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Migrant athletes and the transformation of physical capital. Spatial and temporal dynamics in West African footballers' approaches to post-careers

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ABSTRACT

For many young people from the Global South football labour migration to Europe fuels hopes of social mobility. However, the long-term value of an international career is uncertain. Despite the success of a few migrant role models, professional careers in Europe often go along with a number of social and economic challenges for migrants that hinder sufficient preparations for post-career life courses. In this article, we focus on retiring male West African footballers in Scandinavia and their challenges to transform accumulated physical capital into other forms of social, economic and cultural capital, such as financial resources, social relations, educational assets, language skills and rights in form of long-term residence permits or citizenship in Europe. By foregrounding the temporal and spatial dimensions of the accumulation and transformation of capital, we depict the relational character of its various forms (social, cultural and economic capital) and their changing value in the different localities of players' origins and destinations and at different points in time. Hereby, we show how processes of capital transformation are ambivalent experiences which, nevertheless, point to problematic structures in the global football business that disadvantage migrant players and their attempts to reproduce social mobility after career ending.

KEYWORDS

Transnational football migration; transitions in sports; migrant athletes and social mobility; athlete career discourse; long-term value of sport careers

When former Nigerian international Prince Ikpe Ekong ended his professional career in 2013 after 18 successful years abroad, it was a call from God that provided his post-career pathway. Rather than embarking on the usual struggle of an uncertain coaching career he left the football business to become a pastor in an evangelical church in Sweden where he had spent the last seven years of his playing career. His move may appear extraordinary at first sight, however, having built a strong reputation in and

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beyond his congregation he has probably found his occupational destiny (see Scott, 2015). Hereby, he has achieved something which many other African players attempt to realise with little avail when ending their careers in European football.

Generally, and contrary to Ekong's trajectory, transitions to post-career life courses are a challenging experience for professional athletes (Park et al., 2013). Eventually, the use-value of their accumulated physical capital – a form of capital in its own right comprising of physical skills that athletes possess in different degrees depending on individual attributes of the body, class, gender, location, age, etc. (see Shilling, 1991) – declines. Hence, in order to reproduce social mobility, athletes need to transform their physical capital into what Bourdieu (1986) has conceptualised as the three fundamental yet interlinked forms of capital: 1) economic capital in the form of salaries and resources for making investments, 2) cultural capital in the shape of language skills, educational certificates, long-term residence permits or citizenship and 3) social capital, prominently expressed by established relations to relevant people inside and outside the football business that have the potential to become materially valuable (e.g. when they are converted into other forms of capital, such as by providing access to occupational opportunities and higher salaries). However, retired athletes often struggle to transform their physical capital and find it hard to embark on decent occupational trajectories, to deal with less economic means and the need to change comfortable lifestyles, or to keep the social recognition achieved over their active careers (Park et al., 2013).

For many African players, it is the widespread institutionalised disadvantages over their active careers that impede this transformation and challenge their life courses after career ending (see Ungruhe & Agergaard, 2020a). While many European and non-European players face problematic career courses (Roderick, 2006; Fifpro, 2016), African players are overly affected by structural constraints such as underpay and short-term contracts (Poli, 2006; Ungruhe, 2018), insecurity towards residential rights (Ungruhe & Büdel, 2016) and limited options to embark on dual-careers to facilitate future job opportunities (Agergaard, 2016; Agergaard & Ungruhe, 2016). In light of these constraints and given the highly competitive nature of professional sports, a strong focus on active careers by continuous training and bodily labour is essential for migrant players to succeed in the game and become socially mobile (Agergaard & Sørensen, 2009). Yet, such an explicit stress on developing physical capital leaves little room to invest in and prepare for future post-career trajectories during active careers.

The particular career challenges for African footballers turn attention to the question of the long-term value of such careers, and whether, how, where and when they transform their accumulated physical capital for future use. By centralising these questions, we foreground migrant athletes' experiences and approaches that facilitate or hinder the accumulation and transformation of capital. Hereby, we follow the call to critically examine the role of sports in capital acquisition directed towards social mobility (see Blackshaw & Long, 2005). Doing so, it is vital to consider migrant athletes' struggle, negotiations and decision-makings over time and space. Through this, we show how the transformation of capital is a dynamic, multi-directional and often ambivalent process within a complex web of opportunities, demands and challenges

of the global football business, national economies and policies, and moral economies in the players' home settings.

Migrant athletes and the transformation of capital

Much of the growing body of sociological studies on post-career transitions and experiences has targeted migrant and ethnic minority athletes in Western contexts (see Campbell, 2020; Curran, 2015; Ungruhe & Agergaard, 2020a). These studies have primarily engaged with specific (groups of) athletes' reasons for career ending and the question of their occupational and social mobility amidst political, economic and legal structures and relations of power in and beyond sports in destination settings. However, while studies have highlighted some of the structural barriers that hinder the transformation of physical capital among ethnic minority players, such as the aforementioned issues of underpay, short-contract lengths and barriers to embark on dual-careers, the particular approaches and struggles of those players have received less attention.

Generally, this reflects the relatively little emphasis on agency in relation to capital in Bourdieu's works (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Agergaard & Sørensen, 2009). Yet, a focus on athletes' agency and lived experiences contributes to move beyond simplistic portraits of ethnic minority players as sheer victims of a ruthless football business. In an earlier article, we have shown how West African athletes' border-crossing activities and communication with family members and friends at home ease structural challenges encountered in their Scandinavian host societies (Ungruhe & Agergaard, 2020b). Hereby, players utilise existing social capital to establish themselves in a northern European country and its football industry while they negotiate upward social mobility in West African home settings by making their career valuable for the wider local social environment (e.g. by remittances to family members and friends). In this article, however, we examine how those transnational relations are embedded in more general practices of professional male West African athletes to transform accumulated physical capital into relevant forms of social, cultural and economic capital for their post-career trajectories.

Analysing these practices in relation to time and space is a crucial approach. First of all, migrant players already arrive in Europe with different sorts and degrees of capital (e.g. with regard to educational qualifications obtained at home or relations to relevant people in the football business). Hence, starting conditions on the eve of a professional career abroad differ and are bound to the individual athlete's possession of capital. In addition, accumulating and transforming physical capital over careers and post-careers is a dynamic process. Over time, as careers accelerate, decline, revive or end, (former) players' scope of action to transform physical capital varies accordingly. Therefore, while physical capital has different value at these various career stages, players consequently have varying opportunities to transform their physical capital into relevant economic, cultural and social capital for post-careers. For instance, playing for a club at the European top-level usually provides the opportunity to accumulate more economic capital in the form of salaries and social capital through greater visibility than being a substitute player at the third-tier level on the European

football periphery. Moreover, the relevance of capital changes over the course of post-careers. For example, social capital in the form of relations to relevant people in the football business who could facilitate coaching jobs usually has more value right after the end of one's career than several years after career ending and without having gained significant experiences in the field in the meantime.

Regarding the spatial dimension of capital, once transformed capital often has different value in different locations. This is of particular relevance upon athletes' career ending when the question of staying abroad or returning home comes to the fore (see Kyeremeh, 2020). For instance, while specific forms of cultural capital, such as Scandinavian language skills, have probably more use-value in northern Europe than in West Africa, the reverse is often visible in relation to social capital. Given the multifarious structural barriers in European football that Black players are confronted with, namely general racial discrimination in sports, the lack of diversity among board members in European clubs as well as the widespread non-recognition of African coaching licences in Europe (Bradbury et al., 2018; Campbell, 2020; Mezahi, 2020), links to relevant people in the football milieu that lead to coaching jobs are often easier to utilise in African settings (see Ungruhe & Agergaard, 2020a). Further, in light of the economic disparities between West Africa and northern Europe, accumulated economic capital in the form of financial means has often more use-value in athletes' home settings than abroad. In this regard, our research participants frequently mentioned that they made investments in businesses and real estate in their respective countries of origin rather than in Europe. This practice often promises a more profitable cost-benefit-ratio that contributes to a migrant's success at home (see Ungruhe & Agergaard, 2020b). Hence and to conclude, seen from a transnational perspective and in addition to its processual character, capital is relational and bound to locality.

However, while the use-value of such social, cultural and economic capital is seldom exclusive and fixed, its fluid and relational characteristics point to the fact that these forms of capital are not invariable positive assets but often involve problematic features (see e.g. Wacquant, 1998; Agergard, 2018, for social capital). Though capital is not an exclusive asset of a privileged group (Coleman, 1990), access to and utilisation of capital is restricted in many ways and often leads to the exclusion of particular underprivileged groups (Field, 2008; Spaaij, 2011). Migrants from the Global South are often excluded from a) transferring capital from home to abroad to accumulate further capital (such as with regard to the widespread non-approval of educational certificates obtained at home that could facilitate further education abroad, see Black et al., 2018), b) transforming accumulated capital abroad into other, long-lasting forms of capital (such as from physical capital to economic capital as analysed in this article, see also Ungruhe & Agergaard, 2020a), and c) utilising accumulated capital abroad upon their return home (e.g. such as when obtained qualifications do not suit the needs of the local job market, see Martin, 2005). Therefore, while the transfer, accumulation and transformation of the various forms of capital are linked to the various structural inequalities and power imbalances that migrants face over their journeys, transforming physical capital into other forms of capital is often an ambiguous process that may facilitate or restrict social mobility. In the section that follows our methodological

approach below, we analyse empirically how this takes place among West African football migrants.

Methods and material

In a research project running from 2015 to 2018, we investigated post-career approaches, transitions and livelihoods among male West African footballers in Scandinavia. While West African players form the bulk of African migrant players in Europe (Poli, 2006; Ungruhe & Schmidt, 2020), the focus on the Scandinavian setting reflects widespread understandings of this area as a 'stepping-stone' for African footballers who wish to enter into Europe's major football leagues (Poli, 2010). Furthermore, Scandinavian professional sports have widely institutionalised the support of athletes' post-career transitions, though the benefit for migrant athletes, whose specific needs are not acknowledged in the EU Guidelines on Dual Career in Sports, is uncertain (Agergaard, 2016; see EU, 2012).

Using a snowball sampling technique, we conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with male West African athletes who played professional football in a Scandinavian league at some point between 1994 and 2016. The duration of their employment with a Scandinavian club varied from half a season to 14 years. At the time of the interview, all either had retired from professional football or were approaching their post-career, and resided in Scandinavia or had returned to West African localities.

Depending on the players' locations, the interviews took place in either Scandinavia or West Africa. They ranged from 30 to 110 min, with an average length of approximately one hour, and were conducted by both authors. In order to generate a holistic account of their trajectories, we first focussed on the players' relevant biographical aspects ranging from the role of football during childhood and youth, over their family background and level of education to the question of how the move to abroad had materialised. We then emphasised players' experiences over their career abroad, such as educational opportunities and obstacles, the role of transnational relations and social networks, and legal issues like residence permits or citizenship. Hereby, we shed light on players' respective options and challenges over their careers and the outcome of their decisions and experiences concerning the reproduction of social mobility after career ending.

We analysed the interviews according to a flexible and reflexive qualitative thematic analysis approach that draws on the six-phase process developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thus, overarching patterns in the semi-structured interviews were identified and allowed a contextual interpretation of West African footballers' experiences, approaches and practices in relation to their post-career transitions and trajectories. First, and following the transcription and digitalisation of the interviews, we made ourselves familiar with the material (step 1). By applying standard software for qualitative analysis, we developed initial codes (step 2) and looked for general themes in the transcripts (step 3) that we evaluated and refined (step 4). Hereafter, we mapped key themes leading us to an analytic interpretation of the data (step 5) presented here in a textual form (step 6).

Over the whole research process, we worked in line with the principles of research integrity and good scientific practice of our respective institutions. Since West African migrants in Europe generally qualify as vulnerable subjects according to EU research guidelines (EC, 2020), we treat personal information of our research participants (including particular biographical information, places and events) confidential to guarantee their anonymity and integrity. Our participants were informed orally and in written form about our study's goals and approaches, e.g. methods, data handling and plans of dissemination. In order to provide a maximum degree of individual safety and comfort, they were further ensured the continuous right to refuse participation partly or entirely. All players gave their active consent to the interviews and the outlined procedure regarding data analysis and dissemination.

Transforming capital for future life courses?

Based on the players' experiences, we have identified three dimensions of practice crucial for the transformation of physical capital into more long-lasting forms of capital: 1) accumulating economic resources and fulfilling transnational give-back obligations (economic capital), 2) obtaining language skills, formal education and citizenship (cultural capital), and 3) utilising social relations and securing future jobs (social capital). In the following, we shed light on how players have approached these key dimensions of practice over their careers and discuss the exchange-value of their transient physical capital and possible challenges for their post-career transitions and livelihoods.

Accumulating economic resources and fulfilling transnational obligations

Securing a contract with a European club may materialise a talent's dream (Esson, 2013; Ungruhe, 2016). However, the new status as a professional international footballer comes with consequences and is often an ambivalent experience. In this section, we show how balancing the lure (and ability) of consumption with the need for investments to provide for future livelihoods and meeting expectations from family and friends, is a difficult endeavour for many West African athletes.

Even if players are on short-term contracts and receive only a modest salary, embarking on a professional football career in Europe usually implies a rise in economic capital. While some clubs provide housing and a car for the duration of the contract in addition to a salary, players also enjoy amenities such as a signing bonus or access to bank loans or credit lines. Hence, for some months or a few years, most migrant players have financial resources available that often provide for a better, longed-for lifestyle. 'The game has been good to me', recalls Evans, who ended his professional career at the age of 33 following successful spells in Europe and Asia. 'I could take 40.000 [US-]Dollar cash and buy a car, [a] Porsche Boxster.' Suddenly accessing goods that had been out of reach in their home countries shifts the players' attention to the new possibilities in the here and now. 'You are celebrating. You want a comfortable life, you get it', Evans explains. Nana, who came to Scandinavia in the mid-1990s and stayed for a season before moving on to various other destinations in Europe, remembers likewise. Suddenly making money lured him and other players to

buy material goods as status symbols like fancy cars or designer clothes that met dreams of success rather than basic needs or long-term goals: 'You can just go to any car shop to say "I want this car"', and then they will put it in your account. And they will take it every month. In another month, you see another car [and] you say, "I want this one too", and they put it in your account.' According to Nana, as a young player, enjoying life and living for the moment is what counts: 'But you don't care, you are young, you think you [have] more year[s] in your career' and hence assume that this lifestyle could continue for some time.

Yet, securing a contract abroad comes with transnational obligations. Within football migrants' families, moving abroad for football is part of a 'household livelihood strategy' (Van der Meij & Darby, 2017). Accordingly, footballers are seen as breadwinners who care for the family's general well-being and social mobility, e.g. by providing for the education of (extended) family members. Nana explains how being the only one in his wider family who embarked on a successful career abroad made him the provider for a large family network. 'I pay school fees for a lot of people [from] the lower level to the university level. At the end of the semester people will come and then you have to pay for every[one]. We have [an] extended family [and] you have to take that responsibility.' Hence, migrant players' access to financial resources comes with both opportunities for personal consumption and obligations to provide for others. 'You can never have it [money] and spend it alone. There's always family and friends', says Evans. Obligations can be a burden if they become too many or if one's resources decline. 'You have to be wise', he explains, 'when people come around you, you think it's because you are famous and rich. But you realize they are in their problems [and] you solve it for them.' Some players may risk losing control over their contributions to people. Peter, who played a year for a Scandinavian club at the beginning of his international career in the early 2000s, remembers that every time he travelled home for holidays, people, many of whom he did not know, were queuing in front of his house to ask for money. He was afraid that they would spoil his name if he did not meet their demands. Over the course of his career, he calculates, 'more than 30 or 40% in total of my money went [...] to family and friends.'

The lure of consumption abroad and the obligation to provide at home point to the ambiguous transformative economic value of migrant players' physical capital. On one hand, the money spent on short-term material goods and the needs of family members and friends may reduce players' possibilities to provide for one's personal future. On the other hand, status symbols as well as fulfilling familial obligations and meeting wider social demands contribute to one's social recognition at home. In many African societies, meeting such social demands and being a 'social giver' is an important strategy to secure lasting social mobility (Martin et al., 2016), in particular for West African footballers (Acheampong, 2019). 'When you make life comfortable for those around you, you make it comfortable for yourself too,' explains Evans. Hence, while fulfilling obligations at home serves as a transnational transformation of accumulated physical capital abroad, players need to sustain its long-term value.

Among West African football migrants, it is a widespread practice to invest in long-term forms of social relations and assets at home that are meant to pay back in the future. Besides the support of the education of family members, building a house is

one of the priorities. Like many other players, Adam, who moved to Scandinavia in the early 2000s and spent most of his international career here, started to build a house in his country of origin soon after moving abroad. For now, he gave it to his father to stay in while ‘make it befitting for myself’ for his own use in the future. Though receiving only modest income from playing at the second or third-tier level over the years, ‘I can take care of a few things’, he explains, such as the house and education for his sister’s children; things which are meant ‘to take off pressure [from] me’ in the future. Having a house at home, he says, secures at least that ‘I will not go hungry’ if anything unforeseen happens in life.

For some players, building a house and providing education for kin may serve as a fruitful long-term transnational strategy. However, managing own material needs and social obligations in order to transform physical capital into more lasting forms of economic capital remains a balancing act for many migrant footballers. When professional careers end, most players face a decline in resources and need to adjust the aforementioned practices of consumption and social giving. ‘After the game things go down’, confirms Evans, ‘and you get to a state [when] you cut the cord according to your size’. However, social demands are likely to continue after career ending as football careers in Europe fuel the imagination of kin and friends with associations of excessive wealth and migrants who are set for life (Darby & van der Meij, 2018). Former players often try to meet their expectations to the expense of their individual needs and provisions for the future. ‘The little that you have’, says Evans, is needed ‘to take care of the family back home.’ Hence, given the ambivalences and challenges that come with the transnational exchange of physical capital, it is uncertain whether economic capital provides for adequate livelihoods in the long run.

Obtaining language skills, formal education and citizenship

Cultural capital in the form of language skills, formal education and residence or citizenship rights are important assets to widen players’ post-career opportunities. In Scandinavia, the widespread idea of developing ‘whole human beings’, emphasises dual-career opportunities such as studies or job training that athletes are encouraged to pursue over their careers (Agergaard, 2016). While this approach reflects general institutionalised welfare policies in Scandinavian countries that address the well-being of their populations, specific policies of Scandinavian sport associations and clubs promote the development of athletes’ psychological, intellectual and social competences (see Bergsgard & Norberg, 2010). Hereby, sporting bodies also acknowledge the often restricted economic prospects of athletes and aim to ease the challenges of their post-career transitions (Agergaard & Ungruhe, 2016). Moreover, careers that span over a number of years in one Scandinavian country may qualify migrant athletes to obtain long-term residency or citizenship. This may provide lasting forms of cultural capital in the form of social security and participatory rights that help to secure decent livelihoods in Scandinavia. However, as we will show in the following, West African football migrants are widely excluded from the benefits of the ‘whole human beings’ approach and lack access to dual-careers and long-term political and legal rights. Rather, they

need to deal with various structural constraints that hinder the accumulation of relevant cultural capital over their careers in Scandinavia.

Such as in Stephen's case. When he joined a second-tier Scandinavian club as a 19-year-old, he had dropped Senior High School at home in order to follow his dream of professional football in Europe. He was offered a four-month-contract with a monthly salary of 500 Euros in addition to food and housing. The club did not provide any opportunity for education or language courses. 'You are only there for football', Stephen explains, 'and they [the club] want you to be there any time. [...] Because now they have seen that you are 18, you have taken football as your profession. Unless you propose, "I want to attach education to it", nobody will just come to you.' Stephen felt that he needed to emphasise football in order to promote his career. However, after his contract ended, he only got a one-season-offer from a local third-tier club. Again, though he solely focussed on football, he failed to make an impact. His contract was not renewed, and in the absence of adequate options in professional football, he left home and ended his active career while not having pursued any education or job training in the meantime.

Stephen's case illustrates how the aforementioned predominance of short-term contracts among African players hinders the accumulation of cultural capital. Short-term contracts reflect a widespread strategy among Scandinavian clubs to minimise financial costs and risks when recruiting players from abroad. Hereby, clubs stress on players' immediate sportive benefit to an extent that often contradicts the cultural efforts to develop 'whole human beings' in and through sports (Agergaard, 2016). In fact, if players did not perform within a short period of time their contracts were not renewed and they either had to return home and try again or embarked on another precarious short-term deal in Europe with uncertain prospects and, again, little possibilities to accumulate cultural capital. Hence, by providing only short-term commitments clubs restrict migrant players' dual-career options and limit own responsibilities towards their future well-being. Though many African players saw short-term contracts as a long-awaited opportunity to embark on an international career, usually without avail, those temporary affiliations hardly benefit their life courses in the long run (Ungruhe & Agergaard, 2020a).

However, even if a Scandinavian club encourages migrant players to pursue education, it remains a struggle for them to build upon it over careers in order to provide far after. When Ali was signed by a Scandinavian club already as a 16-year-old in the early 2000s, he had completed Junior High School at home. With the help of his club, which has built an exceptional reputation for combining sport and education for minor players, he was soon able to continue school education in Scandinavia in tenth grade. While, due to the language barrier, he was only able to graduate in English language, he wanted to learn the local language and continue with his school career. He explains his stress on education with the way he was brought up at home. 'My parents, they believe [...] that the way to success is getting educated.' However, Ali found it difficult to continue education when he was promoted from the junior level to the first team after turning 18. In order to succeed in European football, he felt that he had to focus on sport. 'We trained very early in the morning, and sometimes we trained in the afternoon, too. So playing for the first team is not the same as playing

in the academy. In the first team there is a lot of pressure and [you need] a lot of commitment.' While he kept struggling with the language, he did not manage to complete the tenth grade. 'So then it's up to me to choose a position [and] I decided, "Okay, this [football] is really what I want, and then I have to go for it, 100 percent".' He was playing at the first-tier level for his Scandinavian club for some years, though, time and again, he was facing injuries that blocked him from realising higher ambitions. Following another serious injury, now 27 years of age, he concluded that football will not secure a decent future livelihood and he decided to re-embark on schooling. Over the years, he had acquired sufficient language skills that qualify him to pursue this to get a higher education entrance qualification. In the meantime, playing football on an amateur level helps him to generate a little income and get by. Yet, while he is confident that 'once you are educated you can be anything in life' and hopes to land a job in football management, the realisation of his ambition remains uncertain.

While Ali's account underlines the relevance for education and dual-careers in sports, it once again reveals the structural barriers in the football industry to provide for this, such as the need to exclusively stress on sportive performance and limited options to embark on dual-careers. However, postponing the accumulation of cultural capital to some point after one's career has ended is a risky endeavour. Even if a former player meets the legal and educational requirements for this struggle, success is not guaranteed. Rather, by sustaining oneself and one's education at the same time, a retired player is usually bound to part-time employment or temporary sources of modest income (such as playing football at the amateur level) that may generate a rather precarious livelihood. For many former players, pursuing education under such conditions is an impossible undertaking and often leads to abandon their educational ambitions (see Ungruhe & Agergaard, 2020a).

Moreover, and in addition to the field of education, Ali's case points to the issue of long-term residency as a condition to accumulate further cultural capital. Ali envisages his future in Denmark where he has spent the past twelve years. Since his wife and child came over from West Africa a few years ago and his second child was born in Denmark, he feels at home here to a degree that he wants to become a citizen of the country. This will open doors for him and his children, he believes. 'I need to be part of the culture and [...] be able to vote', he says, and 'the kids [...] can have a better education than [me].' Yet, obtaining citizenship is a difficult endeavour. Apart from the years of residency, the level of language skills and a clean criminal record, one needs to prove a great degree of knowledge about the country's national history, culture and political system. 'You have to know everything about Denmark', Ali says, 'everything has to be perfect.' While he seems a little daunted about the exam that even 'not every [Dane] can do', he believes that passing it will free his mind and allow him to emphasise his post-career occupational trajectory.

Again, while Ali was fortunate to qualify for long-term residency by a continuous career trajectory in a Scandinavian country, this is rather an exception than the norm among African players. For many, the option of staying in the country in which they have played professionally is often out of reach as residence permits are bound to contracts with clubs, and players may be forced to leave a Scandinavian country soon after a contract expires or after career ending. Due to non-linear and often ruptured

career courses that contain phases of unemployment and result in the need of almost global mobility to secure a contract, players are not able to accumulate a sufficient number of years in one country to obtain long-term residency or citizenship. Hence, for many, accumulating cultural capital in Europe after career ending is often impossible.

Overall, while cultural capital seems to be a crucial asset for successful post-career life courses, transforming physical capital into assets of education or residency is often unfeasible for migrant players. Caught up in a vicious circle of short-term contracts and minimum wages that do not provide the necessary time, means and opportunities to accumulate cultural capital over careers, players also face legal and structural constraints to obtain education and long-term residency after career ending. Hence, while careers in football are rather short and the time to achieve economic gains and social mobility is limited, the structural conditions of the global football industry do not favour the accumulation of cultural capital that demands a rather long-term and continuous commitment to secure post-career livelihoods. Yet, even if education is accessible over careers, players often face difficulties to cope with an unknown educational system and its requirements in terms of formal qualifications and language skills. Given the depicted barriers to accumulating cultural capital, stressing on education, language skills or citizenship alone is seldom sufficient to transform physical capital successfully and, hence, to open doors to an occupational post-career trajectory that reproduces social mobility.

Utilising social relations and securing future jobs

In light of the challenges to pursue education, many migrant players count on acquired social relations over careers to land jobs in the football business. Yet, given the outlined structural barriers for African players to remain in the game as coaches or managers after career ending the actual relevance of social relations to get a high-profile football job is uncertain. In the following, we shed light on how and under what conditions former African players are able to utilise acquired social relations for their post-career trajectories.

'I say to myself, "my future is to be a football coach"', Robert, who ended his career at the age of 31 and looks back on several years in professional Scandinavian football, reveals his plans for the future. An initial job in his former club's administration that was terminated after a short period was not what he had aimed for. In contrast, obtaining a first license that qualifies to coach at the junior level 'was not difficult because I have the experience [as a player].' Yet, he acknowledges, moving on in coaching is a challenging trajectory. For now, he solely counts on his social relations to land a job in the business. '[M]aybe your teammate that you used to play with is a manager somewhere. And maybe he might need [an] assistant. And if you have a good network then it's easier to be able to connect with [him]', he explains. Whereas he deliberately stays in touch with a number of former colleagues, his efforts have not secured a coaching job yet. Robert is aware that the acquisition of further qualifications in coaching is needed, too. However, he lacks the resources to embark on coaching courses now. Rather, he postpones his plans to an uncertain future so 'that maybe

in five years' time there can be a job there'. Yet, waiting for the right opportunity is a risky strategy, he admits, as 'my experience that I have [in football], I know it's gonna die one day.'

The uncertain use-value of social relations for jobs in the football business is widespread among former African players. Indeed, apart from Robert's short-term experience in his former club's administration, none of our research participants was able to make use of his connections in this way. Yet, some have utilised their connections in football to land jobs in other sectors. Emmanuel was one of them. After having spent most of his career playing for various Scandinavian teams at the first- and second-tier level, he faced an early career ending before reaching 30 years of age. Following a series of injuries, he approached the sponsor of his last club, a cleaning company, to provide him a job. He did not have any qualifications apart from basic schooling until the ninth grade. The sponsor offered him to become a sub-contractor for one of its offices. Though, he says, 'there was no training', he was confident to run the business successfully. 'Everybody can do cleaning', he thought. He taught himself the needed entrepreneurial skills, such as writing bills by reading relevant websites. Indeed, he managed to run his business for two years before financial difficulties forced him to give up. 'I was back to square one. Where I don't have no education. I have to find a new job and everything. So everything was messed up.' Having already ended his football career in the meantime, he was jobless for about a year. With the help of a friend, he finally found a job as a parcel deliverer with a private company. It is precarious work, poorly paid, and he constantly feels under pressure to meet the demands of managers and customers and deliver in time. 'It's hard, very, very hard. I've never tried something like that before', he says. Today, 33 years of age, Emmanuel regrets some decisions of the past, in particular, that he did not focus on education while hoping for a breakthrough in football that never came.

What can we learn from Robert's and Emmanuel's accounts? First of all, social capital in the form of relations in the football business alone does not seem to facilitate jobs in Scandinavian professional football after career ending. Social relations cannot overshadow both the structural constraints for African athletes in the sector and their often inadequate planning of their post-careers. However, social relations in football may have use-value to secure jobs outside the football industry. Several of our research participants work as assistant nurses in the elderly care sector, cleaners, or parcel deliverers. Though these jobs may secure immediate livelihoods, they involve precarious working conditions, such as low salaries, unregulated working hours and health risks due to hard manual labour. Hereby, they often manifest former players' precarious existence and point to the ambivalent role of such social capital for post-career trajectories in Scandinavia (Ungruhe & Agergaard, 2020a).

Unhappy with the current situation, Emmanuel sees a return to West Africa as the only option to prevent further downward social mobility. He plans to be a scout and bring up local talents to professional football. Yet, without any relevant connections, he struggles to get a foot in the business. 'I am trying to build a contact over there now. But it's because of my work at the moment [that] I don't really have time for it now. So I'm hoping within a couple of years [...] I can fully concentrate on scouting.' Whether he succeeds to build up a useful connection from scratch that will facilitate

his plan is yet uncertain. However, his plan to return home reflects the transnational dimension of physical capital and its transformation.

In light of the limited adequate opportunities in Scandinavian football, many former players return to West Africa to look for opportunities to remain in football as coaches or player agents. Indeed, utilising social relations in West Africa and reconnecting with former team-mates and other ex-players is a likely option for many former athletes. Among returnees, it is common to meet once or twice a week to play football for fun and use this opportunity to share memories of the olden days abroad and talk about recent developments in local and global football, as well as possible jobs in the business. For instance, when Evans ended his career and failed to secure an envisaged scouting job in Scandinavia he returned to West Africa without any prospects of how to continue in life. However, while he lacked relevant educational or vocational assets, it was an informal network gathering among former professional footballers that opened up an opportunity. One day, after two years without a job, he was approached by a former fellow international player at such a gathering and asked whether he was interested in becoming his assistant in a local second division club. Though coaching was not his first choice, Evans accepted the offer in the light of lacking alternative options. At this time, he did not have any coaching experience or qualification. As a player, however, Evans was known for his ability to lead a team which apparently made him suitable for the job. 'When I joined and I went to the grounds with the team, and I saw how the boys were coached and how the boys were playing, I thought, "I have a lot in me that I can impact into these boys,"' he explained. 'That's how I became a coach. Then I started to get serious.' Hence, soon after he had become assistant coach, he took a coaching course in West Africa and started to acquire the basic degree. When the team's head coach left after the following season, Evans took over. He quickly made a name as a coach in his home country and qualified further. Today, he looks back on several coaching positions with first-tier clubs in West Africa and youth national teams and is one among several of our research participants who benefitted from transnational connections and secured a job in the football business at home.

This reflects a general observation among returnees: While some former players have established their own football academies to promote local talent and profit from selling their graduates to clubs overseas, others have achieved coaching positions with first-tier clubs or national teams in Africa (Darby et al., 2018; Ungruhe & Agergaard, 2020a). Combined, their examples point to the fact that former migrant players' homecoming may ease their challenges of post-career transitions by utilising transnational relations that had been established through a career abroad. Hence, while accumulated social capital over professional careers abroad may rather facilitate precarious jobs and not provide for anticipated post-career life courses in the football business in Scandinavia, it may gain use-value upon former players' return to home. Here, it often facilitates better options to embark on coaching careers or other football-related jobs.

Transforming capital in time and space

As the accounts above indicate, transforming physical capital and providing for post-career life courses over active careers is a complex and ambiguous endeavour for many West African football migrants over time and space. This is partly due to players' limited use-value of cultural capital obtained at home, the lure of consumption, and their sole focus on active careers to make it as footballers in Europe. In addition, precarious work conditions, the burden of transnational obligations and rare alternative educational opportunities that come with a career in European professional football equally challenge the transformation of physical capital into economic, social and cultural capital for future use. Hence, it is the combination of own emphases, the profit-driven and competitive conditions of the football industry, structural disadvantages for migrants in Europe as well as social relations and moral economies in players' home societies that determine capital accumulation and reproduction for post-career life courses.

However, despite the obstacles to accumulate and transform capital, the role of capital is itself ambivalent. By applying spatial and temporal perspectives, we have shown how forms of capital may lead to migrant athletes' marginalisation (see Field, 2008; Spaaij, 2011). For example, similar to Wacquant's (1998) observation that social capital may yield inner-group support but prevent members from social mobility outside the group, migrant footballers' social relations in the football business do not facilitate anticipated jobs as coaches or agents in Europe but rather precarious ones outside football. While those jobs may secure immediate livelihoods, they are nevertheless often inadequate to further education or football-specific qualifications alongside. The fact, however, that former players utilise social relations in home societies to land jobs in the local football business underlines the transnational dimension of capital and its shifting value in relation to space. Hence, while forms of capital may lead to exclusion in one setting, they may open up opportunities in another.

The spatial dimension of capital is deeply entangled with time. While successful careers and post-careers may lead to recognition in one's social environment at home and transform physical capital into economic and social capital, meeting obligations towards family members and friends is often a precarious challenge over a career course. Hence, social capital may limit the value of accumulated economic capital to provide for education or business investments that could secure smoother post-career transitions in the future. In this way, such forms of social capital may rather be a burden than an asset during active careers.

Further, the relevance of time is particularly striking with regard to cultural capital. Football clubs' dependency on cost-efficiency and immediate sportive goals and the resulting need of African players to exercise a high degree of flexibility and spatial mobility over their careers stay in contrast to the long-term approach of dual-career pathways in Scandinavia. Thereby, migrant athletes' specific career trajectories do not meet the needs of a continuous commitment to accumulate cultural capital. Hence, migrant athletes' football careers and principles of education follow contradictory conditions of time that impede the transformation of physical capital into cultural capital. Likewise, the legal requirements for long-term residency and citizenship that demand

a continuous stay in a Scandinavian country over several years reflect a temporal opposition to migrant players' need to exercise international career mobility and therefore, again, hinder their attempts to transform physical capital into cultural capital.

Finally, migrant athletes' scope of action is subject to change throughout their careers that are seldom characterised by upward linear trajectories. Transforming physical capital is particularly challenging in the likely event of downward career mobility when all efforts target to get back into game rather than to provide for post-careers. When reaching career ending, however, former players need to emphasise their immediate livelihoods and it is often too late to transform one's physical capital into useful forms of economic, cultural or social capital.

Conclusion

Athletes' transformation of capital is indeed linked to the intertwined dynamics of athletes' agency (see Agergaard & Sørensen, 2009; Spaaij, 2011) and structural conditions that prominently feature mechanisms of power (see Blackshaw & Long, 2005). In this article, we have further shown how these dynamics root in and relate to processes over time and space. For West African football migrants, the transformation of physical capital is bound to players' possibilities, practices and experiences of structural constraints and marginalisation over and after the short-term professional career abroad as well as to cross-border activities and negotiations with members of their social environments at home. It is thus a multilayered processual and transnational experience that encompasses the specific challenges and opportunities at home and abroad and at various points in time over careers and post-careers. Given the challenges identified in the transformation of physical capital, it appears that investing in either economic, cultural or social capital alone is insufficient to reproduce social mobility. Rather, (former) players need to diversify efforts and carefully consider the relevance of the various forms of capital in relation to their shifting values according to locality and in time.

Additionally, and assuming that Prince Ikpe Ekong's earlier mentioned call from God remains a rather unique access to adequate post-careers, it is essential to politically acknowledge migrant players' specific needs and implement policies and measures to ease the transformation of their physical capital. For instance, collective action among clubs, (inter)national football governing bodies and relevant political entities is needed to create room for migrant athletes' dual-careers. Further, these actors need to tackle the discrimination of Black athletes more seriously and implement measures to support their post-career trajectories as coaches and technical staff members. In this regard, acknowledging coaching licences obtained under the Confederation of African Football (CAF) in Europe in addition to implementing quotas for members of ethnic minority groups in clubs' decision-making bodies may serve as initial responses.

On the academic level, future studies could investigate how migrant footballers' reproduction of capital plays out in the long run and how their life courses develop years and decades after career ending. Further, studies could facilitate a deeper analysis of the motives, reasons and consequences of staying abroad and returning home

after career ending. Finally, an exploration that includes the specific conditions for female migrant footballers would help to provide a more nuanced and gendered picture of migrant players' post-career livelihoods and their challenges.

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