These parallels demonstrate the relevance and applicability of Berry’s framework to the understanding of the cultural transition of African athletes in Germany.

Figure 3.1: The Acculturation Framework



Source: Immigration, Acculturation and Adaptation (Berry, 1997, p. 15)

3.3. The cultural transition model

Similar to the acculturation framework, the cultural transition model (CTM) (Ryba et al., 2016) recognises various cultural influences that shape the experiences of transnational athletes as well as the agency of athletes in transition and adaptation. While the acculturation framework is very useful in articulating the influential factors that shape the experience of and adaptation to cultural transition, the CTM is more detailed about the process of and the temporal phases in cultural

transition. In addition, it is sports contextualized. Through life story interviews with professional elite and semi-elite athletes in various sports, their work set out to understand the 'the developmental tasks and underlying psychological mechanisms, set in motion by the cultural transition, which facilitated career adaptability' (Ryba et al., 2016, p. 5).

Ryba et al. (2016) posit that some common developmental tasks confront transnational athletes in the process of transition. Transnational mobility, they maintain, disrupts established meaning frames and sets in motion 'adaptive responses' that athletes enact in order to fit into new cultural contexts. These adaptive responses occur through an 'array of culturally patterned behaviours and discourses that, in turn, may or may not lead to a successful task resolution in a particular cultural context' (Ryba et al., 2016, p. 7). Ryba et al. developed a three-phase model of adaptive responses that occur across the cultural transition process. These phases include 'pre-transition', 'acute cultural adaptation' and 'sociocultural adaptation' (Ryba et al., 2016, p. 6). Temporally, the last two occur after relocation, but the experiences that dominate these phases are, nevertheless, hardly linear and the specific manifestations are subjectively experienced.

The pre-transition phase occurs at the time when athletes begin to consider a transnational migration (Ryba et al., 2016). It is marked by a number of concerns that trigger the first set of adaptive responses. The first is learning about the new context such as 'teams, coaches, and locale' which the athletes mobilize different 'social networks (e.g., intermediaries and friends of friends)' to fulfil (p. 7). Such knowledge, Ryba et al. (2016) write, is important for making decisions in mobilizing self for a transnational athletic career. At this stage also, athletes begin a psychosocial adjustment process necessary for a cross-cultural experience of 'navigating diverse meaning systems and negotiating cultural practices' (p. 7). The social networks that support learning about the new locale and the psychosocial adjustment prepare the athlete to handle the 'disengagement

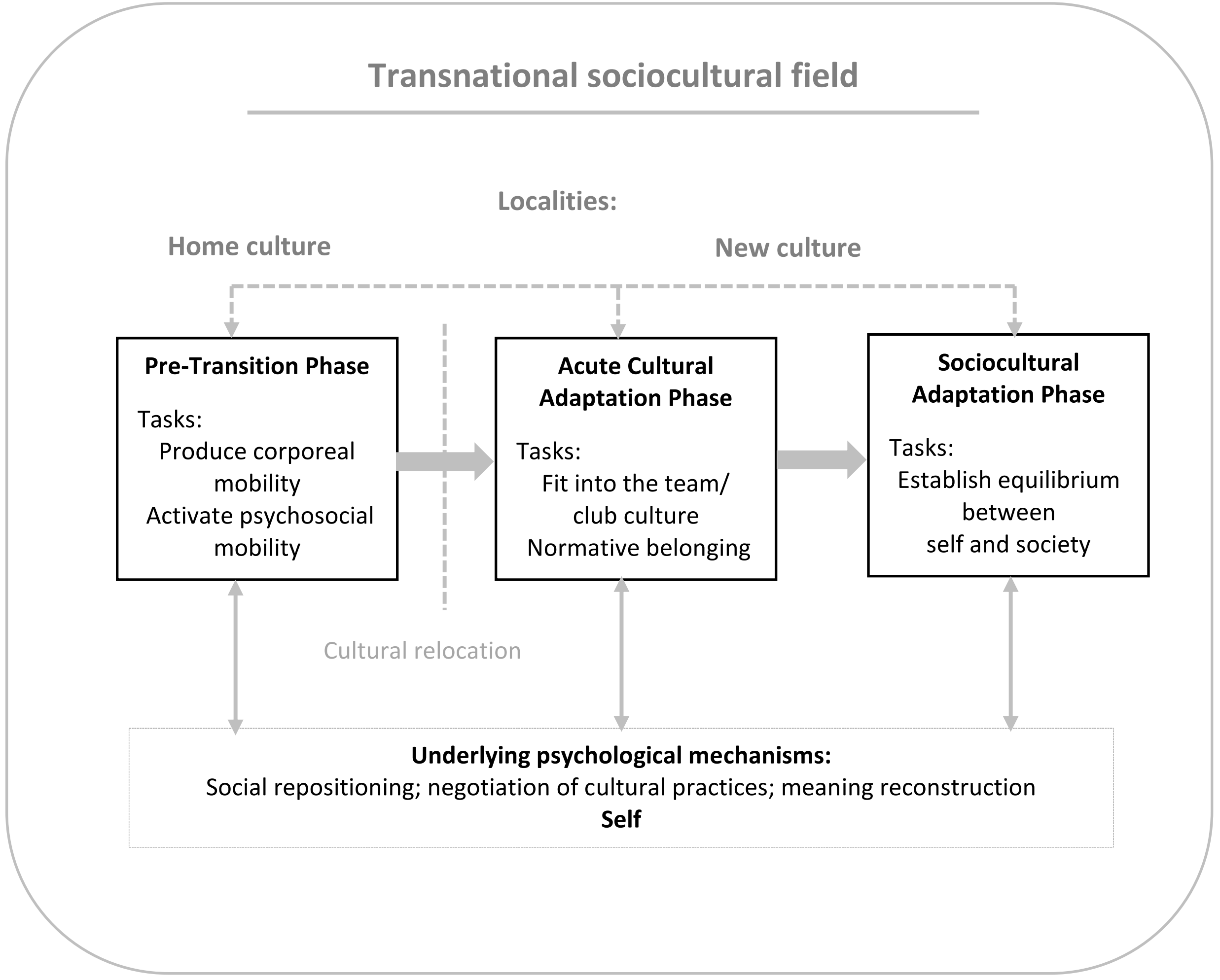
with the familiar' while developing a connection to the destination (p. 7). The most challenging experience at this stage is the disruption to family life and ties as athletes struggle with decisions about relocation (Ryba et al., 2016). The way athletes articulate and prepare for the transnational migration project during the pre-transition phase has impacts on the adaptation experience. Athletes 'poor or incorrect expectancy of the cultural differences' at destination, and 'neglecting to expand on normalized ways of being', writes Ryba et al. (2016), 'were linked to confusion, resentment, emotional disconnection, and social withdrawal at the subsequent stage' (p. 7), similar to the psychopathology articulated by Berry (1997).

The second phase is the acute cultural adaptation marked by struggles to fit into a new culture. Ryba et al. (2016, p. 8) note that 'the acuteness of this phase is lived and felt through loneliness and attempts to fit in with the cultural patterns of group life'. Relocation opens up an unfamiliar world for athletes in both work and non-work life which 'ruptures their daily life, inner meaning, and established routines' (Ryba et al., 2016, p. 8). New ways of meaning-making evolve at this stage as athletes negotiate self and belonging in a new cultural context. Failure to 'repair the mismatch between their own mode of being and social context (e.g., due to culture distance, marginalization, and exclusion)' leads to a 'feeling of the loss of self' (Ryba et al., 2016, p. 8). Acute adaptation is dominated by efforts at building connections to society and culture learning. Re-establishing belonging within social groups familiar at the origin society (e.g., a religious community) is one way that athletes try to reposition and negotiate self in the new setting. However, this is not without stress, as such groups may be quite distinct in character from the way they conduct their activities at origin society (Ryba et al., 2016). Athletes prioritise learning within the work domain, probably for survival in their nascent careers at the club (Ryba et al., 2016).

The role social networks play at this stage is crucial by 'providing logistic support' and 'acting as cultural guides' (Ryba et al., 2016, p. 9). The demand for immediate impact from athletes compels clubs to seek for a smooth and quick transition. Wealthy sports clubs provide support in the form of 'interpreters, drivers, and ethnic cooks' while 'athletes from less commercial sports relied more on personal networks, coaches and teammates' (Ryba et al., 2016, p. 9). Important in the acute adaptation phase is whether the athletes see their goals as being met within the club and how they fit into the club's culture as well as whether their psychosocial needs are met. This has impacts on their athletic performance and whether they commit to making an effort at adapting to life in their host country (Ryba et al., 2016). This phase of transition is emotionally intensive and 'may last for several months and encroach into the subsequent adaptive phase' (Ryba et al., 2016, p. 9). Failure to make 'affective and cognitive' connections and 'integrate new cultural meanings' in the new locale led to dissatisfaction with professional development and exploration of a new career course (Ryba et al., 2016, p. 9).

The third and last phase is sociocultural adaptation 'associated with the migration that has connotations of permanency or long-term stay' (Ryba et al., 2016, p. 9). Athletes who harbour the intention of such a long term stay express satisfaction with both their work environment and fit with the cultural setting in the settlement community. In this phase, athletes' adjustment to a transnational life involves multi-spatial embeddedness; a fit in the country of settlement and ties to origin community (Ryba et al., 2016). The psychosocial adjustments prepare the basis for continuous repositioning of self and career. In effect, sociocultural adaptation 'is a psychological repairing of the cultural rupture of daily life that results in a more expansive and fluid psychological self-system (Ryba et al., 2016, p. 10).

Figure 3.2: The cultural transition model



Source: The Work of Cultural Transition: An Emerging Model (Ryba et al., 2016, p. 6)

3.4. The human adaptation to transition model

The human adaptation to transition model (Schlossberg, 1981; 1984) provides a general framework for understanding transitions in the lives of individuals such as relocation, parenthood, retirement, ageing, illness, widowhood, etc. It is concerned with the different ways that individuals react and adapt to transition and the various factors that influence these differences in experience across individuals and across a life course (Schlossberg, 1981). Though a general rather than a sport-

specific framework, it has been used to explain various types of transitions in the context of sports and physical activity ranging from transition from junior-to-senior competition, critical events like injury or change in health status, retirement and cultural transitions. Schlossberg (1981, p. 3) writes that the model 'provides a context within which such questions may be examined and perhaps answered'. Transnational migration in the pursuit of a career represents such a transitional context of cultural differences, both on and off the pitch, for migrant athletes.

Schlossberg (1981, p. 5) explains that a transition happens 'when an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behaviour and relationships'. A change in one's life alone does not constitute a transition, but the altered self-identities and behaviours as a result of the change (Schlossberg, 1981). Individuals are in a constant process of change and transition across different domains of life. Transition may bring about negative or positive outcomes, or both for the same individual (Schlossberg, 1981). For instance, an athlete who transfers from a club in one country to another may experience an increase in income while at the same time dealing with the absence of family and friends. Individuals, however, react and adapt differently to changes occasioned by transitions, and the same person may differ in response to the same change at different times of the life course (Schlossberg, 1981). As individuals pass through various stages of life and changing situations, they try to adapt to the new realities of their changing life world (Schlossberg, 1981).

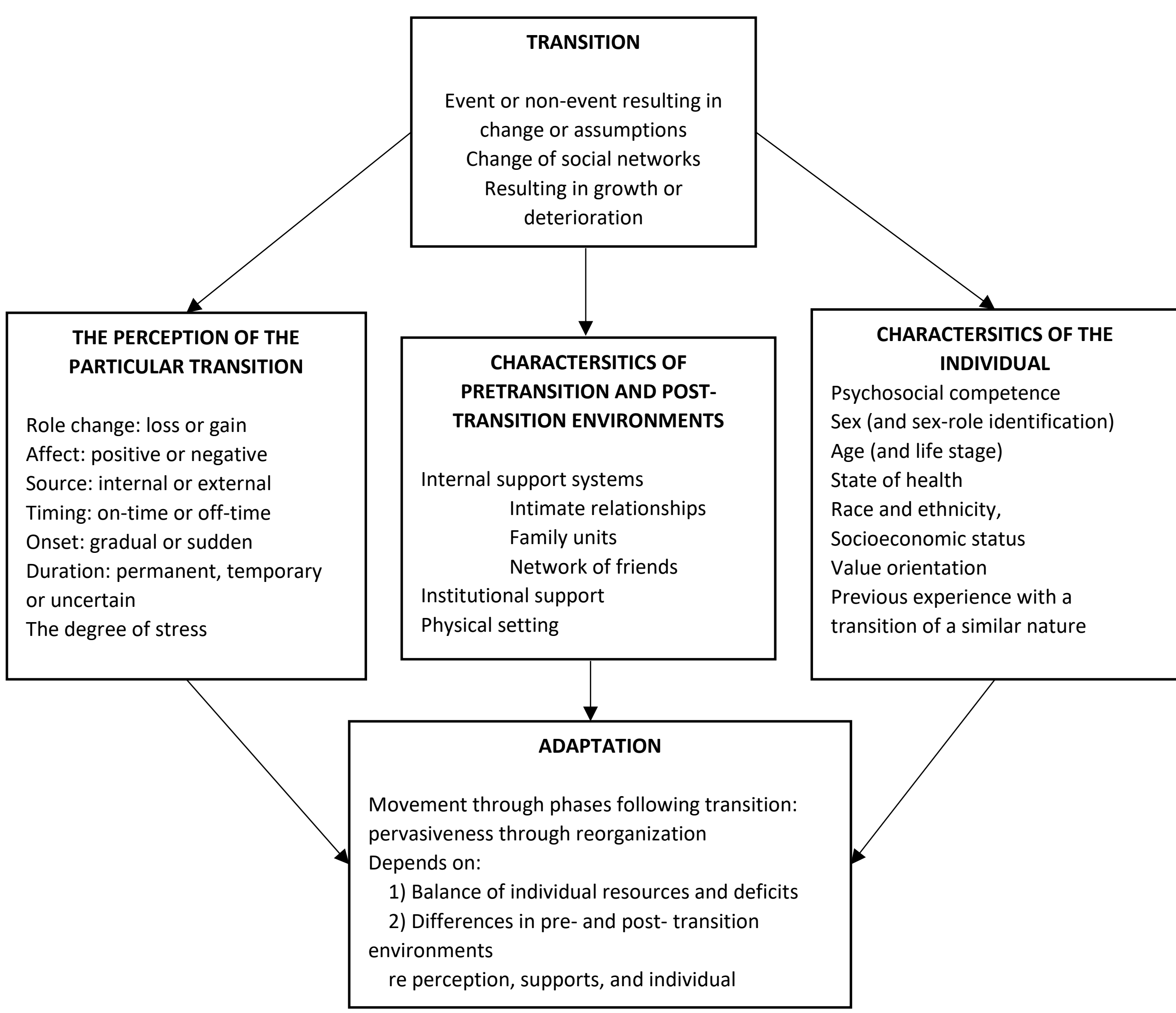
Schlossberg (1981, p. 7) describes adaptation as 'a process during which an individual moves from being totally preoccupied with the transition to integrating the transition into his or her life'. Adaptation may involve changing the perception of self (e.g., a change of athletic identity from an amateur athlete to a professional with higher athletic demands), developing new relationships (e.g., making friends with teammates) or behaving differently (e.g., increased work at the gymnasium)

(Schlossberg, 1981). The way individuals react to transition and experience adaptation may be dependent on three factors including the situation, the environment, and the person (Schlossberg, 1981). Situation factors refer to 'the characteristics of a particular transition' which may depend on whether it involves a role change (loss or gain), the affect (positive or negative), the source (internal or external), the timing (on-time or off-time), the onset (gradual or sudden), the duration (permanent, temporary or uncertain) and the degree of stress (Schlossberg, 1981, pp. 8-10). The environment refers to 'the characteristics of the pre and post-transition environments' and is made up of interpersonal support systems (e.g., family and friends), institutional support (e.g., work place support, social welfare religious and community support groups) and the physical setting (e.g., climate and weather, settlement type and workplace) (Schlossberg, 1981, pp. 10-12). The person refers to 'the characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition' (Schlossberg, 1981, pp. 12). These have a reasonable degree of influence on individual agency such as the level of psychosocial competence, sex or sex role identification, age and life stage, state of health, race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, value orientation, and previous experience with a similar transition (Schlossberg, 1981, pp. 12-15).

These three factors which 'may show considerable differences across the population of athletes' (Lavallee, 2000, p. 10) constitute resources whose 'perceived and or actual balance or deficits' determine the ease and process of adaptation to transition (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 7). Furthermore, the degree of similarity or difference between pre and post transition environments is important in how individuals adapt to transition, and the closer they are, the more the ease of adaptation (Schlossberg, 1981). However, this 'is significant insofar as the difference affects the individual's assumptions about self and the world, and consequently, the individual's relationships in family, work and community' (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 8). To cope with and adapt to transition, individuals

may adopt any of the three strategies or coping responses that either modify the situation, that control the meaning and interpretation of the situation, or that help in managing the stress resulting from the situation (Schlossberg, 2008, p. 78).

Figure 3.3: The human adaptation to transition model



Source: A model for analysing human adaptation to transition (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5)

3.5. The integration-transnationalism interaction framework

Transnational athletes construct their lives across a 'broad range of social, cultural, and political contexts' that span across national borders (Ryba et al., 2018, p. 521). The integration-transnationalism interaction framework provides 'a tool to enable migration scholars to move beyond simply acknowledging the co-existence of transnationalism and integration and towards an analysis of the nature of interactions between the two' (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013, p. 867). Though the transnationalism-integration interaction framework is not specifically developed for sports contexts, it is relevant to the study of all groups of immigrants whose lives span across national boundaries including elite migrant athletes.

Erdal and Oeppen (2013) explore whether and how migrant transnationalism interacts with integration. They argue that transnationalism and integration are not mutually exclusive phenomena but interact as 'the balancing acts of migrants who can access opportunities - but who may also have responsibilities in two or more societies' (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013, p. 868). Through transnationalism, immigrants are able to continue 'existing pre-migration relations to people and places which are now separated from the migrant by great distances' while at the same time building new lives in their hosts societies. (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013, p. 868). Elite migrant footballers have been demonstrated to create a sustained sense of 'home' both in material (Prato et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2020) and relational ways (Ryba et al., 2016) while simultaneously cultivating new lives at their places of career.

In examining the interaction between integration and transnationalism, Erdal and Oeppen note that 'the activities of actors with agency are the object' of their analysis (2013, p. 877). Transnational migrant athletes represent 'agentic individuals' (Ryba et al., 2015, p. 48) who make decisions on the nature of their belonging across the social fields to which they are connected. Erdal and Oeppen

contend that most analyses of the interactions between integration and transnationalism give little consideration to the human nature of the interactions due to structure-focused frameworks. A structure-focused approach forces upon the interaction, a dichotomy of integration or not, which scarcely explains the complex relationship between the two processes. The interaction, they write, can best be described as '"migrants" balancing acts - as migrants straddle societies of settlement and origin, living their everyday lives locally, but also connected within a transnational social field' (2013, p. 877). This balancing act occurs within structures that present both opportunities and constraints to the nature of participation and belonging.

Erdal and Oeppen's typology 'takes spheres of migrants' lives relevant to overall social processes as its starting point, and disaggregates both integration and transnationalism into structural and sociocultural aspects' (2013, p. 879). The typologies show the nature of belonging that is produced in the interaction between the two processes. The framework identifies three possibilities in the interaction across the two aspects: additive, synergistic, and antagonistic. In an additive interaction, 'the result of the interaction is the sum of the two parts'; in a synergistic interaction, 'the result is greater than the sum of the two parts'; and in an antagonistic interaction, 'the result is less than the sum of the two parts, or one part even cancels out the other' (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013, p. 878). The details of the typologies of outcomes are presented in Figure 3.4 below. The possibilities within the sociocultural and structural aspects present an interesting framework for understanding athletes' balancing act in transition along the competing demands of career, life adjustments and transnational commitments.

Evidence from a number of studies on transnational athletes supports the typology of interactions exhibited within the framework, demonstrating that it could be used for understanding the interaction between host country belonging and the transnational lived world of migrant athletes.

For instance, Acheampong (2019) and Acheampong et al. (2019) showed how African athletes in Europe through 'giveback behaviour' use their income to support family and community and also invest in commercial activities in their home countries. This fits with the typology of synergistic interaction at the structural level.

Figure 3.4: The integration-transnationalism interaction framework

Typology of interactions between integration and transnationalism

	Type of interaction		
	Additive	Synergistic	Antagonistic
Socio-cultural integration and transnationalism	Feeling of belonging and socio-cultural connections in country of origin and of settlement	Feeling of belonging and connections in one place give confidence to further develop connections in other	Feeling of belonging and socio-cultural connections in one place displace feelings of belonging in other
Structural integration and transnationalism	Economically active in country of origin and of settlement (Dual) citizenship regularised mobility	Resources gained in one place are invested to develop further resources in the other	Demand for resources in one place limits ability to meet demands in other

Source: Migrant balancing acts (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013, p. 878)

3.6. Summary of the theoretical framework

In summary, the main theoretical underpinnings that shaped this study are integrated from the various frameworks as follows:

- The athlete is constituted within a cultural space (athletic and non-sport) and a web of life experiences which in turn shape his or her self-concept and perception of reality and interaction with the social and material world of his/her athletic work and life.
- An athlete's relocation to another cultural space and sports context or the emergence of new forms of life experiences disbalances the equilibrium of an established life schema rendering established frames of being and behaving unfit or insufficient for normal functioning within work and other life domains.
- The altered life balance from relocation requires the athlete to develop a new way of being and behaving (on and off the pitch) in order to return to normal functioning or adapt to the altered life world within the sporting and non-sporting spheres of life.
- The reconstitution of self to re-establish a new life balance is mediated by the athlete's past cultural socialisation, athletic formation, life experiences, personal characteristics and resources, the peculiarities of the changed life world, and the social support available in transition.
- A new life balance involves an integrated social field of belonging across multiple localities and social spaces where athletes balance sporting and non-sporting demands that may emanate from career location and other localities to which his/her life is connected.

The foregoing explains the various approaches that contributed to an integrated theoretical framework. The synthesized theoretical points above shaped the conceptualization of the project. In the next chapter, I deliberate on the methodological approaches and issues that guided the study.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I explain the ontology and epistemology of knowledge that underpin my research. Following that, the research design is explained and then, I define the study population. I also clarify my role in the production of knowledge as well as the measures taken to guarantee research ethics.

4.2. The ontological and epistemological approach of my research

Hiller (2016, p. 100) notes that ‘beliefs about what can be known (ontology) and how to approach coming to know it (epistemology)’ influence the decisions that a researcher makes about the appropriate research design to use in a given study. Smith and McGannon (2018, p. 104) write that in sports research, epistemology and ontology are necessary because ‘all methods are informed, either knowingly or unknowingly, by an epistemology’.

Ontology refers to the nature of reality; what is, its forms and categories. Ontology could be realist or idealist. A realist ontology contends that reality exists outside of the consciousness of the individual and that nature is ruled by fixed and independent laws (Hiller, 2016). In this sense, things exist and remain true to their nature independent of the mind, and could be discovered as they are if their natural guiding laws could be established. On the other hand, idealist ontology maintains that reality is constructed in the mind of the individual and exists in multiple forms and interpretations (Hiller, 2016). Idealism emphasizes the variability of reality and that nothing truly is except for the mind’s construct. In other words, individuals make reality.

Epistemology is the theory of how what is (reality) can be known, the sources and the limits of such knowledge (Hiller, 2016). Curtis and Curtis (2011) identify three epistemological approaches namely, positivism, social realism, and social constructivism. Positivism is rooted in the realist ontological tradition of reality as existing independent of the mind. It holds that true knowledge is objective and that reality can be observed, measured and categorised using empirical methods. Social realism accepts 'an external and measurable social reality, but one that exists through the mediation of our perceptions of it and our actions' (Curtis & Curtis, 2011). To gain knowledge of reality would, therefore, entail an understanding of both the objective realities that structure experience and the subjective perceptions of individuals that communicate such reality. On the other hand, social constructivism is ontologically idealist. It holds that 'individuals or actors actively create the social world and all potential measures of that social world' (Curtis & Curtis, 2011). Social constructivists believe that reality can be known by deconstructing the meanings that individuals attach to their actions through their subjectively rendered accounts of their experiences.

My research recognises the influences of the structures of experience as well as the agentic reflexivity of athletes in the construction of reality. It acknowledges 'the relationship between subjectivity and wider social relationships' and emphasises the 'socially embedded nature of creative practice' (Farrugia, 2013, pp. 290, 292). Athletes are individual's with agency, albeit expressed reflexively within sports and non-sports social structures of work and life (Ryba et al., 2015). While I approached the athletes' narratives as a social construction of reality, I do not take such as autonomously enacted subjectivities outside the contexts of their life history and the social world. Thus, I went beyond merely describing athletes' subjective interpretations of their actions to situating such rendered experiences within the social contexts of their lived world, in time and in space. I also recognised my own epistemic reflexivity - 'the social relation between the subject

or author and the knowledge claim' (Maton, 2003, p. 57) - as a researcher with subjective experiences that impinge on the reconstruction of the athletes' narrated experience. In effect, I explored the athletes' construction of their realities, placing their narrated world simultaneously beside the social contexts in which their athletic careers and lives have been constituted while reflexively interpreting and generating meaningful knowledge constructs.

4.3. The research design

This study adopted a qualitative research design. Qualitative research is a type of inquiry 'aimed at discovering how human beings understand, experience, interpret, and produce the social world' (Sandelowski, 2004, p. 893). It is primarily 'non-numeric' and oriented towards 'understanding the meaning of human action' (Jackson II et al., 2007, p. 24). The qualitative research approach is suitable for studies that adopt a relativist ontology and a social constructionist epistemological stance (Slevitch, 2001) given that it is interested in the world of meanings and social action. Cultural transition in sports have mostly been studied through qualitative approaches (e.g., Schinke et al., 2013; Ryba et al., 2016) because transition is a subjectively experienced phenomenon and they offer sports researchers the opportunity to investigate processes, meanings and interpretations that underlie athletes' narratives.

Slevitch (2001, p. 78) notes that qualitative research 'does not pursue objectivity and generalizability, because both conditions are viewed as unachievable from ontological and epistemological perspectives'. Rather, qualitative research is committed to 'examining people's lives in rich detail' (Smith, 2018, p. 138) and providing a depth of description and reflexively interpreting meanings underlying individual and group action (Polit & Beck, 2010). Therefore, generalisability in qualitative research may be approached differently through 'transferability' i.e. 'the extent to which readers can use/transfer described experiences of the phenomenon to their

settings based on the depth and vividness of the descriptions' (Slevitch, 2001, p. 78). This is most profound for subjectively experienced realities such as cultural transitions in sports. The athletic career is a qualitatively experienced phenomenon and shaped by subjectively constituted biographical and social contexts. As such, while athletes' experiences may be transferable, they also tell a personal story.

Schinke et al. (2016, p. 42) advised that investigations of transnational athletes' acculturation experiences should '(a) be positioned in research methodologies that open a space for the richness of athletes' experiences, and (b) show how they are storied and unpacked'. Qualitative research approaches that have been used in sports research include ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, life history and narrative, which employ a number of data collection methods including interviews, observation, visual methods, focus group discussions, media, vignettes, internet and virtual or digital ethnography (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). This dissertation adopted the life history and ethnographic approaches using two data collection methods: semi-structured interviews and digital ethnography.

Articles 1, 2 and 3 used the interview method in accessing the narratives of the participant athletes. In-depth interviews are very suitable for studies that strive to gain a deep understanding of the lived experience of respondents (McGrath et al., 2019; Dworkin, 2012). Researchers studying cultural transition in sports have widely used interviews to explore participants narratives (e.g., Agergaard & Botelho, 2014; Schinke et al., 2016). It enables the researcher to 'delve deeply into social and personal matters' (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 315). The process of in-depth interviews is 'meant to be a personal and intimate encounter in which open, direct, verbal questions are used to elicit detailed narratives and stories' (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 317). The direct involvement of the interviewer should be taken into account, reflecting on 'the ways that

their involvement changes and acts on the data that they acquire' (Bolderston, 2012, p. 67). The researcher, therefore, plays an important role in the understanding and interpretation of meanings and reality.

Article 4 combined the use of the interview technique with digital ethnography. Ethnography, notes Murthy (2008, p. 838), 'effectively communicates a social story, drawing the audience into the daily lives of the respondents'. Digital ethnography involves the use of online platforms and technologies to enter into, observe and gather data on the daily lives of research subjects. Sports researchers increasingly use digital ethnography to collect data on athletes and their activities (e.g., Smith, 2021; Calow, 2021). Social media platforms, Twitter and Instagram, were used to generate data on some aspects of the participants' experiences. This enabled access to certain domains of the athletes' lived world that would have been incompletely rendered through interviews alone.

4.4. The research population

The study specifically focused on football athletes from sub-Saharan African countries. The research population involved two groups of athletes. The first cohort were youth athletes in Africa aspiring to a professional career. They were included to serve as a retrospective way of understanding the context of African athletes' career imagination prior to migration. Research Article 1 was based on this group of athletes.

The second cohort were professional African athletes who plied their careers in Germany. Articles 2, 3 and 4 were based on this group of athletes. For a player to be included in the second cohort and be eligible for selection, the following criteria were applied:

- Hold the nationality of a sub-Saharan African country.

- Be registered with a club in any of the two professional tiers of the German football league (Bundesliga and Bundesliga 2).
- Be raised in a sub-Saharan African country: must have spent the early years of life and formative years of football career in a sub-Saharan African country. Specifically, would have lived in a sub-Saharan African country up until the 16th year of birthday.
- Does not currently represent a national team (youth or senior) of a football association of a country other than one in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Must have, at the least, played in one of the two professional tiers above for a football season.

The above criteria were very important in ensuring that every respondent had the required attributes and lived experience necessary for observing the cultural transition and adaptation that my research investigated.

4.5. My positionality in the research process

Hiller (2016, p. 100) maintains that each epistemology has its own assumptions 'regarding the nature of the relationship between a researcher and the subject(s) of research' as well as with the object of knowledge. The position of the researcher varies in qualitative and quantitative research. Whereas in quantitative research, the investigator assumes an impersonal position with the research subjects while seeking for objectively measured patterns of behaviour, in qualitative research, the investigator rather maintains a closeness with the research subjects in order to uncover deeper meanings underlying phenomena (Reinhoffer, 2002; Neuman, 2014). Such proximity entails that the researcher 'takes over the points of view of the interview partners and looking at the world through their eyes' (Reinhoffer, 2002, p. 124). Living in the world of the research subjects affords the researcher the opportunity to connect with their beliefs,

circumstances, struggles and aspirations and make linkages between these and their narrated experience.

This insider position is useful in cultural transition research where an understanding of the cultural and social influences, both past and present, is important in explaining the lived experience of transnational sports athletes. Rosenthal (2004) pointed out how her knowledge of the biographical background of her target population helped in the reconstruction of the experience of her respondents. Insider insight could either be gained by immersing oneself within the world of the researched or through one's belonging and experience. While I am not an athlete, I am African; born and raised in an African culture. I am an insider with rich experience of African societies and African football and have interacted a lot with aspiring youth footballers in local academies and clubs. This experience placed me in a very informed position.

Despite my proximity to the subjects of my research - as someone who shares their African cultural experience - my role largely remained 'to collect data, to organize it, to work on it and to present interpretations' (Reinhoffer, 2002, p. 125). My proximity was important, only in so far as it enhanced my ability to achieve this primary objective. As Neuman (2014, p. 170) notes, 'an intimate understanding of a setting does not mean that we can arbitrarily interject personal opinion, be sloppy about data collection, or use evidence selectively to support our prejudices'. The closeness with the subject is however, useful if 'we take maximum advantage of personal insight, inner feelings, and life perspective to understand social life' (p. 170). My position was advantageous in many ways. Firstly, it helped me gain access to the research respondents. Secondly, my proximity placed me in a position of trust arising from being 'one of us'. This created a sense of relaxation with the athletes and enabled them to open-up to someone they considered a 'brother'. Thirdly, as someone from sub-Saharan Africa and who has lived in the UK and

Germany, I am conversant with some of the cultural experiences and subjectivities of living as an African immigrant in a western European context. This was very valuable in drawing meaningful parallels and connections between patterns of experiences.

4.6. Research Ethics

Qualitative research demands standards of ethical compliance (Lichtman, 2014; Flick, 2009). My study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen (Reference number: A2.5.4-158_ns). Due diligence was applied throughout the fieldwork and in handling generated data following common standards of ethical research practice in the social sciences. The transcripts of the interviews are stored on the Research Data Management Organiser (RDMO) of the University of Tübingen and interested persons may get the whole interviews from me.

5 RESEARCH PAPERS

5.1. list of articles

Ikechukwu Ejekwumadu (2021) Social structure and the imagined mobility of youth football athletes in Dakar. *European Journal for Sport and Society*. (Published online first article). https://doi.org/10.1080/16138171.2021.2001174

Ikechukwu Ejekwumadu (manuscript) 'Just another world': Cultural transitions in elite sports. A study of African footballers in Germany. Manuscript submitted to *European Journal for Sport and Society*.

Ikechukwu Ejekwumadu & Ansgar Thiel (manuscript) 'I get used to it, I train through it, even though there are some days you cry through it': Coping behaviours and social support of elite African footballers in transnational transition. Manuscript submitted to *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*.

Ikechukwu Ejekwumadu (manuscript) 'As an African boy, you know the struggle back there': Transnational commitments of elite African footballers in an ongoing and negotiated career. Manuscript submitted to *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*.

5.2. Article 1: Social structure and the imagined mobility of youth football athletes in Dakar

Ikechukwu Ejekwumadu (2021) Social structure and the imagined mobility of youth football athletes in Dakar. *European Journal for Sport and Society*.
https://doi.org/10.1080/16138171.2021.2001174

[Author has the right to include the article in a thesis or dissertation that is not to be published commercially provided that acknowledgement to prior publication in the journal is given]

Based on interviews with aspiring youth footballers in small football training centres in the Dakar region of Senegal, this paper explored the socio-structural context of becoming and the imaginations of mobility through football migration among youth athletes in Africa. Senegal is a football talent powerhouse and in the top five of origin countries in Africa for transnational footballers. It provides a good case study for the understanding of the imaginations of a football career and migration motivations of African youth. The paper reveals how socio-structural factors of class and limited mobility inform the imagination of a career through football, the decisions to invest self in athletic pursuit and the search for a path to Europe. The structural context of becoming and the athletes’ expression of agency are factors that contribute to the experience of and adaptation to cultural transition in Europe.

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Social structure and the imagined mobility of youth football athletes in Dakar

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Social structure and the imagined mobility of youth football athletes in Dakar

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ABSTRACT
Across Dakar are many small football training centres where youth prospects start what could grow into professional careers. At these centres, imaginations of career and social mobility develop. In this paper, I explore the mobility imaginations of the youth athletes. I argue that the imaginations are shaped by existing social and class structures, and that the imaginations among the athletes from poor and working-class backgrounds are predominantly unidimensional. Such imaginations that construct mobility exclusively along a career in football produce barriers to the social mobility that the athletes strive for, thereby, reinforcing the structures of social immobility.

KEYWORDS
African football migration; imagined mobility; social mobility; social immobility; unidimensional imagination of mobility

1. Introduction

Football is a very popular sport in Dakar attracting significant interest and large populations of supporters (Hann, 2017). From a very young age, many youths get involved in football playing recreationally or they join small training centres in their neighbourhoods. All across Dakar are many of such training centres where youths as young as 10 are admitted to the start of what could possibly grow into professional careers. Many of them develop professional ambitions quite early drawing inspiration from the success of Senegalese internationals such as Liverpool's Sadio Mane and Paris Saint-Germain's Idrissa Gueye who have become global superstars while starting from humble backgrounds (Eastaugh, 2016). The success of these 'icons' from backgrounds similar to those of the youth athletes is a source of mobility imaginations that they could themselves follow in their footsteps and migrate to the professional football leagues outside of their home country (Poli, 2006a) where they also perceive limited opportunities for self-advancement. For these reasons, Darby (2012, p. 268) writes that among many African football talents, there is 'a strong sense that their futures lie outside the country.'

Thus, the migratory quest of football talent has spurred academic interest in football migration in Africa. Researchers have examined different aspects of the phenomenon exploring the structural pull and push factors (Agergaard & Botelho, 2014; Darby, 2000, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c; Poli, 2006a, 2006b); the impact on development of football

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and society in Africa (Acheampong, 2019; Acheampong et al., 2019; Darby, 2012; Darby et al., 2007; Poli, 2006a); the agency of the migrant athletes in the construction and realisation of a migration project (Darby & Van der Meij, 2018; Esson, 2013, 2015a, 2015b; Ungruhe, 2016; Ungruhe & Esson, 2017; van der Meij & Darby, 2017); and the experiences of migrant African athletes at destination countries (Büdel, 2013; Scott, 2015; Ungruhe, 2014; Ungruhe & Agergaard, 2020).

Structural factors influencing the migration of African athletes have been explained as the expansion of globalisation and neo-colonial economic relations between the North and the South and the lack of opportunity for social mobility within African countries (Agergaard & Botelho, 2014; Darby, 2000, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c; Poli, 2006a, 2006b). Darby (2000) conceives the phenomenon as a replication of the commodity trade between the core and the periphery of the global economy. Following that thought, Poli (2006b) posits that European clubs' quest to lower recruitment costs and increase profits through the trade of players is the key driver in the spike of the import of African players. Darby (2007a) argues that weak economic conditions at home, and the high wages on offer at European clubs, are major reasons for the migration of African players. Agergaard and Botelho (2014) see the motivation to migrate as part of overcoming the lack of opportunities occasioned by weak economy and lack of social mobility opportunities. They contend that 'African players often have several motives, which together seem to support their dreams of social mobility – that is, being given the opportunity to enhance both their economic and social status' (p. 523).

African football migration has been mainly towards the Western European football leagues such as England, France, Germany, Spain, Italy and Portugal (Darby, 2007c; Poli, 2006a) and more recently South Asia and South-East Asia (Abe, 2018; Akindes, 2013; Poli, 2010). On the geographies of migration, Poli (2006a) illustrates that though African players increasingly move to diverse locations, the flow largely reflects colonial legacies and ties with Europe. Such ties are further consolidated through 'mediated images of top-level European leagues' (Darby, 2012, p. 268). The projection of African football superstars in the media, Poli (2006a) expands, has 'contributed to the increase in African youth of the desire to succeed through emigration' (p. 409). Such media projections, Poli argues, create an unrealistic belief that football holds so much opportunity for deprived youths to achieve mobility: 'By only showing a few career paths of successful players, they contribute to a partial image of reality and thus function as a deforming prism' (Poli, 2006a, p. 407).

Ungruhe and Esson (2017) maintain that the involvement of young West African males in football migration projects represents a 'social negotiation of hope' and an attempt to overcome 'social immobility.' Such negotiation of hope, Esson (2013) argues, explains why Ghanaian youths dispense with their education to take up football as a way of navigating around an economy where schooling no longer guarantees employment. Thus, the structural constraints within the athletes' home countries, the opportunities presented by a global football economy, and the desire of the athletes to achieve social mobility interreact in the production of the migration phenomenon. The athletes, therefore, imagine mobility through football, and 'associate spatial mobility with social mobility' (Esson, 2015a, p. 514).

Previous studies have articulated the structural dynamics, the geographies of football migration, and the agency of the football migrants in enacting the migration experience. However, attention on the impact on the origin countries has mostly focussed on the negative effects on talent 'brain drain' (Darby, 2012; Darby et al., 2007) or, in more positive ways, on remittances and social responsibility initiatives of African athletes in their home countries (Acheampong, 2019; Acheampong et al., 2019). So far, attention on the impacts migratory imaginations have on the aspiring youth athletes with respect to their preparation for adult and independent life remains insufficient. Marginal discussions in Poli (2006a) of the local impacts of media representations of the 'iconic player' on perceptions of football as a feasible mobility strategy, and Esson's (2013) work on how Ghanaian youths drop out of school to navigate uncertainties in employment through a football migration project, are exceptions. More closely, Ungruhe and Esson (2017) point out the contradictions of the mobility imaginations of aspiring football athletes noting that 'it is an attempt that does not help to overcome social immobility for most young men in West Africa today' (p. 38) while Agergaard and Ungruhe (2016) point out the precarious future that faces majority of the athletes. Though Poli (2006a), Esson (2013), Ungruhe and Esson (2017) and Agergaard and Ungruhe (2016) to some degree show why the imagination of mobility through football is unrealistic for the many, they have not exhausted explanations of how such ways of imagining portend broader limitations to future livelihood for aspiring African football migrants.

Senegal is a major origin country for expatriate players ranking 17th globally and fourth in Africa with 211 professionals among 145 football leagues surveyed in 2021 (Poli et al., 2021). This paper, therefore, explores youth athletes in small training centres in Dakar, Senegal and their mobility imagination through football. The objective is to show: (a) How the imaginations are shaped by and vary across class backgrounds; and (b) how the mobility imaginations that emerge within poor and working-class backgrounds produce current actions that may lead to future social immobility or might undermine future livelihood for the athletes.

Theoretically framing mobility as an imagined construct within social and class structures, and one that conditions behaviour in certain ways (Baas, 2010; Chambers, 2018; Koikkalainen & Kyle, 2016; Pine, 2014), I examine how the youth athletes in small training centres in Dakar map out their mobility projects through an imagined football career. I argue that for a group of the athletes from poor and working-class backgrounds, the imaginations of mobility produce a certain social contradiction where the vision of mobility may constrain its achievement. The main contribution is to show that the imaginations of mobility among the athletes from poor and working-class backgrounds, may be constraining because of the unidimensional path that it produces at a very critical stage of the individual's development.

2. Theoretical framing and deliberations

2.1. Mobility as an imagination

Mobility as an imagination is a developing concept that explores subjective aspects of the development and enactment of the migration experience within institutional and social structures. Baas (2010) has used 'imagined mobility' to capture migrants' motivations for

transnational mobility. Pine (2014) refers to an 'imagined future' to describe migrants' hopes of improving the lives of their families at their origin communities from their present life of struggle at their destination. Koikkalainen and Kyle (2016) employ 'cognitive migration' to study how the process of imagining oneself living in a foreign land before physically moving influences the decision to and process of migration. Chambers (2018) explores the role of 'imagination' in shaping subjective experiences of migrants. The idea conceptualised by imagined mobility is reflected in football migration studies that focus on the agency of the athletes. For instance, Ungruhe and Esson (2017, p. 38) used the phrase 'imagined football mobility' to capture hopes of Ghanaian youth athletes of achieving 'social becoming' through football. However, the concept is yet to be fully operationalised as a theoretical frame in football or sports migration research. I will focus on how Baas has used this concept because it is theoretically detailed and more closely captures how I employ it in this paper to describe athletes' abstract construction of their aspiration, but one which mediates lived actions and experience.

Though Baas (2010) employs the concept in migrant research in the field of education, his conceptualisation of imagined mobility is similar to how aspiring African sports migrants construct their mobility project. Baas' (2010) study of Indian overseas students who came to Australia for degree programmes and their motivations is similar to the way African youth athletes instrumentally construct their mobility projects through football and provides a suitable analytical frame for this paper. Imagined mobility, as conceived by Baas (2013) 'is about the way young migrants imagine themselves being transnationally mobile one day.' Indian students who came to Australia, Baas found out, were largely motivated by the ambition of gaining permanent residency which would enable them to bypass the limitations placed on cross-border travels by an arduous visa process. Australia's residency permit regulations at the time, made it very possible for students to attain permanent status after studies if they met certain achievable conditions.

Baas (2010) argues that the permanent residency, which Indian students seek through studies, is mainly to achieve their ambitions of transnational mobility and not just to relocate to a new country. He writes that 'an Indian passport is often experienced as a limiting factor in this, as crossing borders often involves going through lengthy visa procedures' (Baas, 2013). Thus, an Australian permanent residency is a means to a transnational status enabling the migrants to freely move across borders for different forms of social and economic engagement. Mobility in this case, is 'imagined' as a journey towards actualising a transnational right of movement free from the cumbersome visa process that Indians who wished to travel internationally normally passed through (Baas, 2013).

Baas narrates that the demand for transnational mobility is associated with the increasing purchasing power of the Indian middle class and appeal of middle class lifestyle. Besides, within India, the ubiquity of tales and presence of the 'abroad' creates a popular desire to experience it. In effect, 'crossing borders has become much more tied up with certain expectations of desired lifestyles' (Baas, 2013). While the purchasing power has increased, the limits placed by an Indian passport has, however, remained. 'Yet while Indian money may now buy a ticket out of India, an Indian passport still does not guarantee an easy passage across the border' (Baas, 2013).

A permanent residency, is therefore, imagined as a means to achieve regular and unhindered passage.

A concept which is important in the calibration of imagined mobility is 'arrival points.' Baas (2013) explains this as 'imaginary moments in the future when migrants imagine themselves as having arrived at where they intended to be by going through a particular (migration) process.' These moments are set in the minds of migrants as the purpose fulfilling milestones in the journey towards the ultimate goal. It is an integral part of the mobility that is imagined acting as an indicator through which the process is to be evaluated. As Khadria (2012, p. 906) points out, 'in the context of transnational students, their arrival is determined by their imagination; hence his term "imagined mobility".'

The enactment of imagined mobility creates a problematic form of multi-spatial embeddedness (Baas, 2013). The fact that transnational mobility is characterised by multi-spatial relationships, place is never fixed, which creates a category of migrants who are 'neither here nor yet there' (Baas, 2013). Such status, Baas writes, is at odds with the integration goals of the nation state. Thus, the fluidity of place creates a social problematic for the state.

Baas' imagined mobility provides a framework for analysing aspiring migrants' (for example, African youth football athletes) construction of their mobility project by framing the enactment of mobility as a project that is mentally mapped and lived out within structural orders. Firstly, it appropriately captures the understanding of mobility as an imagination; an ambition that is abstractly crafted but rooted in concrete experiences and goals. Secondly, imagined mobility is a process; a journey with different 'arrival points'—geographical, economic, and of a social status. Thirdly, mobility is imagined within structural orders. In relation to African sports migrants, these refer to the demand for African talent and the poverty and lack of opportunities in their home countries illustrated in the literature reviewed earlier. Fourthly, following the 'neither here nor yet there' as a problematised status, I draw a parallel (though not in the sense used by Baas) to explain how the imagined mobilities of the youth athletes from poor and working-class backgrounds constitute a social problematic.

2.2. Dimensions of imagined mobility

Imagination of mobility among African football migrants is of two dimensions—social and spatial (Esson, 2015a, 2015c). Social mobility is 'the movement in time of social units between different positions in the system of social stratification of a society. The moving units are usually individuals, but may also be groups' (Müller & Pollak, 2015, p. 640). These positions in the social structure define differential access to socioeconomic resources and social recognition. The social positions are not binary but graduated across a continuum of social strata. To be socially mobile, therefore, is to move from a position of limited access to a position of increased access to resources and prestige. The desire for material improvement is a strong motivation for migratory ambitions, writes Massey, as migrants may 'generate remittances sufficient to support the family while at the same time accumulating savings to finance socioeconomic mobility' (Massey, 2015, p. 452). Massey's point underscores the altruism that migratory

imaginations embody since it is not just a desire to improve one's fortunes, but in many cases, the fortunes of family members (or even community). Massey (2015, p. 453) further notes that 'people also move for purposes of symbolic gratification – to gain status, prestige, and esteem, which are also core human motivations.' The recognition and status accorded to footballers is an important aspect of the imagination of aspiring African migrant youth athletes (Ungruhe, 2016). They want to emulate their predecessors and become global superstars (Poli, 2006a). Among many aspiring migrant athletes, football is imagined as a means to a career; a route to economic emancipation and a journey to fame and social recognition (Agergaard & Botelho, 2014).

The spatial construction of mobility refers to the 'ways in which different places are imagined and ascribed with different qualities' and then aspired to as prospective locations for achieving set goals (Åkerlund & Sandberg, 2015, p. 353). The imagination of place among aspiring migrant athletes is, therefore, expected to follow a perception of given locations as sites for the performance of their aspired football careers. Åkerlund and Sandberg (2015, p. 352) write that 'the ways in which places are perceived, represented and given meaning play a crucial role in the mobility decision.' Place in this imagination sets boundaries on space. Such spaces marked out, represent in the imagination, 'arrival points' (Baas, 2013) in the migration project and ones that enable certain roles to be performed (Åkerlund & Sandberg, 2015). The arrival points in the athletes' imagination would come in the form of countries and football leagues aspired towards. This imagination of place is co-constructed between athletes and other actors such as agents and family members (van der Meij & Darby, 2017). As Åkerlund and Sandberg (2015, p. 352) note, 'imaginaries of places are mediated not only by movers themselves but also by agents who in various ways seek to promote and encourage relocation.'

In imagined mobility, delimitated spaces 'contain material settings, or a context for social relations to be played out' (Åkerlund & Sandberg, 2015, pp. 353–354)—a football career—and thus, a 'migratory disposition, which associates spatial mobility with social mobility' (Esson, 2015a, p. 514). Hence, the social and the spatial dimensions overlap because the motivations and the goals that produce them are the same. Consequently, both the social and spatial dimensions are primarily tied to self-advancement—a drive to move to locations that can improve life chances and to secure a better life and recognition (Esson, 2015a, 2015c).

In the next section, I discuss the study population and sample as well as the considerations underpinning data collection and analysis.

3. Methods

3.1. Selection of participants and data collection

This study is conducted through field visits to small football training centres in the Dakar region of Senegal. The training centres visited were purposively selected to reflect the size, operational structure and class differences. The data were collected in September 2019 through observation at the training centres and face-to-face in-depth interviews with aspiring youth footballers. The respondents comprised of 10 male athletes, with five athletes drawn from each of Group A and Group B clubs respectively

(the classification of the training clubs is described in more detail below) through a purposive process where athletes were selected across different ages. The youth athletes interviewed are aged between 14 and 22 years (one 14, 19 and 22-year olds respectively, and three 15 and four 16-year olds).

All the athletes were contacted through their centre's management and consent was duly secured from both the centres and the athletes before they were interviewed. The interviews were carried out alone with each athlete for about 50–60 minutes allowing them the freedom to express their thoughts without interference. Each interview was audio-recorded with the consent of the centre's representative and of the youth athlete, and they were assured that the tapes were solely for this research and would be destroyed afterwards. A local field assistant acted as a go-between in approaching the centres. He also functioned as an intermediary during the interviews, translating and interpreting the conversation between me and the respondents from English to French or to Wolof, depending on the language that each respondent was comfortable in. The use of an interpreter raised the risk of loss of meaning as questions and responses were translated from one language to another, so I took steps to manage the constraints (Chiumento et al., 2018; Kapborg & Berterö, 2002; Skjelsbaek, 2016). The field assistant in this study was carefully selected taking into consideration recommendations of Clark et al. (2017). A university graduate of postcolonial studies with a minor in English language, he is very experienced in conducting interviews, transcription and translation having previously participated in many other studies. He is also very fluent in French and Wolof as well as being accustomed to the local culture. Prior to the interviews, he was sufficiently briefed on the background and purpose of the study and the interview guide was reviewed collaboratively with him.

Employing a narrative technique, 'based on the idea that people produce narratives about the self' (Edwards & Holland, 2013, p. 35), the athletes were enabled to construct their imaginations of mobility. An interview guide was used in the form of an 'aide memoire' (Edwards & Holland, 2013, p. 30) to give direction to the discussions but not as a standard set of questions. Emergent issues determined further direction of probing with each respondent.

To obtain a representative view of the phenomenon, I placed emphasis on the depth and richness of the respondents' narratives (Smith, 2018). I selected the training centres I visited from three of the four departments of the Dakar region rather than from the metropolis of Dakar alone to enrich perspectives. The selection of the athletes across class backgrounds further provided a depth of engagement with the different dynamics at play and the findings also corroborated existing literature on the motivations and imaginations of aspiring African athletes.

3.2. The context of the training centres

The training centres sampled in this study are different from the big academies in Senegal like Académie Génération Foot (where Liverpool's Sadio Mane was trained) or L'Institut Diambars (founded by ex-Arsenal and ex-French international, Patrick Vieira, and his friends) that operate highly structured athletics training alongside regular

schooling for athletes who are resident in hostels at the academies. The training clubs in this study are quite small in scope, largely unstructured, do not run their own schooling programmes, and the athletes attend training from home.

The clubs visited and the youth athletes showed interesting demographic variations that also reveal important insights into local socio-structural conditions. The first five training clubs visited (I will, for the purpose of reference, denote these as Group A clubs) train in the departments of Guédiawaye, Pikine, and Dakar. These clubs train at various grounds, usually dusty pitches some of which have no grassing. This group of clubs is primarily populated with youth from poor and working-class backgrounds. Many of the parents of the athletes in this group are small scale traders, artisans, house wives or work menial or irregular jobs. In terms of management, Group A clubs are mostly run by working-class people without external support from either the local football association or local professional clubs. This also limits the wealth of financial resources or technical know-how available to the clubs.

The second set of training clubs (I will, for the purpose of reference, denote these as Group B clubs) is an amalgam where a group of five training clubs have brought their athletes under a single umbrella to share a training facility and instruction. Their training facility is located in an upscale neighbourhood in Ngor District, Dakar metropolis. The training ground is an artificially grassed pitch protected by a plastic net fencing. Majority of the athletes are of relatively middle class backgrounds. Parents of athletes in these groups work as career civil servants, in corporate private offices or as businessmen. Group B clubs are relatively organised with a clear programme for their athletes' development. The management personnel have some coaching qualifications and they also receive financial and technical support from a local professional football club.

Social class categorisation in this paper is understood both in emic and etic perspectives. In the former perspective, I took a cue from Yount-André (2020, p. 93) where neighbourhood is a marker of social class in Dakar, conceived along rich, middle class (*classe moyenne*) and poor. In the latter perspective, I used the concept of middle class to characterise certain socioeconomic status such as possession of tertiary education, employment in professional and corporate jobs and middle-income wages in the domestic economy (Reeves et al., 2018). This also mirrors the description by Yount-André (2020) where neighbourhood is an indicator of certain socioeconomic status. However, I employed working-class and poor to denote those employed in clerical, artisanal, low-skill and low-income work especially in the informal sector. This class, more or less, corresponds to the poor in Yount-André's (2020) categorisation.

3.3. Data processing and analysis

The audio tapes were transcribed verbatim by the field Assistant from the original French and Wolof audio into text, and then translated to English text. However, this process was carefully done in a way that 'is "true" to its original nature' (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 88), initially by selecting an experienced assistant and also by thoroughly reviewing the final transcripts. Discussion of the data was an ongoing process throughout the collection. After each interview and together with the field assistant,

we listened to the audio record as well as reviewed the observations and key comments we noted during the interview. I conducted a systematic analysis of the data after the transcription of all the interviews. Analysis followed the contextualist thematic analysis approach 'which acknowledges the ways individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings' (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 81). This also fits into the theoretical framing of mobility as an imagined construct within social structural orders.

Based on the research objectives and the theoretical reflections that frame mobility as an imagination underpinned by motivations and goals constructed within social structures, the athletes were asked about what they want to achieve at the training centres; what success would mean to them; what they are doing to achieve their goals; what they do away from football as a future livelihood strategy; what they think about failing to achieve their athletic career goals; and how they would handle failure if it happens. From the interviews, I deductively developed three thematic analytical frames based on my theoretical framing of imagined mobility namely (a) *motivations*, as expressed in their goals; (b) *mobility and place*, as expressed in their interpretations of success; and (c) *mobility pathways*, as expressed in what they are doing to achieve their goals and how they are planning for the possibility of failure. These thematic frames are interlinked in the production of the athletes' mobility imaginations and in explaining the ways the imaginations shape the athletes' preparation for adult life and future livelihood. The analysis followed the six phases of thematic analysis espoused by Braun and Clark (2006). All transcripts were read and re-read alongside notes made during the interviews. From these, initial codes were manually developed. The codes were then organised around the predefined thematic frames. I focussed on the prevalence (Braun & Clark, 2006) of the themes across the entire data set and in relation to the two respondent categories classified according to their respective setting in divergent socio-economic environments (referred to as Group A and B training clubs, above). The analysis then developed at a latent level (Braun & Clark, 2006) that not only identified patterns but went further to make interpretive reading of the relationships between structures, contexts and meanings embedded in athletes' construction of their mobility imaginations.

Anchor quotes are used across the reporting of the analysis as a way of empowering the respondents in narrating their own story (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006) as well as to 'provide sufficient evidence' (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 93) for the arguments I made in this paper. Each extracted quote represents an 'easily identifiable example of the issue' (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 93). To maintain the anonymity of the respondents, the names of the training clubs and the interviewees or identifiers have not been reported and pseudonyms are used in place of real names where individuals have been quoted verbatim.

3.4. My role in the production of knowledge

I occupy a position as a West African with depth of understanding of the dynamics of social life in the region and a significant experience interacting with aspiring youth athletes especially from Nigeria. This position carries with it some privileged

knowledge that was useful in deconstructing the athletes' mobility imaginaries. On the other hand, I am not particularly familiar with aspiring youth athletes from Senegal, which created some distance from the observed and enhanced my objective position as an 'outsider.' My cultural proximity only strengthened the contextual understanding of the research issue and added to the depth of meaning making and knowledge production.

4. Results

In this section, the findings are presented under three but interlinked thematic headings: motivations; mobility and place; and mobility pathways.

4.1. Motivations

The motivations among the athletes at the different training centres deeply reflect class and social structure positions. At the Group A training clubs where majority of the athletes are out of school, their motivations carry a strong and primary sense of self, and the narratives underlined by a struggle to escape poverty. The athletes have been raised in deprivation and are motivated by the drive to lift themselves and their families out of poverty. Abdu, a youth athlete at a Group A club whose mother is a trader, when asked about what he would consider as success replied:

> I'd like to be successful, have money … My family is poor and I want to succeed to be able to help my mum … She has really supported me and wants to see me succeed because she believes if I make it, life will be better for the family.

An observation from this group is that their parents are a big influence on their dreams to play professionally. Given that the family backgrounds of these athletes limit the social capital available to them for upward mobility, talented children become important capital that must be supported and encouraged (van der Meij & Darby, 2017). Consequently, the children develop a consciousness tied to the families' social and economic situation.

On the other hand, the narratives observed from the Group B clubs differ in the orientation. Here, the relatively middle class background of the athletes is reflected in their primary motivations. Instead of motivations that are preponderantly about securing a livelihood, in addition, the athletes expressed social goals such as serving as role models to other youths or uplifting the pride of their country. Malik, whose parents are senior civil servants, comments:

> I'd like to become a big professional player to help my parents and be part of the generation of players that will bring all the cups the Senegalese national team has missed … Success for me is being able to help others in need.

For athletes from both Group A and Group B clubs, successful professional Senegalese internationals are an influence in their imaginations and belief. Diame, an athlete from a Group B club, says:

> My ambition is to be like Sadio Mane and represent my country

Another, Camara, an athlete from a Group B club, highlights the influence of global Senegalese superstars but also underscores the drive for similar prestige and fame that motivate the youth athletes. He says:

> I'm a goalkeeper and would like to be a professional and be *famous* like the others abroad.

From the foregoing, the mobility imaginations of the athletes have several motivations. These include the struggle for socioeconomic liberation, the patriotic zeal to serve their country and the desire for recognition and status. The narratives of self-liberation or of community are reflections of different positions in the social structure and the different imaginations of mobility emanating therefrom. That which is borne of deprivation places self-emancipation at the centre of mobility whereas the imaginations emanating from more secure positions overtly express more communal motivations. However, this is not to say that the athletes from poor and working-class backgrounds have no patriotic orientations or that those from the relatively middle class backgrounds have no self-interests. It only goes to show how imagined mobilities are rooted in social structural conditions of opportunity or deprivation.

4.2. Mobility and place

The association of mobility to place is a theme that runs across the narratives of the athletes. Mobility is conceived in spatial terms entailing moving from Senegal to other countries, particularly in Europe. Diouf, an athlete at a Group B club says, 'I'm ready to go anywhere in any club.' Within the spectrum, places outside of Senegal are generally perceived as holding more opportunities to realise a professional football career ambition; so, a career within Senegal is placed at the base of the spectrum while a professional career in a Western European football league represents the pinnacle of mobility. The 'arrival point' is to see oneself play in a major European football league such as the French, English, Spanish, German, or the Italian league. Ousmane, a 16-year old at a Group A club, narrates:

> All my ambition is to move to France and reach my dreams. I want to go because Senegalese football is too challenging due to the large number of players.

The common narrative is that the weakest players are often the ones left behind in Africa (Darby, 2012; Okwechime & Adetiloye, 2019) suggesting that competition for places is not as fierce as in Europe. What Ousmane points to is the sheer number of young athletes who are competing to take very few local opportunities in professional football. The pathway into the local professional league is narrow. There are several of these centres while the local professional league only has a few clubs that can recruit the trainee athletes from these centres. Besides, those who do, barely earn enough as another youth athlete, Aliou, emphasises:

> I'd like to quit this championship and move overseas; playing in Senegal is too difficult with these problems of salary; you can play a long time unpaid, which is not good.

Despite the enormous cost of financing the invitations for trials abroad and the uncertainties of earning professional contracts after such trials, the dream is to leave

Senegal and move abroad, especially to Europe. Isa, who plays at one of the training clubs, comments:

> I had one invitation to go to Italy but I could not make it due to the lack of means I just talked about. We needed 800,000 CFA for me to travel but I could not afford it.

The local environment is perceived as one that holds limited opportunity for mobility through football, whether it is to earn a contract, or it is to earn sufficient livelihood and social recognition. The dream, therefore, is to move abroad with the hope of reaching a professional level in Europe. The imagination of place is not just the pull of the glamour of European football and the success of Senegalese players abroad, but a feedback response to the lack of hope and opportunities for self-advancement through football in the local football league for many of the athletes. Though the motivations and imagined points of arrival among the athletes are similar across class backgrounds, there are significant class-based differences in terms of imagined mobility pathways, a major factor in the preparation for future livelihood for both groups of athletes. This is explored in the next theme.

4.3. Mobility pathways

The imaginations of mobility have profound effect on the way youths prepare for adulthood and future livelihood. The social backgrounds of the athletes influence their imaginations of mobility and how they make sense of the process of actualising it. The imaginations of mobility in the two groups vary. For Group A training clubs, it is unidimensional, that is, built largely, if not solely, on a future football career outside of Senegal, and most especially, Europe. Most of the athletes from the group A training clubs were observed to be out of formal schooling, not in a trade apprenticeship and mainly focussed on their football training. Abdu, a 15-year old, dropped out of school and only focuses on training at his club. His father is an artisan and the mother a house wife. He says he dropped out of school so that he can pay full attention to his football ambition:

> I couldn't cope with school and my parents were not really keen about me continuing … I dropped out of school at fourth grade, and football is the only thing I'm doing.

Like Abdu, the sole focus on the football career path with little consideration for other valuable training in a trade or craft is a product of the unidimensional imagination of mobility common in the athletes from working-class backgrounds. Another Group A athlete, 16-year-old Diouf, who only attended a Koranic school, when asked about what he does aside training at his club, says:

> I want to make progress in my career and become a professional player and dedicate all my life to playing football. That's the only thing I'm doing right now, I don't have another job … Football is all I have.

Diame, 16 and a Group A athlete dropped out of school at the first grade. His parents couldn't continue paying for his schooling. When asked about how he would deal with the possibility of failure to make it into professional football, says:

> …football is the only thing I'm doing. I rarely think about the possibility of failure in my career.

On the other hand, at the Group B training clubs, there are multiple visions of mobility and livelihood among the athletes. There is a vision of a future outside of football, an alternative path to career and adulthood. Most of the athletes here are in school and admit that, though they are passionate about football, their schooling is equally important for their future advancement and livelihood. There is also an admission that a professional football career may not materialise, hence, a strategy for managing all eventualities. Most of them say that their parents emphasise the need for them to take their education seriously and offer them support with their studies. Salif, 22, an athlete at a Group B club whose father works in an office in Dakar, says:

> I'm combining sport and studies. I'm on an internship in a factory. To tell you, I'm not ready to sacrifice my studies because it might not work. Discipline is what can make you succeed in football.

When asked what he would do if an opportunity to play professional football does not materialise, Demba whose parents are teachers and at a Group B club, said:

> I don't want to put this idea of failing in football, but if ever it happens, I would like to become a coach. I like my studies and I am doing very well at school. My parents always tell me to take my studies seriously.

Though poverty contributes to the withdrawal of the athletes from working-class backgrounds from continuing with formal education, little explains the tendency to disregard apprenticeship in a trade or craft as is prevalent among working-class youth in most parts of Africa. When education is not easily accessible or affordable, working-class families may put their children under trade apprenticeships as a route to a secure, even if not significantly uplifting, livelihood pathway. The sole focus on football is a product of a unidimensional imagination of mobility through football that does not consider other options for future livelihood.

The unidimensional imagination of mobility and the lack of preparation for an alternative course of career also reflect class differences at the institutional level. Group A clubs are working-class run, with less resources and technical know-how. Group B clubs on the other hand are run by relatively trained personnel and have an affiliation with a local professional club. While the Group B training clubs start training at 3 pm until 6 pm in the evening, majority of the Group A clubs conduct their training sessions in the morning hours between 8 am and 12 noon. The implication is that the athletes at the different centres have differential opportunities for schooling or learning a trade. Nearly all the athletes at the Group B clubs were in school while attending training in the evening at the centre. Though, activities at the Group B centre are currently focussed on football training, there is a planned back-to-school programme for the few trainee athletes who were out of school. The training schedule makes it very difficult for the athletes at Group A clubs to combine schooling or vocational apprenticeship with football training. This shows that Group A training clubs do not take into consideration an alternative career imagination for the majority who will not become professional athletes.

5. Discussions

The findings of this study show that the motivations that underpin the athletes' imagination of mobility are in line with previous research. These include the desire for

socioeconomic advancement for self and family, the patriotic zeal to serve their country and the desire for recognition and status. The lack of opportunities for self-advancement for many of the poor and working-class youths (Agergaard & Botelho, 2014; Darby, 2000, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c; Poli, 2006a, 2006b) creates a desire to seek greener pastures elsewhere. In addition, the media transmitted feedback (Darby, 2012; Poli, 2006a) of successful Senegalese footballers in Europe is a big influence on the athletes' imaginations which spurs a desire to also achieve transformational mobility and the wealth and fame of 'the others abroad.' This also links to the other finding of this research that shows the association of social mobility with spatial mobility and in line with literature (Esson, 2015a, Poli, 2006a). Reaching Europe and playing as a professional is the topmost 'arrival point' (Baas, 2013) in the mobility imagination. The motivations and the geographies of the aspired mobility show that the imaginations develop within local and global structural orders.

On the pathways for realising social mobility, the findings show that the imaginations vary across class backgrounds. For the athletes from relatively middle class backgrounds, there is a strong acknowledgement of the possibility that a professional career may not materialise. This is seen in the way that they take their studies and non-football training seriously. This may be explained by the middle class family emphasis on education and alternative livelihood pathways. At an institutional level, they are also at the training centres (Group B) with the organisation to imagine a future outside of football for the athletes. On the other hand, the athletes from poor and working-class backgrounds are largely focussed on football with little engagement in non-football education and training. This may be accounted for by the poor and disadvantaged backgrounds which limits their social capital and support (Esson, 2013). There is a general belief among this group that mobility through football is very realisable. It shows in the way that most are out of school, not in any apprenticeship and would rather not think about the possibility of failure. That Group A training centres schedule their daily training sessions during the morning hours, shows that the sentiments also prevail at an institutional level. This is the 'deforming prism' which Poli (2006a) espoused on and Ungruhe and Esson (2017, p. 38) argues, negates the efforts of the athletes to 'overcome social immobility' or prepare for future livelihoods.

In Europe, the situation is different at an institutional level given that there is a regulatory framework for the welfare of players where clubs and academies are required to provide educational opportunities for alternative careers for their youth athletes (Platts & Smith, 2009). In Dakar, most of the academies operate informally without recognition or regulatory oversight from the football federation (Fasano, 2019). As such, they are not under any formal obligations to plan for the non-sporting education of the youth athletes. Though a similar prevalence of a strong optimism of progressing into a professional career and a prioritisation of sports training over academic and vocational training among athletes in academies in English and Scottish football (McGillivray & McIntosh, 2006; Platts, 2012; Platts & Smith, 2009), the tendency to take investments in dual career pathways seriously among middle class athletes in the Group B centres in Dakar reveals the role of class dynamics in alternative career imagination and planning.

This paper makes a contribution that the imaginations of the athletes from poor and working-class backgrounds function as deforming prisms in two ways: firstly, the unidimensional mobility pathway at a critical stage of development constructed solely around a football career; and secondly, the association of spatial mobility with social mobility. The sole focus on the football career path without consideration for education or trades training denies the athletes the opportunity to develop useful competencies for adult and independent life beyond football. Studies have shown that a dual career strategy is important for preparing for life after a sporting career or for those who do not progress to a professional level (Pavlidis & Gargalianos, 2014) and education (formal or trade apprenticeship) is an important factor in achieving a dual career pathway (Graczyk et al., 2018).

Kids who drop out of school or are not training in a trade but focus solely on football miss out on a critical stage of development. Schooling or some other form of trade training prepares the youth for adult life by equipping them with the skills for a career and other responsibilities (Buchert, 2014; Nordman & Pasquier-Doumer, 2014; Oreopoulos & Salvanes, 2011; Fulungi & Hardway, 2004). As an alternative to schooling in many African countries, young people who drop out of school may train in a craft or trade through an apprenticeship tenure to gain relevant skills for employment in the large informal sector (Ahadzie, 2009). However, many of these athletes are neither in school nor in an apprenticeship which is the preparatory route towards gainful employment and future livelihood.

Furthermore, the unidimensional imagination of mobility through football, to the greater part, is not oriented towards geographies within Senegal. The effect is that there is little connection of the imaginations to local realities where many are fated to end up. The local realities mean that the chances of progression from the local training clubs to a professional career, whether in Senegal or outside of Senegal, are very slim (Hann, 2019). So, training to become a footballer without gaining other valuable skills within the local economy undermines the opportunities for future livelihood in the event of (highly probable) failure to advance into a professional career. As Agergaard & Ungruhe (2016, p. 70) note, 'renunciation of other possibilities and trajectories (e.g. education or job training)' presents the athletes with 'the risk of facing an uncertain future.'

Imagination of mobility through football, therefore, produces a group of young people that lack the preparation to confront adult and independent life *within* their society. The geographies of mobility oriented towards a career abroad lead to disproportionate investment in a skill (football) that has little application in Senegal. Besides, in reality, most would not go beyond the training clubs (Hann, 2019). This, therefore, creates a 'neither here nor there' (Baas, 2013) of youths poorly prepared for adulthood within their society. The unidimensional imagination of mobility that excludes schooling and vocational training portends a barrier to achieving social mobility or securing a livelihood for the many in the future (Ungruhe & Esson, 2017). As Grusky (2015, p. 711) noted, 'present-day inequality regimes contain within them the kernel of future inequality regimes.' Consequently, the imaginations of the poor and working-class athletes produce social formations that hinder their holistic development and may

reproduce the very structural conditions of social immobility that the imaginations strive to resolve.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented how youth football athletes in Dakar construct an imagined mobility within class structures and how it constrains preparation for adult and independent life for the athletes from poor and working-class backgrounds. The imaginations constrain the athletes in two ways: 1) through a unidimensional mobility pathway that is focussed solely on a football career abroad, and 2) association of mobility to locations outside of Senegal, both of which lead to the neglect of the development of alternative skills that are useful in other productive activities outside of football and applicable within Senegal where majority of the athletes would end up. This research fills a gap in the literature of football migration, firstly, by fully conceptualising mobility as an imagination and applying it to sports migration research; and secondly, by explaining how the mobility imaginations of aspiring African football migrants 'deform the prism' and portend broader constraints to future livelihood beyond an unrealised professional football career.

This paper has advanced current literature on aspiring African football migrants and the social immobility produced by their attempts to achieve mobility through football (Esson, 2013; Poli, 2006a; Ungruhe & Esson, 2017) by explaining the dislocations that are produced by the unidimensional imaginations at a critical stage of development among the athletes from poor and working-class backgrounds. However, it is limited for understanding the full impacts on the athletes, long after their stay at these training centres. A life course study may provide a more in-depth understanding of the biographies that the imaginations produce.

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5.3. Article 2: 'Just another world': Cultural transitions in elite sports. A study of African footballers in Germany

Ikechukwu Ejekwumadu (manuscript) 'Just another world': Cultural transitions in elite sports. A study of African footballers in Germany. Manuscript submitted to *European Journal for Sport and Society*.

This article centres on the experiences of transnational African athletes in transition. It explores the various disruptions to their established life worlds as a result of encountering cultural differences between their origin and their new host society in Germany. It examines experiences across the sports and non-sports domains of their careers and lives, how they make meaning of these experiences, and the impact on their self-concept and behaviours. This paper reveals not just the specific experiences but also the trajectory across the transition and how this process is mediated by the biographies of the athletes.

'Just another world': Cultural transitions in elite sports. A study of African footballers in Germany

Abstract

Through a two-case narrative of archetypal professional African footballers, I examine the adaptive demands and experiences that elite African athletes encounter in the process of transition through German football and society. The findings show a range of experiences and adaptive challenges which include: pre-transition emotions (excitement, hope, anxiety and curiosity); experiences within the sporting domain (language barrier, the severity of the weather, the intensity of training, a new attitude to work and a nuanced crafting of career progression); and experiences outside the sporting domain (adjusting to a new cultural environment, a high degree of formality in social relationships, loneliness and locating self in society). The paper also demonstrates that adaptive challenges may follow a path of decline, adaptation, or consistency and may vary in manifestation from individual to individual. It also shows that the persistence of an adaptive challenge may not necessarily halt the progression of an athletic career as migrant footballers' athletic identity and objective-centred perspective take pre-eminence in transition.

Key words: Cultural transition in sports; African football migration; African immigrants in Europe; cross-cultural development; biographical mapping

1. Introduction

This paper examines the adaptive demands and experiences that elite African footballers encounter in the process of transition through German football and society. The spate of migration of elite footballers from the global South to Europe has grown significantly in the last couple of decades

(Darby 2007). Of these, many come from sub-Saharan African countries. This increased global transfer of footballers, and other sport athletes, has spurred research interest in the cultural transition experiences of migrant athletes with studies investigating their sporting and non-sporting domains of adaptation and integration. Following Berry's (1997; 2005) work on how individuals deal with navigating new cultural settings, many studies have focused on understanding the psychological and cultural changes that migrant athletes confront and undergo as they move across borders to pursue their sporting careers. The research focus has been mainly anchored on the premise that transborder movements create 'cultural loads' and 'stressors' (Berry, 1997) for migrant athletes as they strive to adapt to new sporting environments and national cultures (Ryba et al. 2016)

Ryba et al. (2016) argue that athletes in cross-border movements experience a 'rupture of meanings' and the disruption of established routines and 'social networks' within sporting and non-sporting domains of their lived lives. Similarly, Schinke et al. (2013) maintain that migrant athletes experience the challenge of 'navigating two worlds'; that of their origin and that of their new host, as well as the challenge of 'acculturation loads' from the burden of learning new ways of living. Schinke et al. (2016, p. 36) further expand that the acculturation challenges of migrant athletes can be expressed under four major thematic experiences: '(a) navigating the sport system without local support, (b) adjusting to new sport programs and training approaches, (c) dealing with cultural differences; and (d) searching for balance'. The differences in meaning, Khomutova (2016) writes, may manifest in orientations to team work where there could be a conflict between a 'collective' as against an 'individualistic' orientation between the host culture and the athlete or vice versa. Brandão and Vieira (2013) found that athletes from the global South may find the football approach, weather, food, and loneliness as the most challenging experiences. Samuel et

al. (2020, p. 705) group transition challenges as ‘on-court’ or ‘off-court’ demands. The former ranges from varying intensities of training sessions and coaching styles to language of instruction. The latter ranges from weather, food, and language to culture. On the other hand, others highlight the tensions and disruptions of family life that migrant athletes experience as they leave families behind or relocate with them during frequent transfers (Onwumechili & Akpan, 2019; Roderick, 2012; Gmelch & San Antonio, 2001; Marques & Júnior, 2020).

More specifically on transition experiences of African and black athletes, authors have noted racism and racial othering as very common (Jowett & Frost, 2007; Ungruhe, 2013; Agergaard & Ungruhe, 2016; Khomutova, 2016). These occur as either racially offensive and discriminatory behaviours toward black athletes or the characterisation of the qualities of black athletes based on stereotypes of their physical attributes. The experience of precarity by African players is noted by Agergaard and Ryba (2014) and Agergaard and Ungruhe (2016). For early stage professionals, there is the uncertainty of stay and tenure of contract creating enormous anxiety for the athletes (Agergaard & Ungruhe, 2016). For those nearing retirement from active athletic involvement, the precarity manifests in the uncertainty or lack of a post-athletic career plan that is a result of limited agency (Agergaard & Ryba, 2014).

However, while the studies above have provided broad insights, gaps remain in our understanding of migrant athletes’ cultural transitions, and more so, for elite footballers from Africa. Firstly, most studies broadly consider athletes from a number of sports which ignores the peculiarities raised by the different sporting contexts (e.g., Ryba et al., 2016). Secondly, the ethnographic site in many studies rarely focus on athletes within a single national culture with participants recruited from across a variety of host countries while neglecting the influence of a common host environment on the experience of cultural transition (e.g., Agergaard & Ryba, 2014). Thirdly, only a few studies

have selected participants on the basis of racial background or similar origin culture (e.g., Ungruhe, 2013), a factor that is important in the experience of cultural transition. Fourthly, of the few studies that have focused on African athletes, there is scarcely any that has placed an emphasis on understanding the way earlier transitions shape future transitions. Fifthly, while there are studies that have reported various cultural transition challenges, the trajectories of these experiences are unknown or not adequately supported by evidence.

Against the foregoing, this study contributes to bridging the gaps by examining the cultural transition experiences of African footballers in the German football league. The research aim is to understand the transition experiences of a specific demographic - players from sub-Saharan Africa - within a single national culture - Germany; the trajectory of the experiences; and how the experiences are shaped by the biography and previous transitions of individual athletes. The following research questions will guide the study: a) What are the major transition experiences and challenges that players from Africa encounter in the process of transition through German football and society? b) What is the trajectory of these experiences? c) How are these experiences shaped by individual athletes' past transitions and biography?

I employ a modified cross-cultural development framework for studying cultural transitions in this investigation. Particular interest is placed on the cultural transition model (CTM) (Ryba et al., 2016) which articulates elite athletes' cultural transition as an experience shaped by their sociocultural background and a process occurring in phases marked by specific experiences. However, I try to bridge the gaps in the CTM, especially with regards to the trajectory of experiences across athletes' cultural transition. To achieve this, my investigation employs and adapts the biographical mapping grid which is used to temporally trace athletes' experiences of a given phenomenon over time.

2. Theoretical deliberations: Cross-cultural development and migrant athletes' transition

The theoretical framework for this study is developed around my synthesis of ideas contained in the works of several scholars on cross-cultural development. The cross-cultural development perspectives offer a useful lens for understanding the challenges that migrant athletes face in their encounter with changing cultural contexts away from familiar surroundings. These approaches highlight the influences of culture and prior experience on behaviour (Berry et al., 2002; Kim, 1997). Culture, 'the shared way of life of a people' (Berry et al., 2002, p. 2), influences the way individuals deal with the social world around them. Norms, values, attitudes, and other elements of culture shape how the individual positions self in society, interprets and responds to social stimuli and patterns relationship with others (Berry et al., 2002; Cialdini et al., 1991; Roccas & Sagiv, 2017). As individuals encounter new cultural settings away from the ones in which they have been formed or familiar with, old cultural frameworks may no longer provide sufficient guides for dealing with the social world (Berry, 1997; Dai & Chen, 2014; Kim, 1997). In such circumstances, it may become necessary that individuals acquire new cultural competencies in order to adapt to and deal with new cultural expectations (Kim, 2001; Ruben, 1989; Lee & Chen, 2000). This process, which Berry (1997) terms acculturation, is required for a meaningful life in a new cultural setting.

Berry, citing Redfield et al., explains acculturation as 'those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups' (Berry, 1997, p. 7). Though acculturation may involve changes in the host culture to accommodate the immigrating group, where the host wields the power in the encounter, it is mostly the immigrants that have to adapt to the culture of their host in order to integrate into the new setting (Berry, 1997). This process is

inevitable for all immigrants, argues Berry, but what varies is the ‘level of difficulty and the eventual outcome’ (Berry, 1997, p. 9). The need to achieve these behavioural changes places a ‘cultural load’ on the individual and produces ‘stressors’ that make life difficult and uncomfortable for the immigrant (Berry, 1997, p. 18).

Most immigrants, Berry (1997) writes, are able to achieve ‘relatively stable changes’ (Berry, 2005, p. 709) in competencies and behaviour in the long term, and the experience of acculturation progresses generally in a positive direction. In the few cases where these stressors persist, the individual may experience ‘psychopathology’ (Berry, 1997, p. 13). Though hardly a linear trajectory, Berry’s acculturation framework generally expects the experience to move from greater to lesser difficulties over time and an achievement of fit for the immigrant in the new setting. This process is however, mediated by ‘moderating factors’ preceding acculturation at the origin society such as gender, education, motivations for migration, language and religion; and during acculturation at the society of settlement such as local attitudes toward the other, social support, acculturation strategies, etc. (Berry, 1997, p. 18).

In line with Berry’s work, Ryba et al. (2016) articulated the cultural transition model (CTM) for studying cultural transitions in sports. The model posits to serve as a framework for understanding ‘the developmental tasks and underlying psychological mechanisms, set in motion by the cultural transition’ among athletes (Ryba et al., 2016, p. 5). In their model, the adaptive demands of an athlete’s acculturation process may be grouped under three temporal phases – ‘pre-transition’; ‘acute cultural adaptation’; and ‘sociocultural adaptation’ (Ryba et al., 2016, p. 7).

Pre-transition which occurs prior to relocation, produces psychosocial stress about the destination as athletes become anxious and curious to learn about expectations, future colleagues and work environment. Athletes are also tasked with conditioning their minds toward experiencing a new

cultural setting. The other two phases occur at the destination. In the acute cultural adaptation phase, athletes are confronted with the struggles of learning new cultural competencies such as language, meanings and behaviours, sporting culture, and making new connections with various social groups. Ryba et al. (2016, p. 9) write that this phase is emotionally intensive and 'may last for several months and encroach into the subsequent adaptive phase'. In the last phase, sociocultural adaptation, athletes are tasked with developing a balance between self and society, enabling them to constantly reposition themselves in multiple transnational belongings.

Similar to Berry (1997), the CTM implicitly assumes a trajectory of 'developmental tasks that change with time' generally moving progressively toward a balance at the sociocultural adaptation phase (Ryba et al., 2016, p. 11). This conceptualisation, however, poses a few issues. Firstly, there are gaps about the continuities and discontinuities of developmental tasks of cultural transition, a point well elaborated by Weinreich (2009). The trajectory of acculturation demands appears linear, occurring at marked out phases. There is little empirical support that specific experiences occur only or are resolved at given phases of the athlete's cultural transition. Secondly, cross-cultural development suggests that successful acculturation entails a resolution of 'stressors' at given phases, a fit into the neat and linear framework of the CTM. It is not clear whether athletes may still achieve sporting progress and fulfilling lives without resolving the demands of given 'cultural loads'.

In addition, Berry (1997) and Ryba et al. (2016) frame a clear demarcation of localities between an 'origin' culture and a 'destination' culture. Such binaries overlook multiple cultural transitions in a highly spatially mobile trade, especially for elite African athletes, and the impact on individual athlete's experience of cultural transitions. Ungruhe and Agergaard (2020) argue that transcultural belonging is the norm for migrant African athletes who are embedded in multiple cultural

locations. Berry (1997) highlights the influence of cultural proximity between origin and destination on the experience of transition. In that light, a transcultural order among elite migrant athletes, therefore, portends both closeness and difference, enabling multiple forms of belonging. Besides, as Weinreich (2009) argues, immigrants may be more at will than articulated by Berry to choose and select what aspects of their 'origin' culture to drop and what aspects of the host culture to adopt. Such freedom is most obtainable in the 'individualist' cultures of the West (Bond & Smith, 1996) where the majority of elite football migrants work. In the light of the foregoing, this study approaches African footballers' experience of cultural transition in Germany as a process shaped by their cultural background, migration histories, and current host society factors.

3. Methods

3.1. Selection of participants

The delineation of research participants followed given criteria based on the research problem and study objectives. To qualify for selection, a player must hold the nationality of a sub-Saharan African country and be registered with a club in any of the first two professional tiers of the German football league system (Bundesliga and the second Bundesliga). The above tiers have a total of 36 clubs, 18 respectively. In addition, for a player to qualify, he must a) be born in a sub-Saharan African country or be born outside of sub-Saharan Africa but have been raised in a sub-Saharan African country; b) have spent the early years of his life and formative years of football career in his country of origin or another sub-Saharan African country. Specifically, would have lived in a sub-Saharan African country up until, at the least, the 16th year of his birthday; c) does not currently represent a national team (youth or full international) of a football association of a country other than one in sub-Saharan Africa; and d) must have, at the least, played in one of the two professional tiers above for a football season.

The criteria above ensured that every prospective respondent has the required attributes and lived experience necessary for observing the cultural transition and adaptation that this research is interested in understanding and explaining. As Rosenthal (2004, p. 49) argued, ‘much could be understood if one knew the biographical background – their experiences in childhood and adolescence, their concrete experience of youth’. Being born and or raised in a sub-Saharan African country entails that a player has a different cultural experience from that of the host country and, as such, encountered a peculiar process of cultural transition. Other players who hold the citizenship of a sub-Saharan African country but do not meet the other criteria, may present quite different biographies, and may not have experiences relevant for the purpose of this study. For this reason, I excluded them from the target population. Applying the selection criteria, a total of 19 players qualified for selection at the time of the interviews: Bundesliga (11) and second Bundesliga (8).

As a first step towards contacting the players, emails were sent out to their clubs’ official email addresses. Only three clubs replied but declined to provide any support. I also contacted the German Professional Football Players Union (VDV) but my request for assistance was declined citing data protection requirements. Consequently, I followed Law’s (2019, p. 2) advice of using uniquely placed individuals such as ‘friends, colleagues, or partners’ as well as my own identity as an African to gain entry and the trust of the players. I explored using social media to gain access to some of the players. Most had their private messaging on social media locked, so I could not reach them through that channel. I then sent private messages through Twitter to a number of journalists who report on German football. While a few replied but could not help, most did not reply to my messages. However, one, an African journalist, replied, and this proved successful in

gaining entry and securing the first respondent's commitment to be interviewed. Through this player, I was able to contact and interview the second respondent.

Emphasis in this research was placed on 'examining people's lives in rich detail' (Smith, 2018, p. 138) and producing an account that sufficiently 'revealed the breadth and nature of the phenomena under study' (Lewis et al., 2014, p. 351). This research was, therefore, a two-case study of archetypal elite African professional footballers in Germany. By focusing on the two players' cases, I was able to generate a rich account of their experiences and that presented me with the opportunity to interrogate the research issue in depth. A two-case sample allowed me room to collect multiple kinds of information and to trace the genesis of individual life stories, which is essential in contextualising the generated data and interpreting a subjectively experienced phenomenon. This very important issue is, oftentimes, not well considered in research on athletes' career transitions. Both athletes in this study have over 11 years of combined professional experience in Europe and have been in Germany for a cumulative period of over six years. The first player previously played in another European country for five years prior to arriving Germany and is in his fifth season in his sole club in Germany. The second player arrived directly to Germany from his home country and is in his third season and in his second club. The two players also presented individual biographical variations that made it possible for me to comparatively examine the influences of personal history and circumstances on the experience and trajectories of transition and adaptation. This added significant nuance and depth to meaning making.

3.2. Data collection

Prior to the interviews, one of the respondents required that I present a negative Covid-19 PCR test result in addition to my Covid-19 vaccination card. Data collection was based on semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted individually with each player in October 2021. All

interviews were conducted in English. The players were asked to choose a convenient location for the interviews, and both interviews happened at the club's complex in a serene and secluded corner. Before each interview started, the respondent was given the general information sheet which explains the purpose of the research and how the data from the interview will be processed and managed and their rights and responsibilities. Additionally, a consent form for the interview and another for audio recording were given to the player. However, both respondents declined to sign the paper forms but opted to verbally give their consent to be interviewed and tape recorded. From my own experience, there is a general suspicion with the signing of forms in Nigeria (could be similar across sub-Saharan Africa) when trust is not yet fully established, either through personal familiarity or institutionalised processes. Individuals may be afraid that they may be signing something they have not fully understood, which may have legal consequences. The UCL Research Ethics Committee (n.d., p. 3) recommends that 'if requesting that participants sign consent forms is inappropriate, other means of recording their genuine consent to participation in research is required'. In this case, the verbal consent during the interview and WhatsApp messages I exchanged with the respondents before and after the interviews where respondents agreed to be interviewed provided sufficient evidence of consent.

In conducting the interviews, I used an interview guide and a modified biographical mapping grid adapted from Schubring et al. (2019). The guide contained a range of issues around the research aims, covering the player's early biography, leaving home for a professional career, and the experiences of cultural transition. The mapping grid is a two-axis grid that maps the timeline of transition experiences enabling their trajectories to be traced. The vertical line (y-axis) subjectively measures the rating of significance or impact of an experience on the athlete's adaptation process, while the horizontal line (x-axis) shows the timeline of the adaptive challenge across the years

spent in the host country. The modified rating scale ranged from 1 to 3, where 1 = not significant; 2 = somewhat Significant; and 3 = very significant. Each interview lasted for about an hour and was captured on an audio tape recorder. The biographical maps were completed together with the players as each gave ratings to the experiences and I marked them out with a pen on the grid printed out on paper. Though the timeline was planned to be quarterly (as applied by Schubring et al. (2019) in the mapping of biographical developments and critical health experiences), the players found it easier to think of their transition experiences in seasons and years. I adopted this modified timeline in the mapping process with the players. The players engaged extensively with the research issues and produced a very comprehensive and a rich depth of narratives sufficient for making meaningful interpretations of their transition experiences.

3.3. Data processing and analysis

I transcribed the interviews into text following McMullin's (2021, pp. 5-6) 'naturalized/intelligent verbatim, so that any participants' quotes included in written works are more "readable" and do not include excessive repetitions or verbal fillers' while 'non-verbal cues' (e.g., breathing out) are included to 'convey meaning'. To strengthen the validity of the research process, transcripts were shared with the respondents to confirm that they represented their views during the interviews.

I analysed the data using the thematic analysis approach by Braun and Clarke (2006). This followed an inductive process where the themes emerged from the data without being fit into pre-existing frames (Braun & Clark, 2006). I read through the transcripts to identify and code narratives that represented particular experiences or phenomena relevant to the research aims. Initial codes were manually developed to capture each specific experience. The codes were then grouped under thematic analytical units and sub-units that presented meaningful interpretations of the research questions and objectives and reflections of previous research literature. To give voice

to and empower respondents, interview extracts were used throughout the reporting of the findings. They also provide evidence of an 'easily identifiable example of the issue' captured by a thematic category (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 93).

Obtaining, processing and management of the data followed strict ethical guidelines. Appropriate approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences of the University of Tübingen prior to the interviews. Pseudonyms were used in place of real names and details such as nationality, and present and previous clubs have been left out to protect respondents' anonymity. Possible identifiers of a respondent were redacted where direct quotations were made. The audio records were deleted after the transcription and the text version (with identifiers redacted) would be stored on the Research Data Management Organiser (RDMO) of the University and would be automatically deleted after 10 years.

3.4. Researcher's positionality

My place in the research process and production of knowledge was very important in this study. I am an African, born and brought up in Nigeria but with significant experience of living across countries in Western Europe. This position was important in two ways: gaining access to the respondents and meaning-making. As I noted earlier, I gained access to my potential respondents through an African journalist who reports on African players in German football. Secondly, the first respondent accepted to grant me an interview after learning that I am a doctoral researcher. This enhanced position of strength during our initial contact may have been different if I were an 'ordinary' immigrant such as a refugee or asylum seeker whose presence is problematised, not just in local politics, but by 'elite' migrants themselves. The player's comments clearly showed this when he said that he was granting the interview to 'support' me, since I was 'here doing something good' unlike 'those who come here to commit crimes'.

On the other hand, my cultural knowledge from growing up in an African country and living in Europe provided a useful anchor for the players for recounting their experiences. Both players constantly resorted to accessing my cultural capital and similarity of circumstance as African immigrants in driving home their narratives. They invited me to co-make meaning by the constant use of ‘you know’ and other visual gestures to suggest that I should easily relate to a particular experience. These enabled a very detailed account of their lived experiences and positioned me for a rich interpretation of their subjectively rendered realities.

4. Findings

The findings are presented in two parts. The first part presents the challenges and experiences in transition, while the second part examines the trajectory of transition challenges and how previous transitions impact on latter experiences.

4.1. Transition: experiences and adaptive demands

4.1.1. Pretransition: a mix of emotions

The players’ narrative revealed various psychosocial and emotional states that were ignited prior to their first move abroad. The opportunity of moving to a European club brings with it a mix of emotions including excitement, hope, anxiety, and curiosity all together. Player A’s first move to Europe was interpreted as a huge opportunity for social mobility, both for him and his family, but one which was laced with a lot of uncertainties about life in a new country:

> *Yeah, you know, this was my first time to leave family and say, ok I want to start a life as a man, which was when I was 18. Taking that step was really big for me. I really wanted to help my family, help myself, but I didn’t know how life would be when I leave. Coming into a new country, trying*

> *to settle down. It's not going to be easy, I know, but me travelling out of [home country], I had the joy that okay, I will make my family proud.*

The uncertainties arising from an expected difference in culture and unfamiliar environment generated a sense of curiosity in the athletes to learn about their imminent destinations. Player B, recounting how he felt on learning that he was moving to a club in Germany, says:

> *I have been preparing for my whole life. But the other aspect of life was like, I am coming to Germany, I have to learn some certain things about Germany. Get on google, search about [name of city], the city I am going to. The people and everything.*

The narratives also convey a sense of coming of age which involved a long period of preparation. The move marks a developmental milestone that calls for the display of independence and masculine responsibility to self and family. This sense of responsibility and altruism has been nurtured in the families' struggles in early life that were common in the players' narratives:

> *I was not fortunate enough to have a wealthy family who can provide and sponsor their children to the best of education and every other aspect of their lives.* (Player A)

The opportunity to move to Europe, thus, carries with it the hope that a better life lies ahead for transformation and social mobility for self and family.

4.1.2. Demands and experiences within the sporting context

The players relayed a number of experiences and challenges that were football-related. These include the language barrier, the severity of the weather, the intensity of training, and a new attitude to work. In addition, there is the realisation of one's status in the transfer market which leads to a nuanced crafting of progress in relation to their football careers. Initial barriers to communication

arise from inability to speak the German language. This situation makes it difficult for the players to effectively communicate with teammates and coaches:

> *The language was a little bit challenging for me when the coach speaks and then I have to make a lot of translations from different players.* (Player A)

The weather comes out very strongly as a difficult experience for the players but one which they have to live through and mentally adapt to. The low temperatures impact significantly on their ability to train at their best capacity and slow down their athletic performance:

> *The weather, you know, is smiling in two minutes, and then after 10 seconds, the weather is just so angry. You just see everything change. It starts raining. It's so cold. The summer is so short. The weather is always so challenging. Not just for me, I think for a lot of foreign players from Africa and countries that are really warm.* (Player A)
>
> *I couldn't play when it was so cold, my legs. It was a shock for my body. I cannot move. Sometimes, I go to the dressing room and maybe, I will just start crying and say, 'it is too cold for me and stuff like that.* (Player A)

The German sporting environment brings higher athletic and performance demands. This is most profound when the player is just moving from youth football straight into the very competitive environment of German professional football:

> *I was the youngest in the team and I played in the academy where it was kind of my mates. The intensity was around my level, but I went into, I will say, men's world. The men's world where everything is more hard, fight, you know. People run faster than you. Everything was just aggressive... I had to work hard in the gym and on the pitch, run faster, do everything faster. Do everything hundred percent... Think faster than everyone on the*

> *pitch. Run faster than everyone on the pitch... Even though I am young, it is not about getting bullied on the pitch because I am young.* (Player B)

In Germany, the players were further confronted with what they perceive as different and stricter standards of conduct and stronger sense of responsibility to their jobs:

> *The Germans, especially a lot of German coaches, they don't want indiscipline. Of course, even in [home country], you don't want indiscipline, but there are some coaches who can cope with it. But I think the tolerance in German coaches, in terms of when a player is disciplined and indisciplined, is so big. They cannot cope with it.* (Player A)

There is a strong notion that German football demands a higher level of discipline than what they had previously experienced. This is linked to the players' expressed belief that German football is business-minded and demands an extreme sense of purpose and focus.

In crafting sporting progress and deciding on career moves, the process is not entirely straightforward. For African players, progress is not construed in linear movements from the lower divisions to the top divisions or less prominent to more prominent leagues. It is more nuanced, at times, involving 'demoting' oneself in order to gain entry and opportunity for greater visibility. These may involve several loan transfers or moves to lower divisions:

> *When I had opportunity to come to [name of club], I was really happy about it. They were in the third league then, but I took it as a big opportunity for me... I was playing in the first division in [central European country] but I didn't mind about playing in the third division in Germany because I knew the good is much more than the bad. Play in the third league and try to show your talent and show yourself in order to come to the bigger stage.* (Player A)

The negotiation of career is mediated by a careful location of self in the transfer market hierarchy as an 'unknown quantity' that has to first 'show' and 'prove' self to the elite European football market.

4.1.3. Non sporting demands and experiences

Off the pitch, the players were confronted with a different set of adaptive demands and experiences. At first, they were confronted with learning about their new environment and developing new routines of daily life: Learning about where to get basic supplies and groceries; how to get from one place to another; and how to relate with the people and conform to different social norms:

> *The most important thing for me is knowing the rules. Knowing things around you. It is about awareness… it is a different culture and everything… where you have to get some certain things. Small, small things like how to get your clothes washed; where to get some food; where to go for shopping; groceries; getting your license.* (Player B)
>
> *Another difference is the roads. The signs. The stop signs. How people obey the rules and everything is different in [home country]. Totally different. I don't know how to explain it, but it is different. Similarities? [protracted silence] I can't think of any similarities. Just another world.* (Player B)

The cultural differences between origin and host community are mostly felt in this domain of life for African players who are arriving directly to Germany from their home countries. More significantly, African players in Germany are confronted with a very new way of living - a world where social relationships are very formal and superficial. African communities are mostly characterised by close social ties. Even in the large urban metropolis, residents interact with each other fairly well at a personal level and maintain close relationships through neighbourhood

associations, membership at worship places, socialising at football viewing centres and collectively celebrated events such as weddings and births. In Germany, the situation is very different. The significance of this difference is highlighted by Player A, who spent considerable time comparing Germany with another European country (where he previously played) and his home country:

> *So, in terms of lifestyle, [central European country] are, they are just, they don't have a lot but they are a happy people. They just want to live life, you know. After training, you always have this get-together, go and eat together, eat food, eat meat, eat their local meat, you know. So, the lifestyle there in [central European country] for me is sweet. Then, I come to Germany, the lifestyle, you just focus on what you are doing. You just have to be focused, you know. Every other thing, in terms of [breathes out] living, the people are sweet. Yes, but the lifestyle, everybody is so serious; everybody wants you to focus in what you are doing, which is one difference between [central European country] and Germany. In [central European country], you can, you can be, I don't know the right word to use, you are not so, you don't have to be one hundred percent focused. So, it was a good experience for me that I experienced the lifestyle in [central European country] and the lifestyle in Germany. In Germany you have to be always focused in everything you are doing. You have to be focused in terms of working. Even when you are not working, you still have to be focused. Everything is just focus, focus, focus. I like this mentality, you know, because it is the same mentality that makes me even stronger now, today. So, I am really happy to be in this country because I like their mentality, but I know sometimes you wanna live life but it is too serious. You know what I mean, I don't know how to explain it. They are two different types of countries; [central European country]; they have sea, you have a lot of places to go, but Germany has the resources. They have good people in the country. They want to make new things, but in a*

> *business-minded way. They have a target. [Central European country] have target but they are just lively people. They can make friends with anyone. In Germany, when the people don't know you, it is hard to make that friendship. You know what I mean. When they know you, the friendship is there, but when they don't know you, it is hard to make the friendship. But in [central European country] when they know you and when they don't know you, it is easy to make friendship. That is the difference. And in my country, [home country], it is a lovely country. We are always happy people. We get mad so easily, we fight, and then we reconcile so quick. We are happy again with each other. So, I could say the lifestyle in [central European country] and [home country] can be similar.* (Player A)

While the goal oriented and 'business minded mentality' of German society, and its material rewards, are very well appreciated by the athlete, the cold embrace can be mentally challenging, especially for young African athletes in the early years of migration and with little experience of a moderating stop in another European country. This is depicted in the Player B, who despite having been away from his parents since age 10, when he left home to live in an academy in another town in his country, experienced a different degree of loneliness in Germany:

> *Challenges? One challenge. Even though I have been away from my parents for a long time, but now I just stay alone. You know, it's different. At the academy, I wasn't alone. I wasn't the one cooking for myself. I wasn't alone. You know. But here, I have to come alone in an empty house, whereby I stay alone. Sometimes, I just miss my parents, local food and, maybe, my mum being there and cooking for you. That kind of thing. That's kind of the hardest challenge.* (Player B)

Dealing with an impersonal world at a time a young immigrant needs the warmth and love of close relationships can be quite daunting, not least, while having to simultaneously adapt to new sporting demands.

Transition also involves a process of locating self in society. This entails finding an identity in relation to the rest of society and apportioning value to self with reference to prevailing cultural frames of belonging. As Weinreich (2009, p. 135) notes, immigrants 'develop a sense of identity with a biographical past and an aspirational self desired to be implemented in the future'. In narrating his experience with the difficult weather, Player A's self-characterisation of his difference to the native population emerges:

> *I think my body is getting used to it like a real German guy, but not a hundred percent German guy or fifty percent German guy at the moment. Four years is not enough to be a real German guy. I still need a lot of years. Let's see If I stay in Germany for a longer period, then, I can become a complete German boy with the weather.*

Here, Player A establishes his otherness while leaving open the possibility of achieving full integration (or assimilation?) as a 'complete German boy'. On the other hand, he assigns a value to his belonging as well as defines himself in relation to other immigrants from his home region and ethnicity by stating that he granted me the interview because I was 'here doing something good' and 'not like the others here committing crime'. By this, Player A makes a claim that connotes several meanings: Firstly, to belong, the African immigrant has to be 'seen' as making a positive contribution to German society; Secondly, his form of belonging (and mine) is valuable and welcome; Thirdly, that the presence of some 'other' is unwelcome. However, this narrative only appropriates local frames of reference in relation to certain segments of the unwanted other and mirrors the contemporary politics and problematisation of the presence of the other, especially refugees and asylum seekers; Fourthly, the African immigrant bears a burden of an ambassador of his ethnic community and his misconduct 'demeans' not him as an individual, but his group; Fifthly, there is a difference in difference in immigrants' self-characterisation. Through the

variations in value attached to self and fellow others, immigrants interpret their individual circumstances as unique rather than representing that of a cultural monolith.

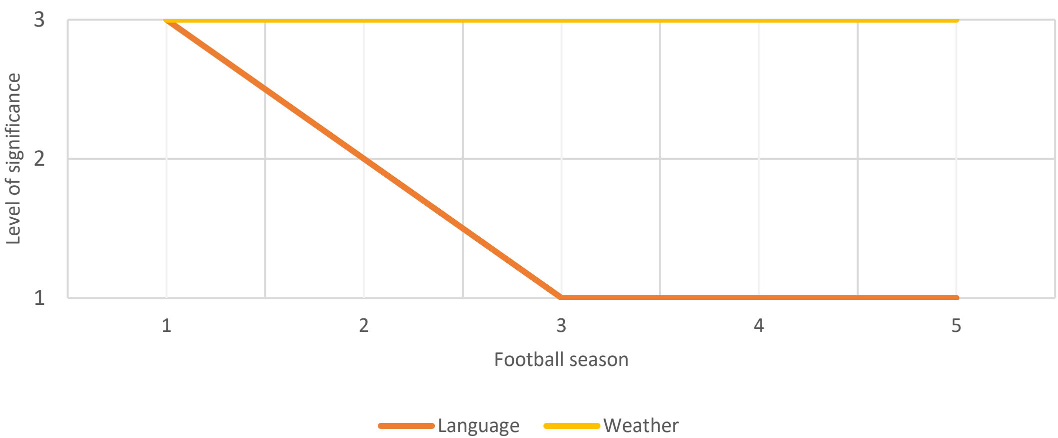
4.2. Transition: trajectories and impacts

4.2.1. Trajectories of adaptive challenges

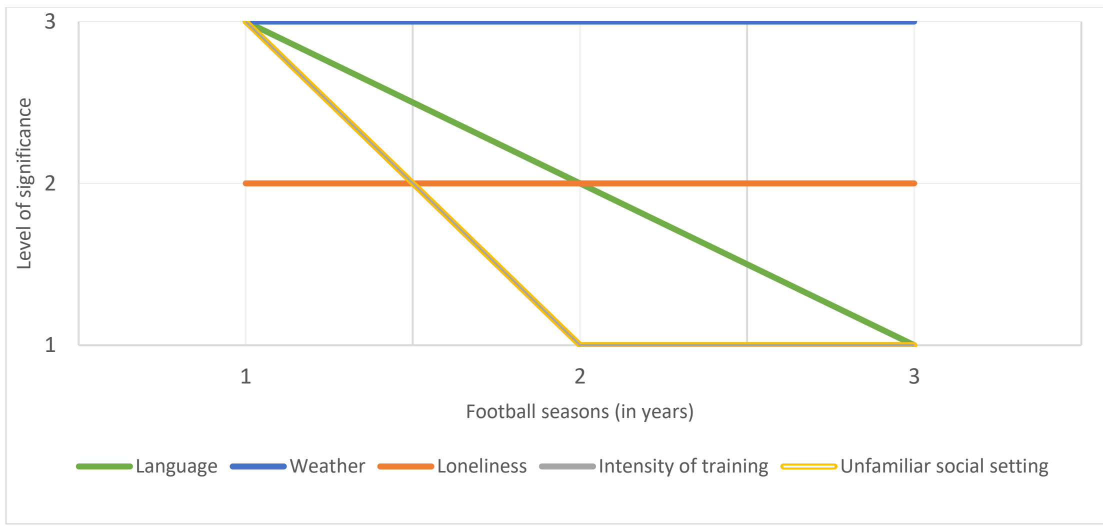
Adaptive challenges were observed to show variations in decline, adaptation and consistency. The trajectories of adaptive demands produced by the players' mapping of their challenges showed different courses for different challenges. Weather as a challenge appeared to be the most significant in terms of rating and also the most consistent in terms of time, remaining very significant for both players in the first and subsequent years. For Player B, loneliness remained relatively high and consistent in both the first and subsequent years. Language barriers posed a significant challenge in the first year and consistently declined to 'not significant' in the second and subsequent years for both players. The intensity of training was only 'significant' in the first year and 'not significant' in the subsequent years for Player B. Adapting to new social and cultural demands was 'significant' for Player B in the first year but declined in the second and third years to 'somewhat significant' and 'not significant' respectively.

Figure 1: Trajectories of adaptive challenges (adapted from the mapping grid)

Player A



Player B



4.2.2. Impacts of previous transitions and personal biography

The experience of transition appeared to be moderated by previous transitions and the individual athlete's biography. Firstly, while Player A moved from his home country to a central European country before arriving in Germany (a five year stay pre-transfer to Germany), Player B moved

directly from his home country to Germany. Secondly, Player A arrived in Germany in his mid-twenties while Player B arrived in Germany in his teens. Thirdly, Player A is married and has a child while the Player B lives alone. The impact of the above differences in migration and personal history was observed in the challenges that they faced and the trajectories of the challenges. Player A expressed much fewer adaptive challenges than Player B. Unlike Player B, though Player A found the impersonal nature of relationships uncomfortable, he had little complaints about loneliness since he had a family. In addition, Player A did not find the intensity of training a challenge, having played in a first division club in Europe for some years before arriving in Germany and also being older at the time of his arrival. Player A also did not find the social and physical environment unfamiliar, having lived in Europe for five years prior to moving to Germany.

However, for both players, these challenges, whether consistent or declining, are what they have to live through by finding ways of adapting or new anchors of meaning in order to realise their sporting careers:

> *No, the weather, even though it is cold, everyone gets cold. Even those who were born here get cold, but it's not about how cold it is but how comfortable you get. During the cold, when you get your jacket on, the kind of cloth that you get on and you won't feel that kind of cold.* (Player B)

> *I get used to it. I train through it, even though there are some days you cry through it. Yeah, you know, it never breaks me down, you know.* (Player A)

5. Discussion

The findings in this study are in line with the literature on cultural transitions in sports and also advance our current understanding of transition experiences of elite athletes. Pre-transition as a period that ignites certain psychosocial and emotional states corroborates the finding of Ryba et al. (2016) that pre-transition produces psychosocial stress about the destination. The current paper advances this forward by demonstrating that the emotions also include excitement and hope arising from the emerging opportunities for mobility and transformation for self and family.

Within the sporting context, the experiences and adaptive challenges found in this study are corroborated by previous literature including language barrier (Ryba et al., 2016; Samuel et al., 2020), the weather (Samuel et al., 2020; Brandão & Vieira, 2013) and the intensity of training (Samuel et al., 2020; Schinke et al., 2016). However, the finding related to adapting to a new attitude to work that demands higher discipline sheds a more nuanced light on previous literature on othering. Most studies highlight the external process of othering where black athletes are stereotyped based on their physical attributes and seen to be less gifted with cognitive skills and less cultured to discipline (Jowett & Frost, 2007; Khomutova, 2016). The finding in this study shows that immigrant players may be actively involved in the production or reproduction of such assumed differences as shown in the players' narrative that German football demands a higher level of discipline than is expected in their home countries. Ungruhe (2013) and Agergaard and Ungruhe (2016) made similar argument that African players tap into prevailing local references such as the 'playful' but not 'disciplined' African player and the 'business-minded' and 'success-oriented' culture of European football in interpreting their experiences and locating self in German football. The finding on how African players locate self in the transfer market expands on the work of Poli (2006) who has extensively described the disproportionate representation of African

players in the lower divisions of European football in comparison to other regions. This study illustrates that this is much as a result of structural factors, as argued by Poli, as it is the expression of agency as African players manoeuvre these barriers to achieve mobility by exploiting the spaces that validate their value while at the same time providing them visibility in the European football transfer market.

Outside of the sporting context, the findings made in this paper are also supported by literature. The new cultural environment that confronts the athletes in the early stages of migration and the need to develop new routines of daily life is corroborated by Ryba et al. (2016) and Schinke et al. (2013). The high degree of formality in social relationships and the associated loneliness that is experienced by the athletes is supported by Brandão and Vieira (2013) and Ryba et al. (2016). The current study, however, further highlights how this can be particularly challenging for young athletes with little experience of migration and unaccompanied by their family.

This paper makes an important finding by showing that transition involves a process of locating oneself in society. Most importantly, it shows how ‘elite’ African athletes (high status immigrants) self-characterise in relation to the rest of society and fellow ethnic others. This difference in difference is the process through which immigrants accord value to self and make claims of belonging. However, the expression of difference in difference is embedded within local political discourses of the other, which create the good and the bad immigrant (Galyga et al., 2019; d’Haenens & Joris, 2019). Michelini (2021) shows that in Germany, discourses in sports reporting bear both the empowering and oppressive characterisation of the other. While successful athletes with a refugee or immigrant background are projected as those ‘who embody the destiny of refugees and the possibility of redemption’, the ordinary immigrant is faced with the ‘negative stereotypes of male, criminal and sexual perpetrator refugees’ (Michelini, 2021, p. 270). van

Campenhout and van Houtumb (2021, pp. 1930-1931) write that for immigrants, acceptance as full members of German society is a moralised process where, in addition to formal requirements, immigrants have to conform to 'invisible moral norms and (cultural) markers, which are socially constructed by the established "insiders", that "outsiders" have to accumulate'. It is within this framework of 'good and bad' immigrants and 'deserving and undeserving' other, that high status immigrants (elite athletes) strategically distance themselves from the 'others here committing crimes' while making a claim for acceptance and belonging.

Findings in this paper demonstrate that the trajectories of transition challenges show both decline, adaptation and consistency. This fills some gaps in the Cultural Transition Model (Ryba et al., 2016, p. 11) by giving deeper insights into the temporal trajectories of adaptive challenges. Findings in this study show that given adaptive demands vary across individuals and follow different temporal trajectories. While some adaptive challenges may last a few months, others may last several years and vary from one individual to another. These individual variations may be accounted for by peculiar biographies such as migration history, marital and family situation, and age. On the other hand, this finding challenges Berry's (1997, p. 13) claim that the persistence of an adaptive challenge leads to 'psychopathology' and a lack of fit that may stall the individual's integration. The challenges posed by the weather remained very significant across all the years for both Player A and Player B who are in the fifth and third years of their stay, respectively. Loneliness remained consistently at the same relatively high level for Player B. Despite the persistence of these adaptive challenges, both players have been able to rationalise their struggles and sustain their sporting progress. 'Rationalisation', write Schubring and Thiel (2014, p. 312), 'denotes the practice of departing from the experience-based perspective in favour of a quasi-objective perspective'. Seiberth et al. (2017) explain that that in sports-related decision-making,

athletes with a migrant background prioritise their athletic identity over other aspects of their self-identity. Behaviour, in this regard, becomes 'functional', based on sporting success and progress. On the other hand, Ryba et al. (Ryba et al., 2016, p. 11) note that, 'athletic transmigrants' economic success and social status does not depend exclusively on rapid acculturation and assimilation into the host society'.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, through a cross-cultural development approach, I examined the experiences that elite athletes from Africa encounter in the process of transition into German football and society and how these are shaped by the individual athletes' history and biography. The experiences of African athletes found in this study include: pre-transition emotions (excitement, hope, anxiety and curiosity); experiences within the sporting domain (language barrier, the severity of the weather, the intensity of training, a new attitude to work and a nuanced crafting of career progression); and experiences outside the sporting domain (adjusting to a new cultural environment, a high degree of formality in social relationships, loneliness and locating self in society).

This study brings new insights to our understanding of the trajectories of adaptive demands in transition by demonstrating that adaptive challenges may follow a path of decline, adaptation, or consistency and may vary in manifestation from individual to individual. It also shows that the persistence of an adaptive challenge may not necessarily halt the progression of an athletic career as migrant footballers' athletic identity and objective-centred perspective take pre-eminence in transition.

Focusing on a two-case narrative presents many strengths but also a few weaknesses. The two cases made it possible for a detailed account of the biography of the athletes, which would have

been more difficult with a larger cohort. This biographical context, made possible, a depth in the interpretation of the variations in adaptation experiences and trajectories. However, while this added much depth to analysis and meaning-making, it may have also limited the range of experiences observed. Besides, the perspective of team members such as coaches and teammates could add additional depth to the narratives of the players. Other studies may integrate these perspectives for an even richer discussion of the research issue. Similarly, my position in the research process was a significant strength with a few weaknesses. My cultural capital enabled me to gain access, and also for the players, to more easily relay their experiences. It enabled them to develop trust in me to express what would have, otherwise, been difficult to relay to someone considered different. Besides, my similarity of experiences contributed to the depth of interpretation and meaning-making. On the other hand, my emersion in the context posed a risk of overlooking perspectives that an 'outsider' may have observed.

The three-point rating scale of the significance of transition challenges adopted in this study made it easier for the players to apply the ratings but may have, to some degree, limited the insight generated on the trajectories of experiences. Schubring et al. (2019) used a ten-point grading scale and using the same may have yielded slightly different curves as slight changes in significance may be captured to add more nuance to the trajectories of experiences. Subsequent studies that adopt this grid to study cultural transitions in sports may consider this.

Conflict of interest declaration

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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5.4. Article 3: ‘I get used to it, I train through it, even though there are some days you cry through it’: Coping behaviours and social support of elite African footballers in transnational transition

Ikechukwu Ejekwumadu & Ansgar Thiel (manuscript) ‘I get used to it, I train through it, even though there are some days you cry through it’: Coping behaviours and social support of elite African footballers in transnational transition. Manuscript submitted to *Psychology of Sport and Exercise.*

This paper examined the ways in which transnational African players in Germany cope with and adapt to the challenges arising from the differences in culture between their origin and the context of German society. It explores coping behaviours and adaptive practices related to both sporting and general cultural contexts. It also examined the nature of support that the players receive from their clubs and whether such support is provided in the manner that is most beneficial to the needs of the athletes.

‘I get used to it, I train through it, even though there are some days you cry through it’: Coping behaviours and social support of elite African footballers in transnational transition

Highlights:

- African football academies influencing transition for African athletes in Europe.
- Cultural learning a major strategy for acquiring competencies useful in adaptation.
- Athletes’ adaptation to transition involves a reconstitution of self-identity.
- Clubs provide social support to players, in some cases, may not fit players’ circumstance.

Abstract: This study examined the coping and adaptation practices and experience of social support of two elite transnational African athletes in the process of transition into German football and society through qualitative interviews. The findings highlighted the structural and subjective adaptive and coping practices of African athletes. These include: socialisation within a European football habitus; cultural learning; multilocal belonging; rationalisation and acceptance of circumstance; and reconstitution of self-identity. It also highlighted the important role of various forms of social support received from their clubs.

Key words: coping behavior; cultural transition; adaptation; social support; African footballers

Introduction

Elite African players are a major group in the growing international football talent market, especially in Europe (Poli et al., 2021). This paper examines their adaptation and experience of social support in the process of transition into German football and society. International transfers of professional footballers bring about disruptions to familiar norms and established networks and routines of everyday life which necessitate adaptive and coping behaviours to changing football cultures and social settings (Ryba et al., 2016). These adaptive demands emerge at various phases

of the transition process, beginning from the period athletes start to consider a relocation through their stay in their host society and elicit different forms of psychosocial and behavioural changes (Ryba et al., 2016).

Ryba et al. (2016) explain that the first set of adaptive demands are triggered by the anxiety of an imminent future in an unfamiliar setting as athletes begin to consider relocation. At the destination, a different set of challenges emerge that stimulate different behavioural changes and adaptive practices. Athletes have to settle into the new environment and face the challenge of finding housing and accessing various services. Other challenges include the disruptions to the familiar frames of meaning-making (Schinke et al., 2013; Ryba et al., 2016), loneliness and homesickness (Brandão & Vieira, 2013) and the experience of racialised othering (Ungruhe, 2013; Agergaard & Ungruhe, 2016; Khomutova, 2016). Nevertheless, studies of cultural and transnational transition in elite sports have devoted more attention to explaining the adaptive demands of migrant athletes while paying lesser attention to their coping practices and the support systems enabling adaptation and career continuity.

Only a few studies have explored coping and adaptive behaviours and social support that athletes leverage on in the process of transnational transition. Coping behaviour consists of processes and actions set in motion by an individual to manage a stressful experience while adaptive behaviour refers to attempts by an individual to establish new assumptions of the world and behavioural patterns to fit new realities (Åsa et al., 2016). Coping and adaptive behaviours are mediated by individual personality and capabilities, social relationships, social norms, and structural positions of resources and power (Schubring & Thiel, 2014; Gerhardt, 1979). Coping and adaptive behaviours identified in previous studies include psychosocial adjustments and reconstructions of meaning, cultural learning, and re-embedding into familiar social groups (Schinke et al., 2013;

Ryba et al., 2016). Sources of social support include family and friends (Ryba et al., 2016), intermediaries and personal managers (Poli, 2010) as well as various support athletes receive from members of their clubs (Schinke et al., 2007; Duchesne et al., 2011; Ryba et al., 2016). However, previous literature does not provide details about the unique ways such adaptive practices and social support are enacted and experienced among specific cultural groups to achieve stability, integration and career continuity. This is important given that transition and adaptation are culturally mediated experiences (Drayton, 2014). On the other hand, though some studies have pointed out the various social support that athletes receive from their clubs, there is little known about athletes' subjective experiences of the social support they receive during transnational transition and how such support may differently be provided to achieve better outcomes. This is especially so for elite African footballers in Europe, whose adaptive practices and social support experiences in transition are not adequately understood.

Against the above gap in literature, this paper explores the adaptive behaviours and experience of social support of elite African athletes in their transition into German football and society. It examines the following questions: a) What are the adaptive practices and coping behaviours that enable African footballers in managing transition demands from German football and culture? b) What are the various forms of social support that they receive from their clubs in navigating through transition, and what are the athletes' subjective appraisals of such support?

The holistic approach of the human adaptation to transition model (Schlossberg, 1981) which centres the role of situational, personal, and environmental factors, provides a suitable framework for examining the adaptive behaviours and experience of social support of athletes in transition. The next section expands on the theoretical framework that guided this research.

2. Coping with and adapting to transitions in sports: A human adaptation to transition approach

The human adaptation to transition model has been used to study various types of experiences of transition across athletes' careers. Transitions, Schlossberg (1981, p. 5) writes, 'occur when an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behaviour and relationships'. For professional athletes, these may arise as a result of changes related to career or competition level (e.g., Pummell et al., 2008), significant events such as injuries (e.g., Ivarsson et al., 2018), interclub or transnational transfers (e.g., Agergaard & Ryba, 2014), and the termination of the athletic career (e.g., Park et al., 2012). Athletic transitions are significant experiences that may bring about dislocations to athletes' self-identity (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007), cultural frames of meaning-making (Ryba et al., 2016) and routines of daily life and networks of relationships (Agergaard & Ryba, 2014). These changes to the established frames of the self and the environment are stressful experiences that may necessitate adjustments to individual personality and relationships to enable adaptation and career continuity (Schlossberg, 1981).

Coping and adaptation are both responses to changes to the individual's established experience of and assumptions about self and the social world. Andersson and Willebrand (2003, p. 97) write that coping behaviours are 'thoughts and behaviours aimed at dealing with stress' and are relatively 'transient reactions that change with circumstances'. On the other hand, Schlossberg (1981, p. 7) describes adaptation as 'a process during which an individual moves from being totally preoccupied with the transition to integrating the transition into his or her life'. It comprises of attempts to establish a new balance between a previous life schema and a new one. Schlossberg contends that individuals vary in the ways they react to transition, and that the same person may

react in different ways to the same changes at different times of the life course. These reactions may depend on three broad factors, namely: the situation, the person, and the environment (Schlossberg, 1981). In athletes' transnational transition, Schlossberg's (1981, p. 5) framework may be related to a) 'the characteristics of a particular transition' (e.g., change in competition level, first or subsequent transition experience, motivations, permanent or loan transfers, level of control over transition demands); b) 'the characteristics of the pre and post-transition environments' (e.g., social norms, language, weather, availability of social support); and c) 'the characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition' (e.g., gender, career stage, relationship status, language competencies, previous transition experience, self-competence and self-identity). These factors constitute a composite of resources or deficits whose balance determines the ease of adaptation to the transition (Schlossberg, 1981). For instance, an athlete who had a strong motivation to migrate to the new country, has previous experience of transnational transfer, speaks the language of the new country, has a dominant athletic identity, and receives adequate social support from his club is more likely to cope with and adapt better to a transnational transition than a player that is deficient in the above.

In the study of athletes' transnational transitions, the characteristics of the pre and post-transition environments' and the characteristics of the individual have received the most focus. Pre-transition environment has mostly been conceptualised in terms of certain socialisation embodying given norms, world views, and relationships oriented to life in given cultural settings (Ryba et al., 2016). These invariably have impacts on the individual's characteristics, such as attitudes and other social competencies, and interact with the cultural aspects of the post-transition environment to influence athletes' adaptation experiences and outcomes (Schlossberg, 1981). For African players, being

formed in a different habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) may affect the balance of resources to deficits in the adaptation to transition in a European setting.

The characteristics of the post-transition environment related to social support have also been emphasized in adaptation to transition. Willard and Lavallee (2016, p. 268) explain that social support in sport transition ‘constitutes the network of people providing the athlete with both structural and functional support’ while Bianco and Eklund (2001, p. 85) describe it as ‘social interactions aimed at inducing positive outcomes’. These include interactions, which may be deliberate or not, with family and friends, intermediaries and personal managers, members of the club and other groups to which athletes belong that support their adaptation to transition. Brown et al. (2018, p. 72) identified three dimensions of social support in sport transitions including the structural (composition and quality), the functional (actual social exchanges provided and received) and the appraisal (assessments of availability and quality of support). The functional dimension of social support, they explain, may be in the form of ‘emotional support (e.g., displays of intimacy or encouragement), informational support (e.g., advice, guidance, and suggestions), esteem support (e.g., that designed to strengthen an individual's sense of competence), and tangible support (e.g., concrete assistance, such as financial support)’ (Brown et al., 2018, p. 72). From an appraisal dimension, athletes may have varied subjective evaluations of the social support they receive from their clubs during transitions with differing levels of satisfaction with available and received support (Brown & Potrac, 2009). Brown et al. (2018) underscored the importance of social support noting that athletes who felt supported experienced smoother transitions than those who did not and that those who found it difficult to seek and ask for support found transition more distressing.

The peculiarities of the transition, the individual characteristics and resources, and the environment of transition also determine the coping behaviour that athletes adopt (Schlossberg, 1981). Henson et al. (2012, p. 18) explained coping behaviour as ‘action or set of actions taken in dealing with stressful or threatening situations in an attempt to reduce stress and minimize personal or interpersonal conflict’. The dislocations of meaningful frames of reference arising from migration constitute stressful situations that individuals in transition must address for continued functional life (Berry, 1997). Coping and adaptive behaviours ‘often result in new networks of relationships, new behaviours and new self-perceptions’ (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 2) to enable athletes to achieve a new balance. To this regard, athletes may ‘activate psychosocial mobility that is necessary for navigating diverse meaning systems and negotiating cultural practices’ (Ryba et al., 2016, p. 7), rationalise experiences and regulate emotions (Johnson et al., 2020), construct life’s purpose along an athletic identity (Ryba et al., 2015), build new relationships with teammates (Schinke et al., 2013), reconnect with familiar social groups or maintain a multi-spatial embeddedness between origin and settlement (Agergaard & Ryba, 2014; Ryba & Stambulova, 2013). A lot of the capabilities required for adaptation are acquired through culture learning (Ryba et al., 2016), which involves the individual learning social competencies such as language, attitudes and norms of interpersonal relationship ‘through another’ (Tomasello et al., 1993, p. 496) or others.

Applying the human adaptation to transition model, this paper examines the various coping behaviours as well as the social support from clubs that shape African athletes’ adaptation to transnational transition within the German context. We expect all three factors of Schlossberg’s (1981) framework - the characteristics of a particular transition, of the pre and post-transition environments and of the individual – to play influential roles. In the next section, we elaborate on the methodology that guided the research.

3. Methods

3.1. Selection criteria and study participants

Based on the study objective, which was to examine the coping and adaptive behaviours and social support experiences in transition of elite African athletes in German football, only participants who met the selection criteria were included in the study as possible respondents. To be eligible for selection, a player must a) be registered in a club in the first two divisions of the German professional football league for at least a football season; b) be born and or raised in a sub-Saharan African country and have spent the early years of his life and formative years of football career in his home country up until, at the least, the year of his 16th birthday; c) represent or is eligible to represent a national team of a sub-Saharan African country and does not currently represent a youth team of a football association of a country other than one in sub-Saharan Africa. 19 players met the selection criteria. Since coping and adaptation are responses to transition (Schlossberg, 1981), the criteria above ensured that any player selected as a respondent would have passed through cultural transition and adaptation that this research is interested in understanding and explaining.

In line with Schlossberg's (1981) human adaptation to transition framework, two players whose biographies provided both points of contrast as well similarity were engaged in interviews to explore and harness qualitatively rich data about their individual life stories (Smith, 2018) which is essential in contextualising and interpreting a subjectively experienced transition and adaptation process. Both athletes had over 11 years of combined professional experience in Europe and had been in Germany for a cumulative period of over six years. While the first respondent previously played in a central European country for five years before his transfer to Germany, the second moved directly from his home country to Germany. The first respondent had played for only one

club in Germany and was in his fifth season, whereas the second was in his third season and second club. In addition, the first respondent was married with a child while the second was single. Both athletes were also very committed to the study and discussing their experiences in detail and were able to relay very detailed accounts of their transition and adaptation experiences.

3.2. Data collection

Data were collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews using an interview guide to direct the discussion. The interviews were conducted in October 2021 at locations chosen by the respondents. Both respondents were very comfortable conversing in English which was used for the interviews. They were asked questions about their family and early life, first memories of football engagement and when they became serious with the game, leaving home for a professional career, relocation abroad, the challenges they faced, how they coped and the social support they received. Emergent issues determined the direction of further probing during the respective interviews.

3.3. Data processing and analysis

The audio files were transcribed following McMullin's (2021) 'naturalized/intelligent verbatim' that prioritises meaning over strict rendering of every spoken word. In this way, while some instances of repeated words may be left out, gestures, laughter, moments of silence and facial expressions may be included to enhance understanding and meaning-making. The six steps of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) were used to analyse the data. This started with the reading and rereading of the transcripts so as to familiarize with the data while making notes of important initial observations. After getting acquainted with the data, initial codes were developed: a process where a code captured an observation relevant to the theoretical framework and the

research questions. In other words, ‘a theoretical thematic analysis rather than an inductive one’ (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 3355). Codes that emerged from the first interview were searched for in the second interview while also exploring for new ones. The next process was to search for themes which involved finding significant patterns across the data and the codes that fit into them. This is followed by reviewing the themes to make sure that there were no overlaps or there was sufficient data to support a theme as well as the sub-themes within a general theme. Themes were then refined in a way that portrayed a coherent and unified story of the data and were also named to convey a clear understanding of the phenomenon they describe. Following Maguire and Delahunt (2017), the themes were organised at two levels – the general themes (which derive from specific research questions and describe broad but closely related themes) and the sub-themes (which describe specific experiences, behaviours, practices, or opinions within a general theme). For instance, the general theme, appraisal of support, which explained the athletes’ subjective evaluation of the support received from their clubs is further organised under two sub-themes, namely ‘feeling supported’ and ‘lack of fit’. The reporting concludes the process by organising the sequence of the narrative and supporting themes with excerpts of the data which served the purpose of giving credence to interpretation and empowering the voices of the athletes as co-constructors of meaning.

3.4. Research ethics

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences of the University of Tübingen (Reference: A2.5.4-158_ns). The respondents were briefed about the purpose of the study and the use of the data produced as well as their responsibilities and rights. Though consent forms were provided, the respondents rather gave verbal consent. However, WhatsApp messages exchanged between the first author and the respondents before and after the

interviews and the interview transcripts that were shared with them provided further evidence of consent and commitment to the study. Throughout the report, real names were replaced with respondent tags and details such as nationality, and present and previous clubs were not disclosed. The audio records of the interview were deleted after the transcription and the text version (with identifiers redacted) would be stored on the Research Data Management Organiser (RDMO) of the University for 10 years.

The results, which are organised under the general themes and sub-themes, are presented in the following section.

4. Results

Overall, three general themes emerged from the data analysis. These were: adaptation and coping, social support and appraisal of support. In the sections that follow, each of these general themes and their sub-themes will be discussed in detail.

Table 1: Thematic map

General theme (GT)	Sub-theme
GT1: Adaptation and coping	• Socialisation within a European football habitus • Culture learning • Multilocal belonging • Rationalisation and acceptance of circumstance • Reconstitution of self-identity
GT2: Social support	• Learning support • Psychosocial support
GT3: Appraisal of support	• Feeling supported • Lack of fit

4.1. Adaptation and coping

This theme explains the structures, practices and coping behaviours by which African athletes manage adaptation to transition in German football and society. Five sub-themes were identified under this general theme, namely: *socialisation within a European football habitus; culture learning; multilocal belonging; rationalisation and acceptance of circumstance; and reconstitution of self-identity*. While the first relates to the structures of the football economy, the rest are associated primarily with the agency of the athletes. The first sub-theme emphasises how the blurring differences in football culture between European and African talent development systems have made transition for African athletes more relatable. Nevertheless, the respondents still encountered a number of adaptive demands. These arose from other cultural differences (e.g. language), the weather, ruptures of established relationships and loneliness, settling into a new environment and establishing new routines of daily life and more intense athletic demands which the players manage through the relevant practice or behaviour captured by the other sub-themes.

4.1.1. Socialisation within a European football habitus

The prevailing systems for the training and development of young elite African talent have shifted some aspects of the transition and adaptation experience retrospectively through processes that replicate European football talent development cultures on African soil. In recent years, elite African football talent exports have progressively emerged from structured academies rather than amateur high school sports or informal street football. Many of the youth exports start at these academies from a very young age, before or during puberty, unlike in the past when many only started structured football in late teenage years or adulthood. Today, a significant number of elite African talents exported to Europe are developed in football academies with standard grass pitches, qualified coaches, psychologists, nutritionists, and a host of other professionals similar to those of

the contemporary European football economy. From l'institut Diambars and Académie Génération Foot in Senegal to the Right to Dream Academy in Ghana, African football talent is increasingly educated in a European football habitus.

The impact on sporting adaptation on arrival in Europe for African footballers is significant. The players learn to live and behave like professionals prior to migration. Though Player B complained about the intensity of training at the time he first arrived (reason being that he had only moved from youth football to a professional level), when asked about how he prepared on learning about his imminent move abroad or what he had to change about himself to fit into life at his new club in Germany, he emphasised how his enrolment into a residential football academy at the age of 10, seven hours drive from where his family lived, prepared him for the life that he was living:

> *In terms of football, I didn't really have to prepare much because I have been preparing this for my whole life. At the age of 10, when I went to the academy, this was what I was looking for; to be a professional player. I know what I had to do; work hard, play that kind of football. It wasn't like any preparation like a last-minute preparation, like you have to work hard. I have been preparing for my whole life.* (Player B)

> *With me, I would say there is nothing really to change about me. I kind of learnt all these when I was young. The academy helped me to prepare for the life that I am now living. I'm just used to waking up by myself in the academy in time, getting things done, making sure that I'm on time for everything. I didn't have to change anything really to fit into this world. I never had to.* (Player B)

Though some aspects of the experience may differ, from a footballing perspective, the 'culture' differences are blurring as academies increasingly structure their technical and psychosocial curriculum, diet and operational procedures to fit the systems of European club football. For

instance, food is one of the challenges that athletes in transnational transition in many circumstances struggle to adapt to but when asked about this, Player B emphasised how his diet in the academy in his home country was similar to what he was provided in Germany:

> *Food here? In the academy, we kind of get food like healthy, you know. People say healthy food. As a professional player you need to eat healthy. That was the kind of food we were getting at the academy. So, I will say it was kind of similar to here. I am in that kind of lane whereby people eat healthy. The food I was getting was healthy. I came here and it was kind of similar food I was getting, so it wasn't a challenge for me getting used to the food. It was the same healthy food; potatoes, salad, cucumber and that kind of thing.*

On the other hand, the increasing formation of African football talent within residential academies has significant consequences later for the athletes' development of self-identity and how they manage other post-transition environment challenges.

4.1.2. Culture learning

Culture learning involves acquiring new psychosocial competencies useful for life in the new environment. It involves acquiring knowledge and skills, such as learning a language, attitudes and norms of interpersonal conduct, both within the club and the wider society. This mostly begins even before migration, when the players begin to show curiosity about their future life. At this time, they rely a lot on technology to find out about the city, the people and what life is like in the place. After noting that football-wise he had nothing to change about himself, Player B remarked that he still needed to learn about his future community:

> *But the other aspect of life was like, I am coming to Germany, I have to learn some certain things about Germany. Get on google, search about [name of city], the city I am going to. The people and everything. That was*

that kind of aspect that I googled to know what I am coming to. You have to know where you are going to, to get prepared for that. I knew that I need to speak German. Anyway, everyone speaks German in Germany, but the kind of people that they are.

In the early days of transition, the athletes make a lot of effort towards getting acquainted with their new environment and learning the language in order to fit into life at the club and in the society. While culture learning may happen through formal arrangements such as language classes provided by the club as reported by both Player A and Player B, it mostly happens through peer-to-peer learning where teammates provide players with information, guidance, advice and opportunities for learning by observation:

> *Language, it was more of a visual thing. I started from the pitch. If you want to start something, you start step by step. That is the easiest way. I started from the pitch with the visual stuff. When someone is doing a visual thing, it makes it easier to understand what he is doing. I started on the pitch, getting my ears down and looking around to see what people are doing and saying, translate it in my head… Maybe, if someone does something or says something, I will be like, okay, he does this, so it means this and that… In the Kabine [dressing room] too. Talking to people and asking, what does this mean? When someone asks you and, maybe, you don't get it, or someone speaking says something to someone, I wanna know what it is. It is easier for me to say: Hi, what was it? What did he say? What's the meaning of this? That kind of thing. To get it in my head the next time and the pronunciation.* (Player B)

> *I look at the Germans, how they do their things and I have to adapt to it and do exactly like them, and now, I think I am pretty doing good* (Player A)

Culture learning is also a form of social capital acquisition involving building a new network of relationships, understanding the physical environment and learning the routines of daily life.

4.1.3. Multilocal belonging

Athletes try to deal with the ruptures of established relationships created by leaving friends and family behind and the loneliness or homesickness that follows it through cultivating a multilocal belonging of being 'here' and 'there' simultaneously. While new relationships might develop (e.g., Player A got married in Germany) the players maintained old ties with family and friends back home through regular communication:

> *You can't cope about missing someone or missing something. I don't know how to cope with that. [breathes out] get myself occupied, calling them, FaceTime, WhatsApp videos. It is not the same as having them near you, but that's the kind of thing I cope with.* (Player B)
>
> *No, no, no. Everywhere I go, my family is number one for me. They are always with me because they keep me moving. They are the ones who push me when I am mentally down. They are the ones when I think about my family, I am always motivated. When I think about my child, my wife, parents, my brothers. It always makes me feel strong.* (Player A)

The players kept in touch with events in their homeland through social media and maintained their belonging through visits back home during off-season periods, material support of family and friends and charity initiatives within their communities, and participation in the national football teams. Preserving a connection with the homeland and loved ones helped the athletes maintain their emotional balance and life purpose.

4.1.4. Rationalisation and acceptance of circumstance

As a coping strategy for difficult situations, especially where they had little to no control of the situation, the players tried to manage the challenge by rationalising and accepting what they were experiencing as either an inevitable part of their professional life or a situation that wasn't exclusive to them. For instance, both players complained about the severity of the weather and how it had made life uncomfortable for them in Germany, nevertheless, normalised it as either part of the job that they had to live with or what others including native Germans also go through:

> *The weather, even though it is cold, everyone gets cold. Even those who were born here get cold.* (Player B)
>
> *I get used to it. I train through it, even though there are some days you cry through it. Yeah, you know, it never breaks me down. It is tough, the weather here in Germany is tough. You can see for yourself, so you know what I mean. But I have lived through it now. I try to adapt to it, and get used to it for the past four years.* (Player A)

Previous and similar transnational transitions may also prepare the athlete for the acceptance of certain realities such as training and playing in very uncomfortable weather conditions. For instance, Player A's five year stay in central Europe was important in accepting that severe weather was a situation he would have to deal with throughout his stay and career in Europe:

> *I couldn't play when it was so cold. My legs, it was a shock for my body. I cannot move. Sometimes, I go to the dressing room and maybe, I will just start crying and say, it is too cold for me and stuff like that. And then, I get used to it, I get used to it, and it becomes a lifestyle. And then, just in Europe playing in every weather.* (Player A)

4.1.5. Reconstitution of self-identity

The players' adaptation to transition also involved a change in the perception of self or the integration of new elements into their self-concept. This happened across two dimensions: the prioritisation of the athletic identity and the reconstruction of the self as a breadwinner. In the first, the athletes began to define their lived experience within the framework of their careers and refocus their attention, energy and emotions towards achieving sporting progress:

> *Yeah, there are certain things that I adapted to that helped me in order to play and live happily. Dedication. The dedication was there for me. The discipline was there for me to want to do the right thing. I can be a joker, but when I enter the field, I wanna give my best. I wanna learn. I wanna see that I do the right thing.* (Player A)

Here, the players draw from their formation in the habitus of organised professional sport with an emphasis on concepts such as 'dedication', 'discipline' and 'focus' which are fundamental psychological attributes of the athletic self. Directing attention towards the growth of the athletic self also leads to the revaluation of old ties and relationships. By preoccupying their minds and time with advancing the athletic self, some other competing demands were shed off or diminished in attention:

> *Friends, it's more like less time to get on the phone because I need to focus here and it is more like a busy time. So, it is less time that I get to talk to them, but we still keep in contact. We chat as much as we can and talk.* (Player B)

The second aspect was the integration of the identity of the breadwinner or family ambassador into the self-concept. By this, the athletes interpreted their experiences in relation to their obligation to provide for their families' sustenance and to enhance the esteem of the collective:

> *I try to focus here. You know, I'm playing for them. What I am doing is all about doing something good for them to be happy and be proud. So, the more that I do this and make them happy, as long as they are happy and seeing me up there makes them happy, then, I'm gonna do it for them... Instead of missing them now, cancel the missing out and make them proud. If I make them proud, they feel like they are there because they see me and they will be smiling. When they are happy, they forget that I'm not with them, and I'm also when I see that they are happy*. (Player B)

The self-concept of the breadwinner and the prioritisation of the athletic self are interrelated since the latter enhances the fulfilment of the former. Sporting progress guarantees a secure livelihood as well as fame.

In the following section, we discuss the second general theme – social support.

4.2. Social support

This theme analyses the social support that the athletes received from their clubs. It includes interactions and activities between the athletes and teammates, coaches and management that enabled them to adapt to the demands of transition. Two sub-themes were identified including learning support and psychosocial support.

4.2.1. Learning support

The athletes were well supported with information, guidance, and suggestions whenever they needed it. Most times they sought for information from teammates about how to get things done or for interpretation of training instructions:

> *The language was a little bit challenging for me when the coach speaks and then I have to make a lot of translations from different players.* (Player B)

> *With the help of my players and management, they speak in German to me and I speak back and try to make fun, and from there, the speaking part is getting better and better and better.* (Player A)

The athletes received more structured learning support, especially from the management. This involved financial investments. For instance, private language tutors were arranged for them by their clubs to improve their German language competency:

> *I also had a teacher in [name of club] who was teaching us [German language] and I started learning.* (Player B)

Learning support was the most expressed form of support in the athletes' narratives which occurred in both planned and unplanned forms and through formal and informal process.

4.2.2. Psychosocial support

The players were supported through displays of friendship, especially from their teammates. This was very important for their adaptation in the early days at their clubs and helped them to feel welcome and part of the group and also to feel confident to ask for help or information:

> *I came and it seemed like I had started playing with them for a long time. The players, I could remember, everyone was really, really good, really professional. They welcomed me so good in the team. They did the best you can think of. You will think you already knew these people from 20 years ago, but you don't know them. It is just your first time, but everybody welcomed you. I didn't expect this, but I got it.* (Player A)

At other times, such support involved in-kind gestures such as concessions made to the player in peculiar circumstances. For instance, days off may be granted after international travels for national team participation in order for the player to recover from fatigue and burnout:

> *Sometimes, when I get fatigued [after returning from international duty], the coach will see it and maybe give me two days off. So, this is really important and which they are really doing good.* (Player A)

4.3. Appraisal of support

The athletes appraised the support from teammates, coaches, and the management. Two sub-themes were identified, namely 'feeling supported' and 'lack of fit'.

4.3.1. Feeling supported

The athletes felt well supported by members of their clubs, from teammates, coaches, and the management. They found the support received crucial to their transition and adaptation experience, without which it would have been very difficult, especially in the early days of their transition:

> *The people there were really good to me; they took me, the tried to see that they made me adapt to everything. Every time I needed something, they always helped me towards it because the president was a good guy.* (Player A)

They particularly valued the welcoming atmosphere and the friendship of teammates who were always willing to help them get settled in and become part of the group.

4.3.1. Lack of fit

Though the athletes generally felt supported, from one of the players' narratives, it was evident that there were situations where the support received may not have suited the player's circumstances at the time and could have been better if provided differently. For instance, Player A expressed that the language class that the club arranged for him was not well timed and was incompatible with other demands of his work:

> *I have a teacher who always teaches me after training, but it has always been difficult to make a lesson after you finish training. Your head is just so tired and then you have to focus on doing the lesson. So, it wasn't a good timing. We are in the first league. It is a lot of responsibility on me and the team. It is a new challenge for a lot of us in the team so, I wanted to be more focused on the pitch because we just got promoted. It is difficult to focus on learning the language because I was just focused on my job. (Player A).*

Player A however, noted that his knowledge of the German language has improved due to the support he got from teammates, coaches and the management through informal conversations.

In the following section, the findings are discussed with regards to literature and theory.

5. Discussion

This paper examined the adaptation and experience of social support of elite African players in the process of transition into German football and society. It contributes to a richer understanding of the transnational transition of African athletes in Europe by corroborating and advancing existing literature as well as opening up new insights. It highlighted the structural and subjective adaptive and coping practices of African athletes including socialisation within a European football habitus, culture learning, multilocal belonging, rationalisation and acceptance of circumstance, and reconstitution of self-identity as well as the forms and appraisal of social support received from their clubs. The findings show that characteristics of the person, the situation and the pre and post transition environment as construed in Schlossberg's (1981) human adaptation framework are all important in shaping the transition and adaptation experience. This is particularly evident in how the prevailing pre-transition environment of talent development is significantly shaping African athletes' adaptation experiences.

This paper makes an important and novel contribution to literature by showing how the athletes' socialisation within a European football habitus prior to migration is changing the experience of transition and adaptation. With respect to sporting culture-related experiences, African youth athletes increasingly occupy a similar world to their peers in Europe. Though the attraction of global capital into the African talent market has been written about in literature (Darby, 2000; 2012), its impact on the talent development culture and African migrant athletes' transition experiences have not been previously discussed. The inflow of global capital into the African football economy has led to the proliferation of football academies working to appropriate value from investments in cheap African talent (Darby, 2000; Poli, 2006). The transforming impact on the convergence of cultures and systems of football talent development in Africa is enormous. Since prime talents developed in these academies are targeted for the lucrative European football economy, the skill set and other competencies have to meet the requirements of the destination market. This relationship has reshaped the football habitus by eroding the differences in practices and dispositions (Bourdieu, 1977) in talent development between Europe and Africa.

Culture learning as an adaptive practice through which transnational and migrant athletes develop the cultural capabilities to integrate into their new environments was highlighted by this study. Key sources of learning were teammates, coaches, and management, as well as personal effort, especially through the use of technology. This finding supports previous literature which shows that athletes in cultural transition try to gain cultural knowledge in order to integrate into the host culture and to be able to advance their careers (Ryba et al., 2016). Multilocal belonging, which involved integrating into life in the host location while maintaining cultural and familiar ties at origin community was employed by the players to manage their feelings of loneliness and homesickness and to also sustain a meaningful life purpose. Multilocal belonging in this study is

similar to what Johnson et al. (2020) described as 'maintaining cultural connections' and Agergaard and Ryba (2014) as 'multiple embeddedness', depicting a life that is rooted simultaneously in multiple locations. New media technologies such as social media applications and the internet played an active role in this experience similar to findings by Prato et al. (2012).

Another coping strategy observed among the athletes was rationalisation and acceptance of circumstance which involved justifying and normalising challenges as common experiences so as to make them less stressful. Johnson et al. (2020) observed similar practices among athletes experiencing a cultural transition. This practice which they termed 'emotion regulation' was employed to suppress or 'moderate emotions and prevent them from escalating into even more stressful situations' (p. 8). Rationalisation is also used 'to leave the role of victim behind and to secure agency and control over' negative experiences (Schubring & Thiel, 2014, p. 312). Rationalisation is also interrelated with another practice among the athletes found in this study - reconstitution of self-identity. Ejekwumadu (2021) explained that the desire to become the family's breadwinner is an important motivation for pursuing an athletic career abroad among aspiring African youth athletes. By foregrounding the athletic self and integrating the self-concept of the breadwinner, rationalisation becomes a means to realising the athletic career and a secure livelihood for self and for family. The athletic self is a 'functional' self-concept that is goal-oriented (Seiberth et al., 2017) which helps athletes to suppress experiences that distract or depart from the goal.

Social support was found to serve highly valuable functions for the players' adaptation to transition, which is in line with literature (Johnson et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2018). The players revealed that members of their clubs played important roles in their adaptation by providing various forms of support. Support provided was in line with the four dimensions of functional

support outlined by Brown et al. (2018) including emotional support, informational support, and tangible support. The fourth dimension of the functional support framework, esteem support (Brown et al., 2018), was not observed from the players' narratives. This, however, does not mean that that type of support was not offered. Athletes usually have access to psychosocial support to improve their mental well-being or to strengthen their mental competencies (Tamminen et al., 2019; Brown & Fletcher, 2017). Brown and Potrac (2009) highlighted that, in some cases, athletes experiencing transitions may receive inadequate support from their clubs. Though the players in this study felt well supported by their clubs, a particular experience showed that some support did not align with the player's peculiar situation in the manner it was provided, which undermined its usefulness and effectiveness. This shows that social support should not only be available but should reflect the athlete's needs and circumstances (Brown et al., 2018). This can only be achieved if the athletes are properly consulted and asked for feedback for support provided.

6. Conclusion

This inquiry examined the coping and adaptation and experience of social support of elite African players in the process of transition into German football and society. The findings highlighted the structural and subjective adaptive and coping practices of African athletes including socialisation within a European football habitus, culture learning, multilocal belonging, rationalisation and acceptance of circumstance, and reconstitution of self-identity, as well as the important role of various forms of social support received from their clubs.

The strength of this study lies in the application of the human adaptation framework (Schlossberg, 1981) which has enabled a holistic consideration of all the factors that shape the transnational transition adaptation experience within a sporting context. The important finding, which shows the convergence of talent development cultures between Europe and Africa and the attendant impact

on football-related adaptation, is revealed through this holistic approach. On the other hand, a weakness is that it captures only the voices of the athletes. The voices of others such as teammates, coaches, and club management would have added more depth to the narrative.

This study opens up opportunities for further research. Future research may examine how African athletes reconcile the changes in personality and relationships while in transition with life back in their homeland as they try to reintegrate themselves after the termination of their athletic careers. For instance, since transition foregrounds their athletic self-identity over other identities, it would be imperative to understand how African athletes reconstitute the self to fit into new frames in the reality of life outside the sport in their homeland.

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5.5. Article 4: 'As an African boy, you know the struggle back there': Transnational commitments of elite African footballers in an ongoing and negotiated career

Ikechukwu Ejekwumadu (manuscript) 'As an African boy, you know the struggle back there': Transnational commitments of elite African footballers in an ongoing and negotiated career. Manuscript submitted to *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*.

Transnationalism is marked by lives lived across multiple localities and social fields. While pursuing a sporting career in Europe, African players at the same time continue to maintain active belonging in their communities of origin. This paper explores the commitments of elite transnational African athletes in their homelands. It examines the range of activities, the underlying motives and the impact on their careers and lives in Europe.

‘As an African boy, you know the struggle back there’: Transnational commitments of elite African footballers in an ongoing and negotiated career

Abstract

The ‘giveback’ activities of African athletes have been the subject of recent research interest. Through an ethnography of social media activities of and in-depth interviews with elite African footballers in Germany, this paper examined their transnational commitments (social responsibility activities) in their home countries and the impacts on their careers and lives. The findings show that African players are involved in many socially beneficial activities ranging from acts of piety towards family and kinship groups; acts of charity towards non-kinship groups; and acts of activism and solidarity with the citizens; to acts of patriotism towards the nation. The motives underlying these acts include feelings of obligation, responsibility, empathy, pride, and self-interest. These acts place costs on as well as generate benefits for the players’ ongoing careers and lives in Europe. The costs include resources (time and money), costs to their emotional well-being, and costs to their careers. The benefits include improved emotional well-being, enhanced social status, and enhanced career prospects.

Keywords: Transnational commitments of African footballers, prosocial behaviour, cyberprosocial behaviour, athlete citizenship, African footballers in Europe, giveback behaviour

1. Introduction

This paper explores the commitments of elite transnational African footballers in their home countries alongside negotiating transition adjustments and succeeding in a competitive career in Europe. By transnational commitments, I refer to the social responsibility and charitable activities of European based elite African footballers in their home countries. In the last couple of decades,

there has been an increased transfer of elite African athletes to the professional football leagues in Europe (Darby, 2007a; 2007b; 2007c; 2000; Poli, 2006a; 2006b). A study of expatriate footballers in 145 leagues from 96 national associations worldwide by the International Centre for Sports Studies (CIES) shows that athletes from Africa are well represented and most of them ply their trade in Europe. It also shows that in 2020, the most increases in the number of expatriate players were recorded by Ghana (46 expatriates and 4th globally), and Nigeria and Ivory Coast (38 expatriates respectively and joint 5th globally) (Poli et al., 2021).

The increased presence of elite African footballers in Europe has spurred research interest in various aspects of their careers and lived experiences in host societies. Ungruhe (2013) studied African footballers in Germany, highlighting their experiences of othering. Similarly, Scott (2015) explored racial discrimination of African and other black footballers in Sweden. The precarity experienced by African players arising from the uncertainty of tenure or post-athletic career prospects is highlighted by Agergaard and Ungruhe (2016) and Agergaard and Ryba (2014) respectively. More closely to understanding the transnational commitments of elite African players in Europe, Acheampong (2019) and Acheampong et al. (2019) studied giveback behaviours through social investments in education, health, and social enterprises. Ungruhe and Agergaard (2020) explored transnational activities of African athletes in Scandinavia as manifestations of the athletes' imaginaries of mobility and of migrant success at home.

The transnational commitments of elite African footballers have mostly been captured in two forms: The first relates to commitments to family, friends and home communities. This is captured by Acheampong (2019), Acheampong et al. (2019), and Ungruhe and Agergaard (2020) who highlighted remittances to family and kin, own investments as part of post-athletic career planning, as well as social investments to support communities and to maintain own social standing and

recognition. The second is their commitment to nation. This involves participation in national teams' friendlies, qualifiers, and tournaments. The majority of the players that represent African teams in international games and competitions ply their trade in Europe. For instance, of four sub-Saharan African countries surveyed, all had well above half of the total minutes played in the national team games in 2015 by players employed in clubs abroad, especially in Europe: Senegal (100%); Ivory Coast (99.7%); Ghana (91.2%); and Nigeria (75.8%) (Poli et al., 2016). Participation in these international games usually involves long travels with consequences for the athletes' wellness and preparedness for club competitions (Fowler et al., 2015; Fowler et al., 2015; Fullagar et al., 2016).

The current state of literature on elite African footballers' transnational commitments leaves important questions yet to be investigated. Firstly, while previous studies have examined commitments toward family and community and the roles such play in families' sustenance and home communities' development, or post-career livelihoods of the athletes, none has reversed the discussion to centre it on the impacts such commitments have on ongoing careers at host locations. Secondly, there has been no attempt to explore the commitment to nation and its impact on the athletes' careers at their clubs. There is little knowledge about whether such has positive or negative impacts on the athletes' club careers. This is even more important considering that professional footballers are in a constant negotiation for their place on the pitch (Roderick & Schumacker, 2017), and more so for African players, for the present (Agergaard & Ungruhe, 2016) and the future (Agergaard & Ryba, 2014) of their careers and lives. This situation necessitates a study specifically focused on the transnational social engagements of African players and the impacts on their ongoing careers and lives.

The German football league provides a good field site for studying elite migrant footballers given the sizeable population of expatriate players, a number of whom are African athletes. For instance, 50 percent of players in the Bundesliga between 2009 and 2019 were expatriates (Poli et al., 2019). This current study, therefore, explores the transnational commitments of elite African footballers in Europe and the impact on their careers and lived experience based on the accounts of the athletes in the German football league. Transnational commitments in this paper are framed as forms of prosocial behaviour (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998) since they are activities that benefit the athletes' places of origin. By construing these activities as prosocial behaviours, I strive to understand why they engage in these activities as well as what benefits or costs such place on their ongoing careers and lives in Europe. This paper answers the following research questions: a) What are the different forms of transnational commitments of elite African athletes in their homeland? b) What are the underlying motives? and c) What costs and benefits do these commitments place on the players' ongoing careers and lived experience in Europe.

2. African athletes' homeland commitments: understanding prosocial behaviour

The transnational commitments of African athletes, be they acts towards family or community or to the nation, constitute forms of prosocial behaviour (Bierhoff, 2002) since they involve acts of filial piety, collective good and patriotic service. Prosocial behaviour refers to a 'broad class of behaviour defined as involving costs for the self and resulting in benefits for others' (Wittek & Bekkers, 2015, p. 579). It involves acts such as helping, gifting, sharing, comforting, donating, defending, protecting, volunteering, solidarity, and cooperation (Hruschka & Henrich, 2015; Hasenfratz & Knafo, 2015; Dovidio & Banfield, 2015; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998). Where prosocial behaviours lead to net benefits for both the beneficiary and the performer of the act, it is denoted

as ‘mutualism’, whereas, if others benefit while the performer realises net costs, it refers to ‘altruism’ (Wittek & Bekkers, 2015; Bowles & Gintis, 2011).

Wittek and Bekkers (2015, p. 579) contend that the categorisation of prosocial behaviour depends on ‘if it benefits specific others, known or unknown’, the ‘degrees of social distance, ranging from close kin to total strangers’, and if it ‘benefits social groups of which the actor is a member or not, as well as society as a whole or abstract ideals’. They identify four types of prosocial behaviour based on who performs the act and whom it benefits: a) an act performed by a single individual to benefit another specific individual; b) an act performed by a single individual to benefit the group; c) acts performed by a group to benefit an individual; and d) acts performed by a group to benefit the same group or another group. Bierhoff (2002) explains that planned prosocial behaviour comprises of the formal and the informal. Informal planned behaviours are performed towards kinship and friendship groups. This type of behaviour is marked by a close relationship and shared bonds with the recipients. The latter involves formal planned acts towards organisations or non-kinship groups.

Attention on athletes’ prosocial behaviour has mostly focused on their material investments and philanthropic activities. Smith (2021, p. 4) notes that ‘exploring only monetary initiatives is a reductive view of the athlete, negating their other traits, especially those which are more personable and those which may derive from the true spirit of their life and work’. Agyemang’s (2014) concept of athlete citizenship presents a more encompassing way of understanding athletes’ prosocial behaviour that goes beyond the material. Agyemang describes athlete citizenship as ‘the manner in which a professional athlete conducts himself or herself (on and away from competition) and makes a positive impact on society’ (2014, p. 29). By this, both the material and non-material contributions that athletes make to the societal good are accommodated. Recent interest in the non-

material aspects of athlete citizenship has brought attention to athletes' use of the cyberspace for social responsibility activities and communication of activities in their daily lives (Smith, 2021; Sanderson, 2013). Athletes increasingly use social media to project a self-identity (Sanderson, 2013) and maintain social ties with family (Smith, 2021; Sanderson, 2013), promote social causes, and demonstrate their citizenship (Smith, 2021). Athletes prosocial behaviour, therefore, encompasses both online and offline practices.

Explanations for the origin of prosocial behaviours vary. Some have emphasised the biological basis arguing that human beings have innate proclivities towards supportive social behaviour (Buck, 2011; Buck & Ginsburg, 1997). Many others are more inclined to the sociology and psychology of group life. These posit that prosocial behaviours are driven by feelings of empathy, guilt, shame, obligation, responsibility, and pleasure (Bierhoff, 2002; Malti et al., 2009; Wittek & Bekkers, 2015; Aknina et al., 2013; Hoffman, 2000; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998) which develop from the individual's moral socialisation and group formation as well as the interdependence inherent in social life. Wittek and Bekkers (2015, p. 581) point to 'formal rules or informal norms and shared meaning as a root cause of prosocial behaviour… the result of deeply ingrained cultural schemas, beliefs, values, or identities.' Essential is the norm of reciprocity which emphasises obligation and responsibility towards individuals and groups that have contributed to one's nurturing and well-being. Reciprocity is very pronounced in African societies (Mpansu, 1986) and may explain giveback behaviours (Acheampong, 2019; Acheampong et al., 2019) among elite African athletes. Society also accords so much regard to sports and demands sports clubs (and personalities) to use their influence to contribute to social good (Waardenburg & Nagel, 2019; Waardenburg, 2016). Bierhoff (2002) points out that the motive of self-interest also underlies prosocial behaviours.

Prosocial behaviour may involve costs and benefits for the performer. The cost of prosocial behaviour differs in resource type (Kawamura et al., 2021) and may range from the very minor to the extreme forms of selflessness and personal sacrifice. Costs may be in the form of ‘effort, time, and money’ (Kawamura et al., 2021, p. 452). It may also involve loss of opportunity or privilege or more extreme personal sacrifices such as exposure to great mental, emotional or physical harm or even loss of life (Qirko, 2013). The benefits of prosocial behaviour may arise out of calculated rational self-interest (Bierhoff, 2002) or a spinoff from the reciprocity of social exchange (COS, 1930). The benefits may be material or non-material. These include relieved feelings of distress (Batson et al., 1987), increased happiness and emotional well-being (Post, 2005), improved economic prospects (Baert & Vujić, 2018), enhanced social standing and prestige (Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006), or power (Honeycutt, 1981), or debt of future care (Nair, 2001). Lysenstøen et al. (2021, p. 3) note that ‘cyberprosocial behaviour may result in the same benefits as offline prosocial behaviour, both for the receiver and for the helper, indicating the need for more research on the topic’. Wright and Li (2012) write that online prosocial behaviours benefit both the receiver and the performer. These include health benefits such as relived stress for the receiver and the creation of new social relationships. Givers benefit from ‘higher personal satisfaction and support within their offline communities’ (Wright & Li, 2012, p. 335). Invariably, online prosocial behaviour would as well be expected to place costs on the performer.

The foregoing shows that prosocial acts carry both costs and benefits that may elicit either negative or positive influences on the quality of life or lived outcomes of the performer. By conceptualising the transnational commitments within the framework of prosocial behaviour (performed online and offline), this paper is positioned to understand how African athletes’ homeland commitments,

and their underlying motives, impact on their ongoing careers and lives in Europe. The next section outlines the methodological considerations.

3. Methods

3.1. Selection Criteria

Target participants included in this study were elite male footballers in the first two divisions of the German professional football league from a sub-Saharan African country. In addition, a player was only included as a prospective participant if he was born and or raised in Africa, represents or is eligible to represent a national team of an African country, and also maintains social ties in his home country. 19 players met the selection criteria.

3.2. Data collection

I employed two methods of data collection in this study. The first level involved a digital ethnography of Twitter and Instagram accounts of the players. Only verified accounts were included to ensure the authenticity of the data. Of the 19 players who met the selection criteria, the Twitter and or Instagram accounts of 17 were verified. The verification was based on the blue verification tick and, in two cases, accounts quoted by the players' official clubs' accounts. Two players' accounts could not be verified and were excluded. Posts covering the period each player has been in Europe until November 2021 (text, images and videos) and ensuing replies were reviewed and those that fit into the research aims were screenshotted or downloaded and archived. I also made notes on the contexts of such posts through secondary news reports in online media for richer interpretation and meaning-making.

As Murthy (2008, p. 844) notes, social media can produce a rich source of ethnographic data as individuals 'converse publicly with "friends" about the intricacies of their respective daily lives'.

Social media has become a very important avenue for communication for sports people and provides a platform for studying the different forms of social engagements of elite footballers (Smith, 2021). Social media posts provided important insights into the various forms of prosocial engagements that African athletes were involved in which previous studies that mostly focused on the players' material commitments have overlooked and some of which the players themselves may not recognise or express in an interview as forms of 'giveback' behaviour.

At the second level, two of the players were selected for qualitative interviews to generate in-depth data (Smith, 2018) on the other engagements of the players that may not be revealed through the players' activities on social media. This also gave me the opportunity to explore in depth the motives and the costs and benefits of the players' transnational commitments to their ongoing careers and lives. The two players were selected based on access and acceptance to be interviewed. Approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences of the University of Tübingen (Reference: A2.5.4-158_ns) and consent for the interview was duly obtained from the players. Data were collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews in English with each respondent at his club's complex in October 2021 using an interview guide to set the direction of the discussion while emergent issues determined further probing.

3.3. Data analysis

I transcribed the interview data following the 'naturalized/intelligent verbatim' approach, which emphasises readability of quotes in ways that enhance meaning (McMullin, 2021, pp. 5-6). Data from the players' social media accounts were organised according to texts, images or videos and processed together with the interview transcripts. Analysis proceeded using the thematic analysis approach by Braun and Clarke (2006), starting with the review of the social media data and the

reading of the transcripts, development of codes, organising codes into themes, and refining themes. A code represented a specific account of an act or experience. A deductive process, driven by the 'theoretical construct' (Stuckey, 2015, p. 8) of prosocial behaviour (the forms, motives, costs and benefits of players' homeland commitments) and the research questions, was applied to the data to organise codes into analytical themes. Following Maguire and Delahunt's (2017) two-strata thematic organisation, the themes were grouped under the general themes (which are overarching and derive from a specific research question) and the sub-themes (which capture similar acts, purposes, experiences or outcomes within a general theme).

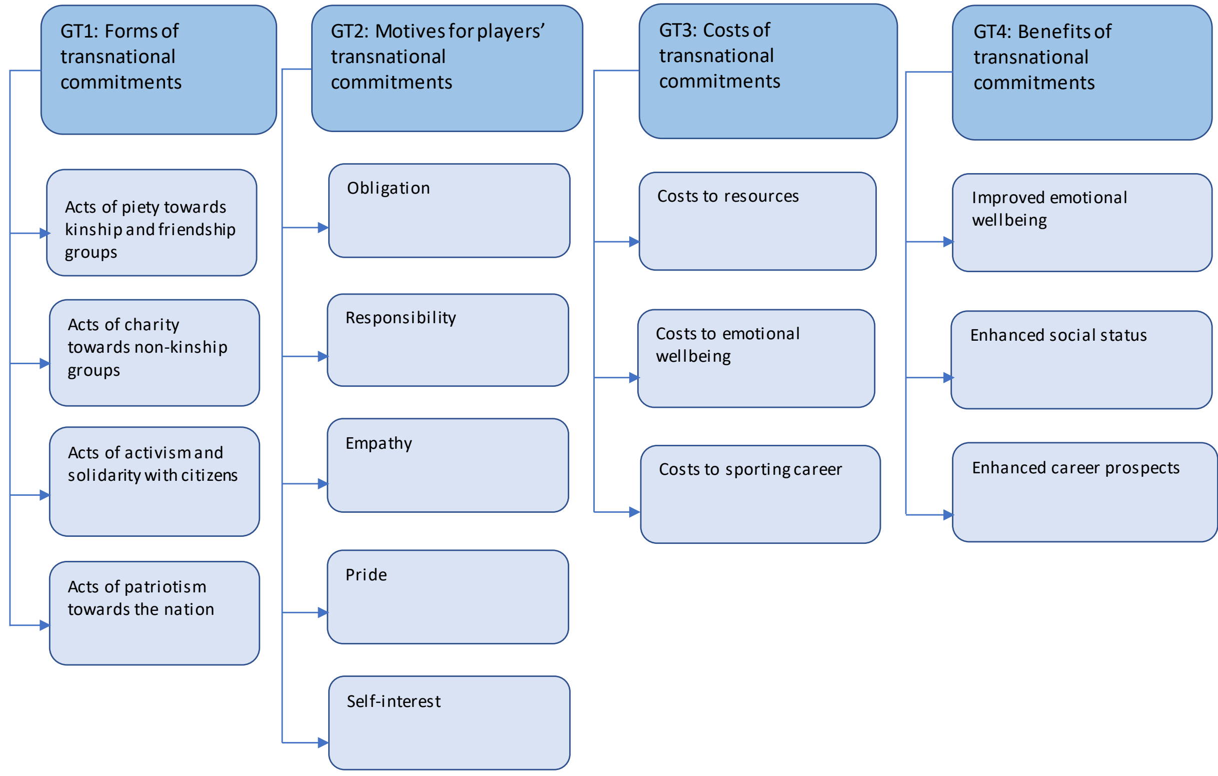
Screenshots from the social media data and excerpts from the interviews were used to support interpretations of the data as well as to empower the voice of the respondents as co-constructors of meaning. In reporting findings from the interviews, real names were replaced with pseudonyms and details such as nationality, and present and previous clubs were left out. However, in reporting data from social media accounts of the players, real names were used since the information was already publicly available as posted by the respective players.

4. Findings

In this section, I present the findings made in this paper under four general themes and 15 sub-themes as shown in figure 1 below. Each general theme (GT) addresses a research question:

- GTI addresses research question (a).
- GT2 addresses research question (b).
- GT3 and GT4 address research question (c).

Figure 1: Thematic map



4.1. Forms of players' commitments towards homeland

Under this general theme, four sub-themes were identified: a) acts of piety towards kinship and friendship groups; b) acts of charity towards non-kinship groups; c) acts of activism and solidarity with citizens; and d) acts of patriotism towards the nation.

4.1.1. Acts of piety towards kinship and friendship groups

These are acts performed by the players towards family, childhood peers, and friends. These may involve parting with a resource such as cash gifts, clothes, shoes or other material gifts. It may also involve non-material acts of love, concern, and care. These involve acts such as visits to parents and family members, friends and childhood neighbourhood during holiday stays, telephone calls to loved ones, social media messages to commemorate birthdays, weddings or other events, and

condolences to bereaved family members or friends. This appears to be the most common form of homeland commitment among the players and a very important part of their non-sporting activities.

Figure 2: Twitter post by Nigeria and Union Berlin's Anthony Ujah, 14 June, 2015.

4.1.2. Acts of charity towards non-kinship groups

These are acts of philanthropy performed by the players towards others outside the family and friendship group. These acts usually involve material and cash donations to support social causes such as equipping schools, hospitals, sports facilities or other public utilities. Acts of this nature may also be in the form of gestures of kindness. During the interviews, Player A's acceptance to

be interviewed was interpreted by him as a giveback act demonstrated when he remarked that he was doing so to ‘support’ me as a fellow African in Germany ‘doing something good’. Beneficiaries of the players’ charity may also have some affiliation to kinship or friendship groups, such as when a donation is made to a childhood neighbourhood school, or hospital, or the local football academy where a player has been trained. Players may also sponsor events such as football competitions and training camps or medical treatments and outreaches. At other times, players may also use their time to support a cause at schools or public events by acting as a mentor or a role model for the youth. Some of these acts are performed through foundations established in the players’ names for charitable causes.

Figure 3: Instagram post by Ghana and Greuther Fuerth’s Hans Nunoo Sarpei, 22 June, 2021

4.1.3. Acts of activism and solidarity with citizens

These are acts in show of solidarity with fellow citizens or in support of worthy social causes such as demand for justice and citizens’ rights, or an end to abuses and violations of the dignity of

citizens, or a demand for democratic and political reforms. These acts are usually spontaneous responses to issues of the moment. It may also involve activism for causes such as calls for vaccine acceptance and climate responsibility. The players' engagements in this domain are very critical of social and political institutions. At times, it may involve calls for the boycott of national teams' games, but appears to be an act performed mostly through social media. The reason may be that such causes require international attention and are much easier to escalate through the reach and speed of the spread of social media. Besides, since such acts may challenge entrenched power structures, social media offers a relatively safe space (at least from exposure to physical harm) to expose and talk truth to power. A very good instance of this is the solidarity shown by Nigerian footballers with the protests of October 2020 for an end to widespread and grievous incidences of police brutality and rights abuses during which government sanctioned army and police officers killed scores of protesting citizens across the nation (Lagos State Judicial Panel of Inquiry, 2021). Under the hashtag, #EndSARS (SARS is a brutal police unit codenamed Special Anti-Robbery Squad), many Nigerian players called out the government's brutal crackdown and massacre of peaceful protesters who were demanding for police reforms. The gory picture of a blood-stained flag during the crackdown, which became the symbol of the civil resistance and the massacre, was tweeted by many of the players, while a few brandished shirts with the protests' hashtags during clubs' games.

Figure 4: Twitter post by Nigeria and Union Berlin's Anthony Ujah, 16 October, 2021

4.1.4. Acts of patriotism towards the nation

These are acts related to representing the nation or promoting a positive image of their country or it's culture and people. These may be called ambassadorial roles. They may involve taking part in international friendly games in preparation for competitions, games during qualifiers for tournaments or matches at tournament finals. It may also involve promoting the nation on social media through beautiful images and videos that put the country in a positive light. In other instances, players may wear gear branded in their countries' colours, such as headbands or wristbands during clubs' games or wave their countries' flags during clubs' trophy and success celebrations. Through these acts, players figuratively, 'put their countries on the map'. This is very significant considering that Africa is rarely seen as a continent of many countries but a geographical monolith among European populations.

Figure 5: Twitter post by Senegal and FC Erzgebirge Aue's Babacar Gueye, 20 December, 2015

The various forms of homeland commitments exhibited above by elite African players in Europe are bound by certain underlying motives which I examine in the next section.

4.2. The underlying motives for players' homeland commitments

The motives for African players' prosocial acts may be grouped under five sub-themes: obligation; responsibility; empathy; pride; and self-interest.

4.2.1. Obligation

The most common underlying motive expressed by the athletes is a sense of obligation to reciprocate earlier care and training. It arises from a kind of filial or primordial connection and is forged in the reciprocity of social life; a form of debt owed to family, friends or community who have contributed to a player's upbringing and training:

> *Every time that I go back to my hometown that I grew up before going to the academy, I try to provide some clothes, some football jersey, that kind of equipment for them to use and also so that they achieve their dreams. With friends and other team-mates in [home country], that's what I do for them. It's like, I won't say donation because it is friends and team-mates and those who are close to me. I won't say I donated something to them. It is like sharing what I have with them now, with some equipment, with football shoes, with some jerseys. Whatever that I can get here and send it over there to make sure that they also get enough to not let their dreams die, to keep their dreams alive.* (Player B)

Above, Player B underlines that sense of obligation by emphasising that his 'donations' aren't donations. He has to 'share' what he has with others, which connotes that his income is not for him alone. What he does for 'those close to him' is not a privilege, but an obligation.

4.2.2. Responsibility

The feeling of responsibility comes from the sense of coming of age, a developmental milestone to be performed:

> *Yeah, you know, this was my first time to leave family and say, ok, I want to start life as a man, which was when I was 18. Taking that step was really big for me. I really want to help my family, help myself.* (Player A)

It also comes from the role structures in low income families in most societies in Africa, where older children are expected to be role models for the younger ones while also contributing to their care and training:

> *I'm the oldest of my father and my mother. So, it doesn't matter about my status now. I have always been like a head that I need to provide for my family, for my siblings… It has kind of been a responsibility for me to carry all around. It is all about, I have to do something to make the others follow. It is like being a leader. The leader has to set the example so that the ones behind will know, oh, he's doing well, we have to follow. So, it's always for me to set the example and feed the family, and make sure the family is stable and comfortable. That has always been the plan.* (Player B)

It may also emanate from gendered responsibilities of family labour and care where the women may be expected to do more domestic work while the male children are expected to go out in search of resources for the family's care.

4.2.3. Empathy

Empathy comes from the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. This usually involves putting oneself in another's situation so as to imagine what the person goes through. For many of the players, there is little need for such imagination since it was a lived experience before their career breakthrough. Ghana and Greuther Fuerth's Hans Nunoo Sarpei notes this on his Instagram post that 'we give not because we have enough, but we know how it actually feels not to have ANYTHING'. The difficult past of many of the athletes makes it very easy for them to relate to the situation and the needs of the less fortunate in their homeland:

> *You know as an African boy, you know when you go out, you know the struggle back there. You know you have to support your family; you know you have to support your friends; you know you have to support the part*

> *of the community, maybe, they need something. You know, this one we can never run away from. This is one thing about Africans, will always be forever. I think because we are all strugglers and hustlers, the moment we succeed in going one step higher, we always look back to try and support those people we know cannot, especially family members and friends.* (Player A)

Prosocial acts of solidarity with the citizens may also come from the feeling of empathy (or sympathy). In showing his concern and solidarity with the #End SARS protests', Nigeria and Union Berlin's Anthony Ujah, posted the blood-stained flag with a hashtag '#Prayfornigeria', depicting solemnity and sympathy.

4.2.4. Pride

The players often mentioned making their families and friends 'proud' as a major source of motivation. Pride appears very strong in the interest to participate in the national team.

> *Great privilege and honour representing my great country. (Twitter post by Nigeria and Union Berlin's Taiwo Awoniyi, 4 June, 2016).*

This feeling is for both self, as a mark of achievement, and for the nation, as a contribution to its positive image and cherished moments.

4.2.5. Self-interest

The players' narratives also expressed motives of self-interest for their prosocial acts, especially in relation to the nation. While participating in the national team is a thing of pride, it is also a measure for their own growth and status:

> *I was in the third league watching [home country] play and then I said [breathes out] 'next year I will be playing for my country'. Some of my team-mates laughed about it and it came to pass.* (Player A)

Even the acts towards family and friends may be done in the player's self-interest as shown by Player B's remark that seeing his family happy when he speaks with them on video calls makes him also happy.

The next section examines the costs that the players' transnational commitments place on their careers and lives.

4.3. The costs of commitments towards homeland

The costs of the players' commitments can be placed under three sub-themes; a) costs to resources; b) costs to emotional well-being; and c) costs to sporting career.

4.3.1. Costs to resources

The most common costs of the players' homeland commitments are money and time. These include money spent providing for the needs of family and friends and paying for charity initiatives or time spent visiting family and friends during holiday periods or maintaining relationships through calls and messages. Meeting the needs of dependents or requests from family and friends for various forms of assistance may be a significant drain on a player's income most especially when this is seen as obligatory. Player A's comment above that 'we are all strugglers and hustlers', highlights the level of dependence on the players' benevolence. Such benevolence is not dependent on the players' goodwill but obligatory as Player B underscored: 'I won't say donation because it is friends and team-mates and those who are close to me'.

On the other hand, the players spend considerable time maintaining relationships with family and friends:

> *You know, and the biggest part is when you come and then you see them, you don't run from them, but you come to them and everything, you know.*

> *This is the great part which I think I am doing. Of course, I cannot go to every part but the part I go to, they see me. We are all together.* (Player A)

Player A's remark that 'I cannot go to every part' suggests that the effort in maintaining these relationships can be quite overwhelming. Players' new celebrity statuses place them in high demand from family and friends. Besides, these visits usually happen during short holiday periods after a hectic football season when players also need private time and rest.

4.3.2. Costs to emotional well-being

African players' prosocial acts may also place a cost on their emotional well-being. This is especially so for the acts of activism and solidarity with the citizens which often involve engagement with very distressing events of social injustice, oppression or state-sponsored extra-judicial killings. Watching videos of military and police officers shooting unarmed peaceful protesters and seeing the dead bodies of fellow citizens soaked in blood is unarguably a mentally depressing moment. Nigeria and Union Berlin's Anthony Ujah's post of the blood-stained flag with the hashtag '#Prayfornigeria' suggests the distress that such an event had put him through. In the same vein, his team-mate, Taiwo Awoniyi, tweeted the same blood-stained flag together with a text that read 'MAN is always temporary but GOD reigns Forever' which shows pain and resignation to the hope of intervention of a transcendental force.

Similarly, during political protests in Dakar in March 2021, which left at least five people dead as a result of a police crackdown (BBC, 2021), Senegal and FC Erzgebirge Aue's Babacar Gueye tweeted an image of a protester hoisting a Senegalese flag, alongside a hashtag '#Freesenegal'. The call for freedom suggests a feeling of repression and maltreatment.

4.3.3. Costs to sporting career

The prosocial acts of players may also place costs on their careers in various ways. Participation in national teams' games may be a potential source of conflict between club and player. In some situations, players are discouraged by clubs from honouring national calls or to exclude self from selection or even early retirement so as to concentrate on club duty. Injuries and fatigue on national duty may lead to a strain on the player's relationship with the club and a loss of place in the playing squad:

> *There will be a lot of times we have important games that they really need me to stay and play without travelling to the national team… There are some clubs that put a demand and say: 'No you are not going. We want you to play for us until the weekend. We don't want you to go to the national team'.* (Player A)

Besides, clubs may not welcome players' involvement in politically tense events in their homelands for various reasons. Players' continued participation in the national team may be affected as they may choose to boycott the team in protest. This is the case in point when some players of the Nigerian national team called for the boycott of the team's games following the #EndSARS killings of protesters (Adewoye, 2020).

In the next section, I examine the benefits of homeland commitments to the players.

4.4. The benefits of commitments in homeland

The benefits of players' homeland commitments come under three sub-themes: a) improved emotional well-being; b) enhanced social status; and c) enhanced career prospects.

4.4.1. Improved emotional well-being

Prosocial acts contribute immensely to improved emotional well-being for the players, especially acts of piety towards family and kinship groups or acts of charity towards non-kinship groups. Players appear to derive considerable happiness in providing for the needs of family and friends or spending time with them during off-season holidays:

> *When they are happy, they forget that I'm not with them, and I'm also when I see that they are happy. I forget that I am not with them. It feels the same because happiness, when you are laughing with someone on the phone and they are happy, you forget that it is even FaceTime or video.* (Player B)

> *If I go back to [home country], my family are happy to see me. Of course, my family is my family. My friends cannot even wait for me to step in my city. They cannot wait for me to come… When I come back, they are the same people who come to me. So, they are all happy with me and I am happy with them.* (Player A)

Similarly, acts of charity to non-kinship groups are also a source of happiness for the players who derive joy from making positive impacts on people's lives or contributing towards the good of society:

> *Thank you all for attending this first edition of "Football Camp". Seeing the happiness in the eyes of all these children gives me a lot of joy and emotion 😍. (Mali and RB Leipzig's Amadou Haidara, Instagram post, 21 June, 2021. Translated by author from French).*

The desire to 'make them smile' (Anthony Ujah, Twitter post, 19 June, 2015) comes from an experience from a difficult past that Hans Nunoo Sarpei (Ghana and Greuther Fuerth, Instagaram post, 22 June, 2021) describes as knowing 'how it actually feels not to have ANYTHING'. Giving is, therefore, a relieving act that makes the players feel better.

4.4.2. Enhanced social status

Players enjoy an enhanced social standing in their communities from representing their countries. National caps, in addition to their club careers, add to the respect accorded to the players:

> *You know, things are different now. I have become a national player and everything… Everybody is proud to know me, especially my friends and the ones we grew up with in the same city together. They are proud to know me and I am proud to see that I make them proud also by representing the country. And yeah, it's a joy for them and it's a joy for me also. (Player A).*

Acts of charity performed by the players also attract a lot of goodwill and commendation from the public who make positive comments in praise of the players' generosity. In a post about an annual football competition he sponsors in his hometown, Anthony Ujah received the reply below:

> *Shout out to a Proud Idoma Son. Just can't wait for the final. (fan reply to Anthony Ujah, Twitter post, 4 June, 2015).*

Such enhanced social standing may also contribute to improving the emotional well-being for the players.

4.4.3 Enhanced career prospects

Transnational commitments benefit the sporting careers of the players, particularly acts of patriotism towards the nation. Selection for the national team is a developmental milestone that players may evaluate their progress with. It serves as a motivation to work hard to earn a call-up. Since national team selection is generally based on performance at the club, this desire to be called-up can push a player to raise his performance levels:

> *[Home country] was playing in the world cup and I said: 'the next one, I want to be there. I will be the one playing'. And everything came to pass. I have been with the national team for about three years now.* (Player A)

Participating in the national team can present enormous career opportunities and commercial prospects. In narrating his decision-making process in relation to transfers, Player A explained that he moved from a first division club in a central European country to a third division side in Germany so as 'to show your talent and show yourself in order to come to the bigger stage'. This underscores the importance of visibility for the players' careers. Events such as the World Cup are such 'big stages' where players may 'show their talents' to a global football market. Participating in these events may hugely increase the profile of players and give them visibility in the transfer market as well as raise their commercial value for club and for self.

5. Discussion

This paper examined the different forms of homeland commitments of elite African athletes in their homeland, the underlying motives and the costs and benefits to the players' ongoing careers and lives in Europe. The activities observed among the athletes are both planned and unplanned (Bierhoff, 2002), benefit known and unknown persons, groups to which the players belong and those that they are not members of, society in general as well as abstract ideals (Wittek & Bekkers, 2015) and have dimensions of both 'altruism' and 'mutualism' (Wittek & Bekkers, 2015; Bowles & Gintis, 2011). The homeland commitments observed are forms of helping, gifting, sharing, comforting, donating, defending, protecting, volunteering, solidarity or cooperation (Hruschka & Henrich, 2015; Hasenfratz & Knafo, 2015; Dovidio & Banfield, 2015). The motives for the players prosocial behaviours that this study found conform to the explanations in the literature about motives underlying prosocial behaviour. These include obligation and responsibility (Wittek &

Bekkers, 2015; Mpansu, 1986; Acheampong et al., 2019; Acheampong, 2019), empathy (Hoffman, 2000), pride (Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006) and self-interest (Bierhoff, 2002; Aknina et al., 2013).

Players homeland commitments are both altruistic (placing costs) and mutualistic (generating benefits). Costs to resources are relevant considering that many African players work in the lower and less remunerated football leagues and divisions or may not be paid as much as their counterparts from other regions (Poli, 2006b). In addition, Agergaard and Ungruhe (2016) highlighted that African players are exposed to precarious conditions arising from their stereotyped value. Agergaard and Ryba (2014) have also pointed out the limitations faced by African players in finding meaningful work at the end of their athletic career. These factors limit both current and future income and the burden of catering for family and friends may limit the players' post-career livelihood. Prosocial acts that expose players to distressing events may compromise their mental health. For instance, the massacre of citizens that followed the #EndSARS protests have been reported to have left many Nigerians dealing with post-traumatic stress disorders (Olasoji, 2021) and athletes who engaged actively with this event may experience similar challenges.

While participation in the national team is generally viewed positively, the challenges it may raise for African players are not adequately discussed. African players in Europe oftentimes find themselves in conflict with their clubs over national engagements (Simiyu, 2017). The AFCON, which is usually played in the middle of the European football season, between January and February, is a major conflict point. Given that most clubs may be in the middle of title campaigns or promotion or relegation battles, players may be pressured by their clubs to withdraw from selection or players themselves may fear loss of place on return from international duty (BBC, 2020). Besides, the possibility of an AFCON selection may also have negative consequences on the career mobility of African players in Europe. Clubs may be unwilling to sign a player in a

season where he may likely be called up for the AFCON or during the January transfer window in which the AFCON is usually held.

Transnational commitments, on the other hand, benefit athletes' careers and lives. The happiness derived from helping family and community may improve players' emotional well-being, enabling them to focus on their athletic careers. Von Guenthner and Hammermeister (2007) showed that athletes who scored highly on indicators of well-being also scored highly on performance indicators including coachability, concentration, goal setting/mental preparation, and peaking under pressure. Happiness may also reduce the negative effects of stressful experiences during transition. The social capital which players gain through homeland commitments in their homelands may be useful in post-career transition. Ungruhe and Agergaard (2020) write that such may be helpful in finding sports-related jobs at former work or training places or in maintaining a positive image of self in their communities. Investments in family and community may also contribute in safeguarding post-career livelihoods (Ungruhe & Agergaard, 2020; Acheampong et al., 2019).

International caps have been found to have a significant positive influence on player contracts and remuneration (Frick, 2011; Garcia-del-Barrio & Pujol, 2005). The 'public exposure of players,' writes Garcia-del-Barrio and Pujol (2005, pp. 15-16), is a major determinant of a players' remuneration and international competitions 'generate positive signal from which players take economic advantage'. Career mobility may be enhanced not only from the increased visibility representing the nation gives a player but also by contributing in meeting transferability criteria in prime European football leagues. For instance, the English Football Association operates a regulated transfer system for foreign players moving to the English Premier League and the English Football League. This Governing Body Endorsement (GBE) requires that a player earn

points from senior and youth international appearances before they would qualify to be issued work permits (The FA, 2020). Earning the GBE may be very difficult for players with little or no international appearances.

6. Conclusion

This paper examined the homeland commitments of elite African players in Europe and how such impacts on their lives and ongoing careers through an ethnography of the players' social media posts and two in-depth interviews. The findings show that African players are involved in many socially beneficial activities for family, friends and society in general. The motives underlying these acts include feelings of obligation, responsibility, empathy, pride, and self-interest. Prosocial acts place costs on the players' material resources, emotional well-being and careers, while the benefits include improved emotional well-being, enhanced social status and enhanced career prospects.

The theoretical and methodological approaches are the key strengths of this paper. Approaching the research problem through the framework of prosocial behaviour enabled an engagement that went beyond a focus on the giveback activities that are primarily material (e.g. Acheampong et al., 2019) to holistically articulating the corpus of African players' transnational engagements with homeland. Besides, it adds to our understanding of the impacts on their ongoing careers which have not been previously examined in the literature. Methodologically, studying African players' homeland commitments through their social media activities opens up a new approach for understanding the entire corpus of athletes' prosocial engagements. Whereas the theoretical framing enabled the expansion of the corpus of engagements beyond the material giveback activities, adopting an ethnography of the players' social media posts enabled this corpus to be fully captured (also strengthened with the in-depth interviews). This is particularly important

considering that the players themselves may not express in an interview the non-material prosocial acts as forms of 'giveback' behaviour (as was the case in the interviews with the two players).

The use of social media data to study players prosocial acts comes with some weaknesses. Players may be selective about the acts that they project publicly. They may concentrate on posting those acts that generate the most positive feedback and reactions. Though, the two in-depth interviews helped in generating more data beyond the social media posts, more depth could have been added if each individual player was probed deeper about specific posts.

While the findings in this paper show that acts of activism and solidarity with the citizens may negatively impact on the emotional well-being of players, this current paper has not exhaustively examined the full extent of such impacts. A study focused on activism in the homeland and the mental health of elite African players may be required to investigate the issue in greater depth. In addition, given that athletes' political activism may affect their participation in international football, there may be a need to explore the impacts on career development in more depth. Since athletes command a very large social media following and reach, another study may also focus on the behavioural influence of athletes' prosocial acts on their fans, such as joining social causes or indulging in other prosocial acts.

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6 FINAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

6.1. Overview of the dissertation

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the experiences of elite African football athletes in Germany in the process of transition into a new sporting and cultural environment. It focused on their experiences, coping and adaptation practices, and the interaction of transition with their transnational lived world. The theoretical framework was built on the argument that athletes' relocation from one cultural and sporting context to another alters their established life balance requiring the reconstitution of self, behaviours and relationships in order to achieve career continuity and normal life functioning.

The dissertation approached the experience of transition from a social constructivist epistemological standpoint that individuals construct reality within embedded social structures and social practices. Through qualitative interviews (Articles 1, 2, 3, and 4) and a digital ethnography of social media (Article 4), data were collected from elite African athletes in Germany and aspiring youth athletes in Africa to answer the research questions. Presented in four independent papers, Article 1 explored the social structural contexts of becoming and the imaginations of mobility through football and migration among youth athletes in Africa; Article 2 examined the experiences that elite African athletes encounter in the process of mobilising self for a transnational career within the context of work and German society; Article 3 examined their adaptation and experience of social support in the process of transition; and Article 4 explored the transnational activities of elite African footballers in their home countries and the impact on their sporting careers and lives.

In the following sections, I present an integrated discussion of the findings at a meta level that conveys the key contributions of my thesis to empirical literature, theory, and methodology.

6.2. Key empirical contributions

Four golden threads may be identified that run through the research papers in this dissertation. These are discussed in the following subheadings.

- **The cultural distance within the sporting context is narrowing**

A key thread in this dissertation is that while the cultural distance emanating from the wider society still remains, sporting culture-related differences are narrowing. In Article 2, the findings showed the cultural and environmental differences that posed challenges to African athletes in transition in Germany. These have been previously highlighted in literature including language (Ryba et al., 2016; Samuel et al., 2020), the weather (Samuel et al., 2020; Brandão & Vieira, 2013) and the high degree of formality in social relationships and the associated loneliness and homesickness (Ryba et al., 2016; Samuel et al., 2020; Brandão & Vieira, 2013). In Article 3 and 4, the findings showed that the athletes dealt with these challenges through culture learning (language), rationalising and accepting their experiences as part of their jobs, or prioritising their athletic identity (weather) and by maintaining ties with family and friends in their homelands through phone calls, return visits and material support (loneliness and homesickness).

The findings in Article 3 revealed that the differences in sporting culture between Europe and Africa is blurring, arising from the merging of talent development systems and cultures. This convergence of sporting cultures is happening as a result of the inflow of foreign capital into the development of football academies in Africa (Darby et al., 2007; Poli, 2006a). Prime talents developed in these academies are mostly sold on lucrative deals to European clubs, and the academies' graduates are an important source of elite transnational African players in Europe (Darby et al., 2007). The modelling of talent development in local academies along European

standards has reshaped the football habitus by eroding the differences in training systems, diet and nutrition and other practices between European and African talent development contexts.

Elite African players still experience cultural differences between their home and host environments and undergo behavioural and psychosocial changes in order to adapt to their host culture. However, the cultural distance within the sporting context is narrowing and this has significant impacts on their adaptation to transition in Europe. From diet to football training and to habits and daily routines, everything within many of the elite academies in Africa are modelled along European systems. In a sporting sense, the players arrive in Europe before their arrival. As one of the athletes aptly remarked when asked about what he had to change about himself in order to fit into the sporting context in Germany: 'I would say there is nothing really to change'.

- **The centrality of the athletic self in cultural transition**

The second key thread across the research articles is the centrality of the athletic self in African athletes' transition in Germany. The players' adaptation to transition involved a change in their perception of self. The evolution of the athletic identity shapes the experience of transition, the strategies of coping and adaptation, and the athlete's balancing act of integration and their transnational lived world. In Articles 2 and 3, the findings revealed that African players in Germany prioritise their athletic identity over other identities and see their experiences in transition through this identity. For instance, one of the athletes explains that his football takes priority over his friends at home because of his 'need to focus here'. Seiberth et al. (2017) have previously argued that in elite sport, athletic identity is always prioritized over other identities. While in Germany, the athletes began to define their lived experience within the framework of their career and refocused their attention, energy and emotions towards achieving sporting progress.

The prioritisation of the athletic identity is related in many ways to the athletes' cultural socialisation, family and class backgrounds, migration motivations and imagined pathways of mobility explained in Article 1. Firstly, the motivations for a football career and migration to Europe were found to include the struggle for socioeconomic advancement for self and family rooted in a humble childhood and the limited hope for mobility in the local economy. Secondly, I found that among the youth from working class backgrounds (who mostly represent the class background of the majority of elite transnational African athletes), the path to social mobility was generally unidimensional, built solely on an imagined career in football and migration to Europe. In Article 4, I found that the players offered support in different ways to family, community and society in their homelands. Most important among these, are the acts of piety to family and charity to community shown in material and other ways. This devotion was found to be rooted in a culture of obligation to family and community in most African societies.

Having invested all hope of economic advancement for self and family in football and migration and also having been culturally socialised to take up the welfare responsibilities of family and community, football inevitably assumes the fulcrum of the athletes' life narrative. Football plays a crucial instrumental role in the desired life of the athletes, that of their families and community. The achievement of this desired future finds expression in the athletic self which leads to its elevation above every other identity and conditions most experiences. This supports the arguments by Berry (1997) that migration motivation, and Schlossberg (1981) that the perception of the transition, are important factors in the experience of and adaptation to transition. The prioritisation of the athletic self informs the coping strategy of 'rationalisation' found in Article 3, which involves justifying and normalising challenges (e.g., severe weather) so as to make them less stressful. As argued by Seiberth et al. (2017), the athletic self is a 'functional' self-concept that is

goal-oriented and helps athletes to suppress experiences that distract or depart from the goal. By foregrounding the athletic self, the players are able to focus on their athletic career and achieve the ultimate goal of a secure livelihood for self, family and community.

- **Otherness as an experience embodied in cultural transition**

Berry (1997) posited that attitudes towards the other is a factor in the experience and adaptation to cultural transition. The findings that show that otherness is an embedded experience of African athletes in transition in Germany is a key contribution of this dissertation. The findings showed that racial othering is not only a structural phenomenon but also agentic and reflexive. Most of the literature on otherness within sports in Germany focus on structurally mediated experiences of racial discrimination or the characterization of the other (e.g., van Campenhout & van Houtumb, 2021; Peucker, 2009). On the other hand, the agentic and reflexively reproduced otherness has not been well explored in literature. Only a few studies have possibly done so, and only Ungruhe (2013), Agergaard and Ungruhe (2016) and Engh et al. (2017) have explored this in relation to African players in Europe. Ungruhe's work showed that though local stereotypes such as 'naturally strong', 'hard-working' and 'playful' may limit their value and become sources of precarity, African players also self-characterize themselves along these stereotypes and instrumentally use same to negotiate better contracts and advance their careers. In Article 2, this dissertation takes this point further to show three other ways in which self-characterization operates at an agentic and reflexive level. The first two dimensions apply to the sporting context while the third dimension applies to the wider society.

The first dimension involves the process of locating self in the football hierarchy and transfer market. There is an embedded recognition by the athletes that they occupy a less valued place in the European football hierarchy in relation to players from the other major footballing regions.

Poli (2006b) has previously argued that the disproportionate representation of African players in the lower divisions in Europe is as a result of structural factors, particularly 'wage dumping' by European clubs. The finding in Article 2 provides an additional perspective which demonstrates that it is also the expression of agency by African players within the structures that enable and constrain possibilities. African athletes were found to craft sporting progress and decide on career moves based on their calculated location of self within the football talent market. Given that African players are most often unknown quantities on arriving in Europe and suffer depreciated value due to racialised stereotypes (Agergaard & Ungruhe, 2016), opportunities that guaranteed playtime and visibility, even when they appeared in lower divisions in the big European footballing nations were most favoured, with the hope of enhancing value and transfer to the higher divisions and for higher remuneration.

The second dimension is the narrative of racialised differences in sporting culture which African players employ to speak of host and home sporting contexts. Agergaard and Ungruhe, (2016) have written that stereotypes of the archetypal African player are embedded in professional football folklore in Europe, and African players adopt these racialised narratives to make sense of their place and experiences. The narrative of the playful but not disciplined African player contrasts with the business minded and success-oriented culture of European football. To this regard, there is a structurally mediated expression of agency, where taken for granted vocabularies of difference condition narratives of the self. In Article 2, the players were found to actively reproduce assumed differences through their narrative that German football demands a higher level of discipline than is expected in their home countries. That is to say that the athletes live in and through a racialised narrative of self.

The third dimension involves the process of locating self in society. This is the process by which a high-status African athlete locates self in relation to the host society and fellow ethnic others. While acknowledging a difference from the native population, the athlete simultaneously makes a claim for the right to belonging which he has 'earned' but may not be extended to fellow ethnic others who have not. By emphasizing self as a 'model immigrant' who is making positive contributions to German society, he distanced self from some supposed undesirable members of the African immigrant community to make claims for acceptance and belonging. This is a process which I termed the 'difference in difference' of the racialised other. I also argued that this process reflects local political discourses of the other within the binaries of the good and the bad immigrant, which problematize the presence of certain groups, especially Africans, and demand the other to earn acceptance and belonging (Galyga et al., 2019; d'Haenens & Joris, 2019; van Campenhout & van Houtumb, 2021).

- **The important but ambivalent role of a transnational sphere of belonging**

Discourses of athletes' cultural transition tend to focus mostly on what happens within the host environment to the neglect of or a marginal attention on activities and relationships in the transnational social fields. Even when the transnational sphere is discussed about African players, it tends to also dwell more around how athletes recreate home or maintain a sense of home at their host locations, or the remittances and charity activities at home to support family and community. In Article 4, this dissertation makes an important contribution that deepens our understanding of the various forms of engagement with the transnational social field and the role in the athletes' integration, psychosocial balance and career advancement at the host location.

In addition to the acts of reciprocity and charity to family and community in the form of material and emotional support, the athletes were found to also display active 'athletic citizenship'

(Agyemang, 2014) in their home countries. These include acts of solidarity with fellow citizens during periods of civil repression or in support of worthy social causes, and acts of patriotism towards the nation, which involve representing the nation in competitions or the ambassadorial role of promoting a positive image of the country, its cultures and people. These acts were found to be cultivated in a sense of obligation, reciprocity, empathy, pride, and also, self-interest. These motives that underlie the players' transnational engagement are intertwined with the motivations of migration found in article 1, which include the desire for socioeconomic advancement for self and family, the patriotic zeal to serve their country, and the desire for recognition and status. African athletes' transnational engagements were also found to be beneficial to their careers, including improving their emotional well-being, which contributes positively to athletic performance, and improved transfer prospects and commercial value, arising from participation in national teams. The transnational engagements also place costs on the players' material resources and emotional well-being, and international participation may be a source of conflict with the club.

This study deepens our understanding of the important but ambivalent role of the transnational social field in transition. It shows that a strong transnational sphere of belonging is important for African athletes' adaptation and integration, but also has some less than desirable impacts. In addition, African athletes maintain a more holistic engagement with the transnational social field than is usually captured in the literature, which focuses mostly on remittances and charity activities. This is not the same with sportspeople from other regions whose athletic citizenship has been well acknowledged in the literature (e.g., Calow, 2021; Smith, 2021). The findings of this dissertation enable the construction of a new narrative of elite transnational African athletes as more than just economic migrants and social philanthropists but also social, cultural and political change makers as well as ordinary people with a life beyond sport and the public.

6.3. Key contributions to theory

The findings in Article 2 demonstrate that the trajectories of transition challenges show both decline, adaptation and consistency. This re-evaluates the Cultural Transition Model (Ryba et al., 2016, p. 11) and provides deeper insight into the temporal trajectories of adaptive challenges. The CTM articulates three temporal phases including pre-transition, acute cultural adaptation, and sociocultural adaptation, which correspond to a set of experiences at each phase. While findings in Article 2 support that certain experiences are peculiar at a given phase (e.g., the emotions associated with pre-transition), other findings show that given experiences may vary across athletes and follow different temporal trajectories. While some adaptive challenges may last a few months, others may last several years and vary from one athlete to another. These individual variations may be accounted for by peculiar biographic factors such as age, previous experience of migration, and relationship status, all of which support the role of individual characteristics in transition posited by Berry (1997) and Schlossberg (1981).

The findings in Article 2 challenge Berry's (1997) claim that the persistence of an adaptive challenge leads to 'psychopathology' and a lack of fit that may stall the individual's integration. For instance, though the severity of the weather remained a very significant challenge and a source of frustration across all the years, the athletes were able to carry on with their normal athletic life and sustain sporting progress. As argued in Articles 2 and 3, the focus on the athletic self and the rationalisation of experiences as constitutive of the athletic self-narrative, enable the athletes to achieve emotional and mental stability in the face of uncomfortable experiences.

The findings in Article 4 shed more light on the various forms of interaction between integration and transnationalism which provides a sports contextualized demonstration of Erdal and Oeppen's (2013) integration-transnationalism interaction framework. African players' interactions fit into

five of the six typologies outlined by Erdal and Oeppen. At the socio-cultural level, the findings showed additive and synergistic interactions but not the antagonistic. For instance, the athletes' cultivation of relationships with team-mates while also maintaining relationships with family and friends at home is additive – i.e. 'feeling of belonging and socio-cultural connections in country of origin and of settlement'. In Article 1, aspiring athletes' motivation for migration included a desire to gain status and recognition at home, and in Article 4, motives of transnational athletes' acts of charity and patriotism included a sense of pride. This demonstrates a synergistic interaction – i.e. 'feeling of belonging and connections in one place gives confidence to further develop connections in the other'. The findings did not support an antagonistic interaction – i.e. 'feeling of belonging and socio-cultural connections in one place displace feelings of belonging in the other'.

At the structural level, the interaction was observed at all three levels – additive, synergistic, and antagonistic. The athletes make regular return visits to see family or for national team participation while actively plying their careers in Germany. This shows an additive relationship – i.e. 'economically active in country of origin and of settlement, (dual) citizenship, regularised mobility'. The athletes were found to invest resources from their income in owning facilities at home, family care and community services. This represents a synergistic relationship – i.e. 'resources gained in one place are invested to develop further resources in the other'. On the other hand, participation in national team games was observed to be, at times, in conflict with the interests of clubs, and clubs may discourage the athletes from being available for international games. This demonstrates an antagonistic interaction – i.e. 'demand for resources in one place limits ability to meet demands in the other'.

6.4. Key contributions to methodology

This dissertation makes an important contribution to data collection methods by pioneering an adaptation of the biographical mapping grid by Schubring et al. (2019) to the study of cultural transition in sports. Developed originally for mapping biographical developments and critical health experiences of athletes such as injury, I adapted it to map the timeline of transition experiences, enabling their trajectories to be traced. Through this, the dissertation made important findings that challenged some of the arguments put forward by the cultural transition model (Ryba et al., 2016) and the acculturation framework (Berry, 1997) explained above.

Using a mixed method approach in Article 4, one that combined interviews with digital ethnography of social media to study cultural transition and the transnational social field, was innovative. Majority of previous studies used interviews, on-site ethnography and surveys to collect data from research subjects. Previous studies that employed digital ethnography of social media as a method examined different issues including athletic citizenship, sports communication, and sports branding, etc. but none I could identify has used the method to study cultural transition. Digital ethnography enabled me to access athletes' activities and experiences that would have been only incompletely rendered through interviews alone.

The common approach to studying cultural transition in sports is to interview athletes and collect present and retrospective data on their experiences. By this way, researchers are able to reconstruct their past. While this does produce useful and meaningful data, certain experiences may not be completely rendered in the way that they actually happened due to loss of memory or the interjection of subsequent experience on memory (Barusch, 2011). In this dissertation, Article 1 studied aspiring youth athletes in Africa to generate narrative accounts close to the reality of pre-migration contexts which subsequently influence the experience of transition and adaptation.

Retrospective data about pre-migration were also collected from the elite transnational athletes, which further corroborated and validated the accounts of the youth athletes. This was methodologically innovative and expands the approaches to accessing memory and experience in qualitative sports research.

6.5. Practical implications

The findings of this dissertation offer some lessons for managing cultural transitions of transnational African athletes and others in similar contexts. The following suggestions provide practical actionable points:

- **Psychosocial support during the early periods of arrival**

Though sporting culture differences are narrowing, other cultural differences remain that present challenges for African athletes in Germany. Besides, leaving family and friends behind to 'another world' entirely is a difficult process lived through loneliness and homesickness. Clubs may provide support to the athletes by creating a welcoming and warm atmosphere. This may be achieved through counselling. Where possible, communication during activities may be done mostly through a language that the athlete understands. This can happen through interpreters. Cultural resources such as music can produce a sense of home and may be used during collective social events to improve the athletes' wellbeing.

Loneliness and homesickness were observed to be most severe with the young and unaccompanied athlete experiencing transnational migration for the first time. In situations like this, clubs may also facilitate athletes to be accompanied initially by family members or provide them with shared apartments rather than single residential arrangements. This may aid the process of moving away from the familiar surroundings of home to a foreign culture for the first time.

- **Cultural awareness and diversity training for staff and players**

The multicultural environment of contemporary professional football requires staff and players to be knowledgeable about cultural diversity and how to deal with multiethnic environments. It should not be taken for granted that everyone understands the right thing to do or that othering and the associated consequences no longer exist within football. Focus most times is on overt forms of racial discrimination, but the othering discussed in this dissertation operate at a more covert and unconscious level.

Cultural awareness and diversity training would enable coaches and administrators to recognise and tackle unconscious bias. This would start by deemphasizing stereotypes and racialised narratives of talent and group behaviour. Doing this would not only entrench fairness and reduce unrealistic race-based performance expectations, but also enhance team harmony and performance.

- **Accommodation of athletes' transnational life**

Though the transnational social field may sometimes create conflicts between the player and the club, it is very important for the wellbeing of African athletes, and in many ways, contributes to their athletic progress. Clubs should offer more support to players and help them navigate engagement in this field. One issue of importance here is engagement in political and social activism, which may be a sensitive issue for clubs. Football has long operated a policy of political neutrality, but sports athletes have also shown that their popularity can be used to promote worthy social causes. Clubs may need to encourage and provide training for the players for responsible and healthy engagement with social causes.

Participation in international football was also found to be an area of potential conflict in this study. The widely reported reluctance of European clubs to release African players for the Africa Cup of Nations tournament in January 2022 supports this finding. Clubs need to support players who choose to participate since the benefits of international participation are mutual for the player and the club.

- **Development of dual career competencies and other life skills**

The emphasis on the athletic identity by athletes in transition plays an important role in the suppression of challenging experiences. However, it may pose other problems for the athletes, especially at the end of their athletic careers. Firstly, as shown in Article 1, a unidimensional path to development may harm future livelihood opportunities for athletes invested heavily in football. African players have been shown to face higher levels of precarity after retirement from football because of limited opportunities for continued work within football or outside the game (Agergaard & Ungruhe, 2016). This is largely as a result of an overemphasized athletic identity that leads to the lack of personal development through education or training that enhances opportunities in other roles after retirement. This problem may be reduced through educational and training opportunities that equip the players with the knowledge and skills for roles within and outside of sports at the termination of their playing careers. Such education may be in the form of degree programmes or training for sports-related jobs and services such as coaching, scouting or game analysis, etc.

The second problem may arise from the challenge of finding a new meaning beyond active involvement in sport. For many of these athletes, their structured athletic involvement started in the academy even before their teenage years and may run into their thirties. For long periods, their lives are defined by their athletic self and cultivating new lives outside of sport may require a lot

of psychosocial support. Clubs and personal managers would need to provide opportunities for counselling for the athletes before and after retirement in order to help them establish a new life balance.

6.6. Limitations

This research is limited for the understanding of African players' transition out of active athletic involvement in Germany since those of them who retired from the game while playing in Germany were not included. Further to this first point, it is limited for understanding the evolution of African athletes' cultural transition experiences in Germany. Inclusion of retired athletes would have allowed an analysis of the experiences at an era-bound comparative level so as to examine what has changed over time.

Though the findings of the study may be transferable to other contexts in Western Europe, a cross-country comparative study may provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the transition experiences of African athletes in Europe. Similarly, a comparative study of transnational athletes in Europe from different regions (e.g., South American players vs African players) may also reveal further region-specific dynamics of cultural transition in elite football.

6.7. Challenges

The main difficulty I faced in carrying out this study was accessing the research population in Germany. The elite football community is notorious for its impregnable wall of defence against outsiders. Law (2019) detailed the difficulties associated with gaining access to and the trust of the community for research purposes. The football clubs were reluctant to offer any assistance when contacted and declined my requests for interviews. However, I was able to get in through a personal contact who had access to some of the players and snowballed my way to the others.

6.8. Suggestions for future research

The findings of this study open up opportunities for further research. The following issues may be worth investigating:

- Given the centrality of the athletic self in the cultural transition of African athletes and the risk it poses to the development of dual career pathways, investigating African players' transition out of active football would enhance our understanding of the long-term consequences of the athletic identity on their lives. This may also focus some attention on personal development activities that the players take up in preparation for retirement.
- The multicultural composition of most professional football clubs necessitates an understanding of the place of diversity in club management practices. What place does diversity and inclusion occupy in management operations, team interactions and player-coach relations? How do clubs create and promote a culturally sensitive and diverse environment?
- International duties are, at times, points of conflict between African players and European clubs. Yet, this issue has not received sufficient attention. For instance, investigating how African players make decisions when these conflicts arise may produce important knowledge about the interactions between club career and the transnational social field.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Interview guide

Athlete's background

- Can you tell me a little about growing up?
    - What was life in your family like?
    - How was life in your neighborhood and community?
    - Schooling?
    - What would you consider the most important things in your career and personal life?
- When did you start playing football and at what time did it become a serious engagement for you?
- How did your family react when you became more serious with football?
- When did you first leave home to pursue a professional career?
    - How old were you?
    - Was the first time you left home to play football within or outside your home country?
- Can you tell me about where (countries and clubs) you've played football in, in a chronological order?
- (If first move abroad is not Germany) can you tell me about your experience in the countries you played football in before coming to Germany?
    - What were the most important moments?
    - What were your most difficult challenges?

Pre-transition to Germany

- How did you come to the German football league?
    - How did you get to know the club and how did they contact you?
    - Did anyone help you negotiate your contract with the club?
    - Who else played an important role during this time and what was their role?
- How did you prepare for relocating to Germany and how did this period affect other aspects of your life?

Relocation and adapting to life in Germany

- Impression and expectations on arriving Germany
    - Can you tell me about your first day at your first club in Germany?

- How similar or different did you find the way of life in Germany from your home country and or other countries you have lived in?
- How different is the football culture in Germany from the country (and club) you came here from?
- Did you set any career or personal targets when you first arrived in Germany?

- Most significant challenges or moments
  - What would you say have been the most challenging experiences or moments in your career in Germany related to either football or your personal life?
    - From the time you arrived through your first season
    - Beyond the first season
- Coping and adapting to challenges
  - What strategies did you adopt to cope with the challenges?
  - Were there people who supported you through these challenging experiences and in what way did they help you?
  - Do you think you had to change anything about yourself to fit into your club(s) or life in Germany?
  - What do you think would have helped you to better manage these challenges?
  - Have you at any time felt like leaving Germany to pursue your career in another country? If yes or no, why?

Managing transition and transnational commitments

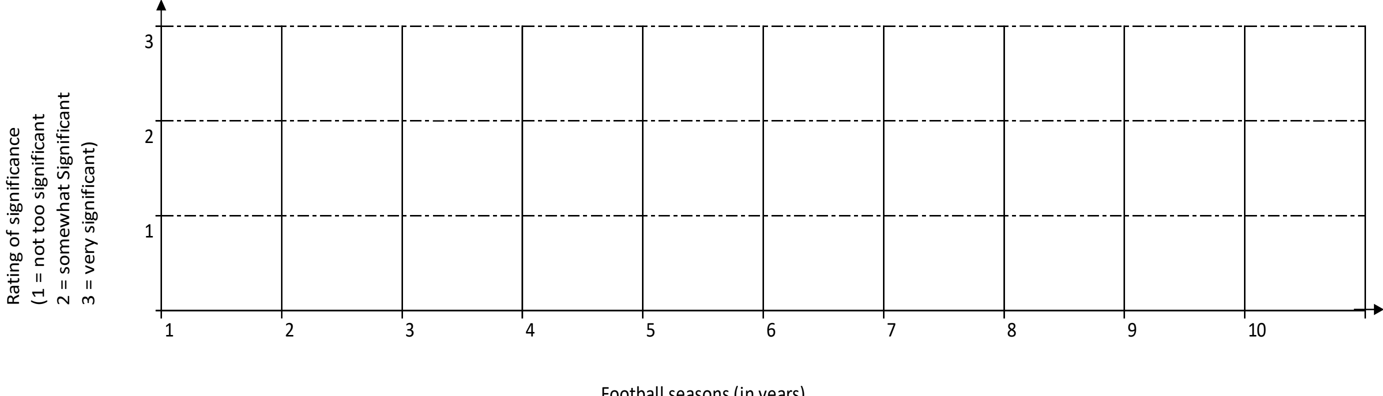
- How did moving here affect your relationship with your family and friends back in your home country?
- What expectations do people at home have of you (both football and non-football expectations)?
- How do you manage these expectations?
- Have you been part of any of the national teams (U-17, U- 20, U-23, full national team) since your time in Germany?
- How has your participation in the national team impacted on your career here in Germany (both positive and negative impacts)?
  - Status at club?
  - Relationship with and playing opportunities at club?
  - Status in home country?

Transition experience and reflections on the future

- How do you think that moving to Germany and the experiences you have faced here impacted on your career?
  - What are your most troubling concerns with regards to your experiences in Germany?

- What gives you the most optimism or satisfaction with regards to your experiences in Germany?
- What do your experiences make you think about the future? (career, personal life, etc.)

Appendix II: Biographical mapping grid



Appendix III: General participant information form

Contact person for any queries:

Ikechukwu Ejekwumadu

General participant information about the study

Study title: The Cultural Adjustment and Integration of African Athletes in the German Football League.

Welcome to our study on 'The Cultural Adjustment and Integration of African Athletes in the German Football League'.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. Through this study, we are investigating the cultural and career transition experiences of African athletes arriving the German football league. The aim is to understand the specific transition and adaptation issues faced by football players from Africa when they arrive and through their athletic career in Germany.

Course of the study

The interview would last between one (1) to two (2) hours.

Your task is to take part in the interview, respond to the questions about your transition and adaptation experience. In addition, with the assistance of the interviewer, you will be required to complete a biographical map. The mapping grid is a two-dimensional rectangular grid that maps the chronological timeline of the athlete's experiences, with each experience rated on a defined scale of significance.

You may be asked questions about your football career from your early days in your home country to becoming a professional, travelling abroad, arriving and plying your trade in Germany. Focus will be on the key experiences, the timeline of the experiences, support systems and coping measures, and the impact on private life and career.

If you have any questions, please send them to the contact person.

Voluntariness and anonymity

Participation in the study is voluntary. You can terminate your participation in this study at any time, and without giving a reason and without incurring any disadvantages.

The above-described data and personal communications collected as part of this study will be treated confidentially. Those project employees who have personal data through direct contact

with you are subject to confidentiality or data secrecy. Furthermore, the results of the study will be published anonymously, i.e., without your data being able to be assigned to you personally. Information such as country of origin, previous clubs and countries of residence, or unique personal situations that may lead to respondent recognition will not be reported in this study.

Privacy

The collection and processing of your personal data described above takes place in a pseudonymized manner in the Institute of Sports Science using a pseudonym and without giving your name. There is a pseudonym list on paper that connects your name with the pseudonym. The pseudonym list is only accessible to the research supervisor and the doctoral candidate; that is, only these people can associate the data collected with your name. The transcript of the data is stored on the RDMO, the data management tool of the University of Tübingen for ten (10) years after which it is deleted. You can request the deletion of all data collected from you at any time until the oral examination is over and the data is destroyed.

Debriefing

In the event you experience any negative feelings as a result of experiences shared during the interview, the investigator would be happy to discuss such with you and provide useful advice towards alleviating any negative emotions.

Compensation

There is no payment for participating in the study.

Appendix IV: Declaration of consent form

Contact person for any queries:

Ikechukwu Ejekwumadu

Declaration of Consent

Study title: The Cultural Adjustment and Integration of African Athletes in the German Football League.

I (name of the participant in block letters)

____

have in writing been informed about the study and the interview. I agree to give information as described in the general information form.

If I had any questions about this proposed study, they were answered by

Mr / Ms ______________________________________ completely and to my satisfaction.

I agree with the described collection and processing of the data, on my career transition and adaptation experience as a professional footballer in Germany. The recording and evaluation of this data is carried out in a pseudonymized manner in the Institute of Sports Science, using a pseudonym and without giving my name. There is a pseudonym list on paper that connects my name to this list. This pseudonym list is only accessible to the research supervisor and the doctoral candidate, which means that only these people can associate the data collected with my name. In addition, information such as country of origin, previous clubs and countries of residence, or unique personal situations that may lead to respondent recognition will not be reported in this study. After completing the oral examination of the doctoral project, the transcript of the data is stored on the RDMO, the data management tool of the University of Tübingen for ten (10) years after which it is deleted. I know that I can revoke my consent to the retention or storage of this

data without incurring any disadvantages. I have been informed that I can request the deletion of all my data at any time.

I am interested in finding out something about the basic results of the study and would like to receive the relevant information.

■ YES ■ NO.

Place, date & signature of the participant: (Name of the participant in block letters)

____

Place, date & signature of the contact person:

____

If I have any questions or other concerns, I can contact the following people:

(First name and surname, address, telephone number and email address of the contact person)

Appendix V: Sound and image recording consent form

Contact person for any queries:

Ikechukwu Ejekwumadu

Declaration of consent for image and / or Sound recordings

Study title: The Cultural Adjustment and Integration of African Athletes in the German Football League.

I (name of the participant in block letters)

____

have informed in writing that Mr /Ms. ____

in the study can make an audio recording of the interview.

The recordings serve to capture the discussions, including the questions and responses during the interview, which may be transcribed for the purposes of the study as contained in the general information form.

On the request made by me for an audio recording, I am potentially recognizable.

The audio recording can only be completely anonymized with great effort. This anonymization cannot be guaranteed in the context of this study. There is therefore a very low probability that someone involved in the data analysis will recognize me in the recordings I have made. For this reason, all persons involved in the evaluation are subject to absolute confidentiality and may under no circumstances pass on confidential information to third parties.

The audio recording and evaluation of this data is carried out in a pseudonymized manner in the Institute of Sports Science, using a pseudonym and without giving my name. There is a pseudonym list on paper that connects my name to this number. Since I can potentially be recognized in the audio recordings I have made, I have the right to have these recordings deleted at any time without this resulting in disadvantages. For this purpose, the pseudonym list is kept until the recordings are deleted. The audio recording is deleted after transcription and the transcript is stored on the

RDMO, the data management tool of the University of Tübingen for ten (10) years after which it is deleted.

The declaration of consent for audio recording is voluntary. I can revoke this declaration at any time. In the event of a refusal or withdrawal, I will not incur any costs or other disadvantages; Participating in the study is then not possible.

I had enough time to make a decision and I hereby agree that a request for audio recording is made by me.

I have received a copy of this declaration of consent.

Place, date & signature of the participant: (Name of the participant in block letters)

____

Place, date & signature of the contact person:

____

If I have any questions or other concerns, I can contact the following people:

(First name and surname, address, telephone number and email address of the contact person)

Appendix VI: Ethics Committee approval

Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaftliche Fakultät

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Ethikkommission

Prof. Dr. Benjamin Nagengast
(*stellv. Vorsitzender*)
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Tübingen, den 05.03.2021

AZ.: A2.5.4-158_ns

Stellungnahme zum Forschungsprojekt:
„The-cultural Adjustment and Integration of African Athletes in the German Football League“

Sehr geehrter Herr Prof. Dr. Thiel,

vielen Dank für die Zusendung der überarbeiteten Unterlagen zum o.g. Projekt an die Ethikkommission der Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Fakultät. Aus unserer Sicht ist das im Antrag dargestellte Projekt, wie Sie es vorgestellt haben, ethisch unbedenklich. Folgender Hinweis sollte bei der Durchführung des Projekts berücksichtigt werden.

- Bei der Aufbewahrung der Daten könnte auf eine Speicherung der Tonbandaufnahmen verzichtet werden und diese nach der Transkription gelöscht werden, so dass die Probanden dann nicht mehr über die Sprachdaten identifizierbar sind. Dies ist in solchen Studien das typische Vorgehen, dass auch mit Regeln der guten wissenschaftlichen Praxis konform ist. Die Teilnehmer sollten in der Aufklärung über den Zeitpunkt der Löschung informiert und darauf hingewiesen werden, dass ein Rücktritt danach nicht mehr möglich ist und die Daten keinen Personenbezug aufweisen. Falls doch eine Speicherung der Tonaufzeichnungen für zehn Jahre vorgesehen ist, muss sichergestellt sein, dass die Teilnehmer in diesem Zeitraum auch wirklich die Möglichkeit haben, Ihre Aufnahmen löschen zu lassen. Hier müsste eine verantwortliche Person als Ansprechpartner benannt werden. Da die Tonbandaufnahmen personenbezogene Daten enthalten, sind die Teilnehmer über Ihre Betroffenenrechte nach der DSGVO aufzuklären. Diese Aufklärung sollte mit der Einverständniserklärung dokumentiert werden.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen,

Prof. Dr. Benjamin Nagengast

UNIVERSITÄT TÜBINGEN · WIRTSCHAFTS- UND SOZIALWISSENSCHAFTLICHE FAKULTÄT

Dr. Rolf Frankenberger

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis was written by me, and that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text. All texts quoted directly or paraphrased have been indicated and appropriately cited. All citations made in-text have been included in the reference lists with full bibliographic information. Any jointly authored paper in this thesis has been clearly stated and acknowledged.

I also affirm that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification except as specified. Parts of this work have been published in the *European Journal for Sport and Society* and other submissions for Journal publication have been duly stated in the respective sections.

I hereby affirm in lieu of oath that this is true, and that I have not withheld or omitted any information. I am aware that making false declarations is punishable with a prison term of up to three years or a fine.