'*I just go on Wi-Fi*': Imagining worlds through professional basketball migrants' deployment of information and communication technology

Abstract

The connection between athletes and technology has developed in recent years, with the focus on how lives are augmented and presented through this relationship. Building on previous reflections concerning the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support the sometimes fractious experiences of sport migration, we suggest a need to develop our understandings of migrant athletes' use of ICT by interrogating the socially embedded processes driving its usage. In so doing, we draw on 18 semi-structured interviews with professional basketball migrants based (at the time) in the United Kingdom but whose seasonal work moves them frequently across the globe. We explore these participants' experiences through the lens of Appadurai's (1990, 1995, 1996) model of scapes and disjuncture. With this framework we explore themes of negotiation, need, expectation and barriers. Consequently, we propose expanding how we understand migrant athletes' relationships with technology.

Keywords

Technology, Migration, Appadurai, Ethnoscapes, Technoscapes,

The title of this paper, '*I just go on Wi*-Fi', was offered as a reflection on the deployment of digital technology by Blake, a North American basketball player during his second spell working in Europe. Blake's casual comment on his relationship with his smartphone is indicative of the saturation and normalisation of digital communication technology into the

rhythm of daily life for professional athletes. Recent observations from Thorpe, Toffoletti and Bruce (2017) have drawn attention, for example, to the deployment of technology – through social media – as athletes respond to the conditions of their lives. While personal engagements with social media may seem trivial to some, criticisms around the technological integration into sports settings have been linked to surveillance cultures, impacts on coach-athlete relationships, peer interactions, performance cultures, team socialisation and individual identity constructions (Carling, Reilly & Williams, 2009; Cronin, Whitehead, Webster & Huntley, 2017; Hutchins, 2016; Kohe & Purdy, 2018; Millington & Millington, 2015; Williams & Manley, 2016). Additionally, the encroachment of technological observations, monitoring and justifications of performance has been interpreted as a negotiable process (Baerg, 2017). These debates provide fertile ground on which to reflect the relationship between athletes and technology. Through an interplay between theory and data, this paper investigates practices in the deployment, insulation and restriction of information communication technology (ICT). Our particular interest is to explore how migrant basketball players maintain contact beyond their shifting localities.

Building on these observed developments in the relationship between athletes and technology, we note that such changes may be read in light of the increased role of ICT in daily life since the late 1990s (Nedelcu, 2012). The accelerated development of ICT from the late 1990s links explicitly to the creation and expansion of the internet and internet-enabled technology (Collin, 2014). Due to expansion of ICT hardware through the early stages of the twenty-first century, access points are increasingly available through smartphones and tablet computers (Ranney & Troop-Gordon, 2015; Wang, Xiang & Fesenmaier, 2016). ICT, in this context, therefore refers to a series of internet-related technological advances in hardware and software technology through the latter stages of the twentieth into the twenty-first century. Consequently, our focus is on the deployment of ICT, which provide software access points,

allowing individuals to connect across geographic spaces (Banerjee & German, 2010; Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016).

This increasing ability to communicate across vast geographic spaces has come to be entrenched in the careers of spatially mobile athletes, with family, agents and peers at the forefront of these communicative possibilities. A variety of scholars refer to ICT use as an essential facet of the sporting migratory experience (for example, Agergaard, 2011; Thorpe, 2012, 2014; Elliott, 2013; 2016; Kanemasu and Molnar, 2013; Agergaard and Ryba, 2014; and Butler & Dzikus, 2014). These observations draw attention to ICT's potential as insulator from issues such as homesickness and dislocation. The salience of this view on ICT related processes is best emphasised by Elliot (2013) through the exploration of male association football players performing in the Polish Ekstraklasa. Elliot (2013, p. 746) suggests 'the entire migratory process was made more desirable by the ease with which these athletes could relocate and the various tools available allowing them to communicate with their families, thus countering problems of dislocation often felt by some migrants'. Notwithstanding that individual athletes may have varied attachments with ICT and value their digital connectivity in varying ways, migrant athletes' use of ICT has begun to develop into an established panacea for the maintenance of attachments to home, providing a need to critique, and elaborate on, the ways by which ICT use flows through athletes' experiences of living and working as migrants.

Rise of the Machines

The significance of ICT related developments was highlighted by Microsoft's acquisition of Skype – an internet telecommunications provider – for 8.5 billion USD in 2011 (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2014). One of the contributing factors in such business decisions has been

the utilisation of ICT developments by migrant populations such as athletes, with opportunities to maintain relationships beyond spatial proximity spawned through daily practices (Buzzi & Megele, 2011; Collin, 2011). Though research into mobile populations has previously identified migrants retain forms of contact with individuals and organisations at home and beyond (See Fortier, 2000; Kosic, 2006), the accelerated rhythms of ICT provides emerging opportunities for migrant populations (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2014). These accelerated rhythms manifest via an internet connection, with ICT connectivity enabling access to applications and internet services such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Viber, Snapchat, the aforementioned Skype, and FaceTime. These services provide migrants with potential instantaneous access points to family, peers and social networks which can assist with the maintenance of multiple interpersonal ties (Nedelcu, 2012).

Through the centrality of migrant athletes' usage of ICT, there is a need to understand the ways in which these technological developments shape social relations. We contend that the 'digital' available to migrant athletes in the twenty-first century is not a neutral or free-floating technological abstraction, neither is it an emerging panacea. The digital is relational, social, and embedded in the experiences of those deploying it (Orton-Johnson & Prior, 2013). As such, ICT use contains a mix of experiences shaped by hopes and disappointments, opportunities and challenges alongside joy and frustration. While the acceleration of ICT accessibility is undeniable, with technology central to athletes' daily life, we suggest that considering the individuality of experiences across localities is important in order to articulate the relational and socially embedded nature of its usage. Moreover, and reflecting on work in other industry spheres (See Wajcman & Rose, 2011; Colbert, Yee & George, 2016), our interrogation is also driven by a concern that digital connectivity appears to have become a stand-in, and synonym for, acceptable social and employment-related connectivity. In forwarding this critique, we contribute to the emerging literature on the relationships between

athletes and technology, whilst providing insights into the experiences of migrant athletes through their deployments of ICT. Such insights could perhaps provide opportunities for players, agents, clubs and governing bodies to consider contractual value and athletes' negotiations of athletic labour as they manage lives across borders.

At the centre of our observations on ICT use are basketball migrants, with their experiences of professional life and ICT use shaped by the modern paradigm to 'circulate and stay in touch' (Buzzi & Megele 2011, p. 41). Having previously been classified under the rubric of *settlers* in Maguire's (1996, 1999) typology of sport labour migration, the evidence presented within the wider project from which this paper is drawn offers alternative insights into the short-term contracts, precarity and consistent renewal of mobility shaping players' experiences. The experiences shared bear the hallmarks elucidated through Rumford's (2011) observations on the changing profile of international cricket in light of the Twenty20 boom. This boom has stimulated portfolios of short-term contracts, including increased contractual clauses related to digital demand and welfare, taking a fundamental role in the experiences of players. Similarly, short-term and seasonal contracts contour professional basketball and the players' experiences of migration. These contracts frequently see players reside in a country for a short period before moving across localities to find future opportunities. ICT use is seen as flowing through these fluid experiences of movement. Communicating with family, friends, peers and agents is consequently at the centre of daily life for the players in this study, containing experiences of need, requirement, expectation and barriers.

Imagined Worlds

To begin considering these practices, we observe that research into sport migration has primarily taken a structural route. Focuses on push and pull factors are a key feature in the

iterative development of this research field (Engh & Agergaard, 2015). World-system theory, for example, has been deployed through the field as an adjunct of the wider interest in globalisation. Poli (2010) utilises this framework to elucidate migration from West Africa to Europe in association football, highlighting the ways in which athletes' careers are structured by sending and receiving localities. Through such theoretical frameworks, the direct experiences of players and how they intermediate processes of migration have remained limited (Carter, 2013).

Reflecting on these observations, a move towards transnational approaches has occurred. This shift has sought to address some of the structural criticisms levied at earlier sport migration literature (See Carter, 2011a; Engh & Agergaard, 2015; Thorpe, 2017). Van der Meij & Darby (2017), for example, expand observations of West African migration in association football by elucidating a transnational approach that considers family and wider social relationships as part of the agency at the heart of these experiences. Proceeding in the spirit of the *mobility turn* existing within this transnational focus, we consider questions, theories and methodological developments through the avoidance of totalising descriptions of contemporary societal moves (Sheller & Urry, 2006). In this space, we conceptualise mobilities as the action of moving from place-to-place for professional development and work, the ease or difficulty with which individuals are able to achieve these outcomes and how this on-going process affects experiences and self (Nedelcu, 2012; Engh & Agergaard, 2015; Szewczyk, 2016). Corresponding with the call to theorise, our observations on the role of ICT at the heart of athletes' lives are shaped by the model of disjuncture and scapes forwarded by Arjun Appadurai (1990, 1995, 1996).

Appadurai's (1990, p. 296) development of a multi-dimensional model of disjunctural scapes is a direct reaction to 'simple models of push and pull (in terms of migration theory)' and the 'inadequately quirky' nature of global theories. To move beyond these observations,

Appadurai (1990) proposes the global economy – driven by disorganised capitalism – operates at disjuncture between economies, culture and politics. In developing these observations, Appadurai's scapes model (1990) addresses the accelerated nature of transnational connections. The model itself comprises *ethnoscapes*, *technoscapes*, *financescapes*, *mediascapes* and *ideoscapes*. Our interest primarily considers the intersections of ethno- and techno-scapes as athletes deploy technology at the heart of their migratory experiences.

The significance of the relationship between ethno- and technoscapes lies in positioning individuals at the end and centre of social formations developed by and through both the act of mobility and ICT use. Ethnoscapes, produced by people through the action of daily life, provide the setting for individuals classified as migrants. Ethnoscapes involve not only people moving for working purposes, but displaced peoples such as refugees, exiles or part of a wider diaspora (Appadurai, 1996); included within these are the movement of sports workers such as basketball players. Technoscapes – flows and development of technology – shape these experiences by providing developing opportunities to communicate between localities (Appadurai, 1990). Appadurai (1990) proposes these scapes are not objective and are entrenched in the historical, linguistic and political background of the actors involved in forming them, providing opportunities to critique the socially-constructed use of ICT.

Through these dimensions, some asymmetric aspects of the world are understood at disjuncture due to their 'nonisomorphic paths' (Appadurai, 1996, p.37). For example, the disjuncture between continuing aspects of the modern (e.g. nation-states, family units) correspond and are contested through heightened cross-border activity, whilst global capital has seen reductions in regulations that most visibly reverberated through the 2008 financial crisis and its impacts (Appadurai, 1995; Guzman-Cocha, 2015). Through these dimensions and imagined worlds, Appadurai (1990, 1995, 1996) encapsulates the complexity of cross-

border processes, emphasising the role of individuals and potential disjuncture in mobilities, providing insights into the treatment, rights and experiences of mobile populations (Heyman & Campbell, 2009). Through these scapes then, individuals are able to create *imagined worlds* via their awareness, as well as creation, of experience.

This conceptualisation draws on Benedict Anderson's (2016) *imagined communities*, locating nations' development on common ideas and claims of a relationship between people with which we never have face-to-face contact. Building on these observations, Appadurai (1990, 1996) suggests imagined worlds are formed by individuals conceptualising the world through contact with the various dimensions of scapes. For example, young basketball players are exposed to images of players competing in highly lucrative competitions whilst themselves participating and interacting with coaches and players who have established careers or gained scholarships (Carlson, 2010; Dubrow & Adams, 2010; Falcous & Maguire, 2006). Young players are able to imagine themselves within these and other positions, as well as envisaging how they might counter particular barriers. The individual nature of these experiences creates multiple, and competing, imagined worlds with links beyond an individual's direct locality (Appadurai, 1996).

The multiplicity of these imagined realities leads Appadurai (1990, 1996) to consider deterritorialization, locating imagined worlds on the thresholds between and across nations. Claims of deterritorialization have echoed in more recent years through criticisms of *methodological nationalism* (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002; Castles, 2007), highlighting the bounded ways in which we theorise social existences. While the cross-border fluidity and shifting localities of ethnoscapes are apposite, we proceed cautiously with the term deterritorialization in our observations. The continuing role of the nation-state in migrants' lives indicates that place, boundaries and intervention have roles to play (Castles, 2007; Hellwig & Sinno, 2017; Ford & Koostra, 2017). Similarly, as we observe through our

analysis, aspects such as access and time difference are shaped by locality, impacting on the insulating qualities of ICT use. We, therefore, focus on how this process is adopted through the relationship between ethno- and technoscapes, as professional athletes deploy ICT to communicate with family, friends, peers and agents. This multi-dimensional approach complements current trends in transnational mobility, with contemporary approaches frequently focusing on one community. Madianou's (2016) work on polymedia, for example, is bounded by Filipino-United Kingdom connections. Similarly, Calbaquinto (2018) focuses on Filipino and Australian connections. Our analysis here seeks to continue the sentiments of the *mobility turn*, with mobility considered 'a highly personal, experiential endeavour shaped not only by structural, historical and economic constraints but also by a number of other factors [which are] political, personal and familial' (Carter, 2011b: p.44). Mobility is, therefore, presented as a continuous and multifaceted process which individuals renew through participation and comprehending the fluidity of their imagined worlds (Appadurai, 1990). As a way of engaging with and understanding mobilities within the context of professional sport, the interaction between scapes in the production of these athletes' imagined worlds provides us with a fertile opportunity to discuss the multi-dimensional relationship between agency and structure reflected through the athletes' experiences.

Method & Analysis

Our reflections on the deployment of ICT come from semi-structured interviews with 18 male professional basketball players, formed around a methodological underpinning of n*aturalistic inquiry* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The 18 participants were all professionally employed by clubs in the British Basketball League (BBL) at the time of the study. The athletes' experiences of competing at both amateur and professional level were drawn from reflections

across four continents, spanning a total of 19 countries. Participants were aged between 21 and 31 years, with experiences of overseas professional work ranging from one to eight seasons. Interviews were conducted with these participants to help gauge experiences of migration, with reflections on the use of ICT as an aspect of a broader narrative of negotiation and impact.

The descriptive and analytical capabilities of interview techniques make it a revealing instrument of inquiry (Guest, 2006). Due to these capabilities, this method has been deployed throughout sport migration research (See Kanemasu & Molnar, 2013; Agergaard & Botelho, 2013; Agergaard & Ryba, 2014; Engh & Agergaard, 2015; Van der Meij & Darby, 2017). Through interviews, researchers can begin to appreciate the social world as the interviewee might see it (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Building on these observations, semi-structured interviews were adopted for the wider research project into athletes' migratory experiences, providing a focus on the narrative of migration (Amis, 2005). This flexibility has positioned semi-structured interviews as an important aspect of interpretive sport research (Smith & Caddick, 2012). Due to the demands and constraints of the professional context in which these athletes were employed, one interview was conducted with each of the athletes. One hour was allocated by clubs, with the actual length of interviews ranging from 35 to 90 minutes, with the majority around an hour in length.

The process of data analysis followed the production of a naturalistic inquiry (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993). The reflections on, as well as adaptations of, the interview schedules was part of iterative process of collection and analysis of these experiences, which is reflective of the relationship between inquirer and inquired at the heart of naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Beuving & de Vries, 2015). Building on this iterative process, the data was transcribed and analysed as text through unitising the data into codes and subsequently themes that were representative of the richness of the data. Subsequently,

themes concerned with the uses of ICT emerged from codes related to their deployment, contractual considerations, professional development and familial expectations. It is from these themes that our theoretical observations develop. Pseudonyms are used for all references to athletes throughout this paper.

'I'm always on my phone!'

The development of mobile phone technology highlights a shift in the evolving landscape of ICT. Through the accelerated fluidity of technoscapes, material changes which enable users to mediate their experiences across borders, managing fluxes in their localities of departure and arrival (Appadurai, 1996). As Nedelcu (2012) and Alonso and Oiarzabal (2010) have highlighted, the use of ICT in a number of migrant populations has developed significantly as a result of technoscapes. Amongst the athletes interviewed for this research, ICT use has developed to the extent that day-to-day habitual use is often as much part of their routines as training and going to the gym. For example, Kyle offers: 'ask any of the guys on the team, I'm always on my phone and on Twitter, Instagram or whatever. It doesn't matter. I'm always on my phone!'. These digital practices enable athletes to maintain identities as players in tandem with other connections across ethnoscapes. These identities position them as family members, agents, businessmen and students. The identities carried and supported through the use of ICT are consequently based on pre-existing commitments and not virtual identities formed through these technologies (See Banerjee & German, 2011).

   For players such as Victor, ICT hardware like personal computers and smartphones provide opportunities to connect with users and content across borders (Wang, Xiang & Feisenmaier, 2014), highlighting the kinship shaping their imagined worlds (Appadurai, 1990). As he suggests, 'I don't think I would enjoy being away if there was no way to

communicate with friends and family.' Access to applications and internet services such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Skype and FaceTime can subsequently orientate athletes to ICT in a bid to manage their identities. Such services provide athletes with instantaneous access points to family, peers and social networks which assist with the maintenance of the multiple interpersonal ties which shape these identities (Nedelcu, 2012; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2014). As Victor continues, '[all] you have to do is pick up your phone and go on Skype then you can call them [family] and talk to them right then and there and see their face.' These applications begin to highlight the social and personal connection of and to ethno- and technoscapes, as they reflect athletes' imagined worlds through the adaptation of practices which maintain connections with family, friends and peers beyond their present localities.

Exemplifying the extent of ICT engagement is the number of devices linked to multiple people and sites at any one time. As Brandon offered, 'I have two phones, iPad and a computer…I talk to four people at one time.' This flexibility positions ICT as an important part of daily experiences for travel; due to their compact size, tablet computers, laptops and smart phones are convenient tools for individuals participating in seasonal and short-term mobilities (Burrell & Anderson, 2008; Wang, Xiang & Fesenmaier, 2016). In an age where crossing national borders is often subject to increased   securitisation of travel (Ajana, 2013), the ability to easily transport communication tools is of increased benefit (King & Raghuram, 2013; Shields, 2014). Migrant athletes are therefore able to facilitate the imagining of worlds beyond their direct localities. This facilitation emphasises the high speed provided by developing technoscapes, whilst competing with nation-state projects which classify and organise individuals crossing borders (Appadurai, 1996).

The day-to-day nature of athletes' communication highlights the positive aspects of affordability and ease of access, emphasised by the reflections of those who participated in

mobilities prior to the availability of affordable mobile technology (Ryan, Von Koppenfels & Mulholland, 2014). For athletes such as Nicolas then, the negotiation of identity across localities manifested differently:

> it was hard because at that time – that was 2003 – we didn't have like Skype and laptops…[it] was not a common thing to have the internet. It was kind of hard because I used to call [mum] like five minutes every two weeks because the card used to be like ten bucks for five minutes.

Whilst the same ambition to manage identities presents itself, restrictive aspects such as affordability and access flow through localities, impacting on the ability to communicate across ethnoscapes. Nicolas' story of expense and inconvenience in contacting his mum therefore highlights how conditions in localities affect the staging of identity (Appadurai, 1990). For athletes who utilise technology as a way of maintaining their identities, operating through Wi-Fi means they are able to avoid buying new, local-specific equipment for their experiences. Moreover, players can avoid engaging with the more insidious aspects of digital capitalism by eschewing the connection between mobile network contracts and access to hardware:

> I take advantage of having Wi-Fi; I don't even have a cell phone number. The places I usually am, [training facility], Wi-Fi; gym, Wi-Fi; class, Wi-Fi; home, Wi-Fi. So the only times I don't have Wi-Fi is when I go to the city centre so it's a waste to spend £20-£30 a month when I can have the Wi-Fi (Blake).

As players look to stage identities and advantage themselves in light of technological advancements, access to Wi-Fi consequently emerges as a key consideration in contractual negotiations between athletes and their clubs.

Contracts form a significant part of high performance sporting environments, containing a negotiation between interested parties (Kohe & Purdy, 2016; McArdle, 2016). In the case of the players here, this negotiation involves themselves, the club, league, and, in many cases, an agent acting on behalf of the player. The significance of Wi-Fi in athletes' contractual negotiations was underlined by Taj's remarks when he offered: 'I need the Wi-Fi. I can't survive without Wi-Fi here. I couldn't do it. I need Wi-Fi. I told them in the contract I need Wi-Fi or I can't do it!' The prioritising of digital access points in professional contracts solidifies the view ICT has become inextricably present in the lives of professional athletes. This position has blossomed to such an extent early season issues with Wi-Fi connectivity led athletes to reflect negatively on their present locality:

> We had a pretty rough first month. We didn't have cars and we didn't have internet at our house. So, it was really tough because we would go to practice, walk home, eat, walk to practice, walk home and then we're at home for like eight or nine and we can't contact anyone at home…it's almost like we were isolated for the first month. That was definitely tough. I remember the first few days thinking all I wanted to do was talk to my parents and tell them I'm ok or talk to whoever back home. It was like I had to go walk to the library to go get internet so I could talk to people back home (Steve).

Implicit in this quotation is the central focus on sporting achievement through training and orientation around team performance involved in elite sports. Steve's reflections on this process emphasise isolating aspects of sporting careers, highlighting also ICT's importance in the maintenance of cross-border forms of kinship (Appadurai, 1996). Similarly, Crocket (2014) suggests that central to the sporting experience of his team sports participants was the prioritisation of winning within their professional lives. ICT here then provides distraction and support beyond the confines of an athletic career.

Steve's reflections on his first month illuminates needs and desires driving the will to extend neighbourhoods across ethnoscapes (Appadurai, 1990). In these cases, differing from instances in which peers perceive technology as central to their professional identity and work, here ICT is a welcome distraction and extension of the professional experience. Similarly, Butler and Dzikus (2014) showed how the mundanity of an overseas career is mediated through entertainment practices (e.g., television, games consoles etc.). Here, Steve's reflection begins to provide insights into the day-to-day athletic experiences of the participants as they imagine worlds which expand their neighbourhoods across ethnoscapes, whilst managing a performance-oriented athletic schedule. Continuing, Steve suggests:

> [lack of access] makes it horrible because not only do you rely on it to speak to people back home, but you need internet to use Netflix or to look where the nearest place is to get my haircut or you type in an address to find where something is in this new city you live in. As bad as it sounds, having internet you pretty much need it nowadays. Certainly the way I operate, I need internet or I'm pretty much useless.

Building on the potential of ICT, it is apparent their visibility in daily life and athletes' attachments to Wi-Fi has installed them as a *sine qua non* of athletic life across ethnoscapes, as well as moulding their orientation in the present locality. While the level of connectivity expected by these athletes underpins more privileged aspects of their mobilities (Ryan et al., 2014), the lack of internet access is a contentious issue and emphasises the commonplace nature of such practices. It is therefore apparent ICT access is an important factor in the athletes' daily routines, supporting earlier observations such as Elliott's (2013). However, having expanded the observations on access, there is a need to continue articulating the imagined worlds maintained through these routes. As we show in the following sections, ICT use can be insulating. However, engagement with these technologies are individually specific

and complicated further by feelings of attachment, disinterest and expectation as players manage lives and expectations.

'…you're able to keep updated with their lives'

Overlapping identities drive ICT use and the festishisation of Wi-Fi as players maintain professional identities whilst ensuring contact with those they have closer relationship to maintain these aspects of their identities (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2014). In this context, the utilisation of technoscapes does not appear to have contributed to a radical shift in how family life is considered and practised, however such kinship 'has become spread over vast and irregular spaces as groups move yet stay linked to one another through sophisticated media capabilities' (Appadurai, 1990, p.306). Through ICT, these media capabilities support communication across scapes, in which the extended family network and family events are conducted through cyberspace (Nedelcu, 2012).

Athletes such as Kevin, for example, require daily contact with home to ensure they make it through the uncertainties of a basketball season both on and off the court:

> [The season] would be a lot more difficult if it was twenty years ago and you didn't have the internet and Facebook and all this stuff. Now you're able to see what someone is doing almost every day and you're able to keep updated with their lives and they're able to keep up with yours. So it makes things a lot easier being able to keep in touch. At the end of the day, the most important thing is the relationships that you have. So, for me, [it's] my family, my friends, my sisters, my parents and my best friends. Obviously I want to advance my career…[but] I put the most importance on keeping a relationship with them. So to keep in touch is extremely important to me. I don't know if I could do this job if it wasn't so easy to connect with them.

The multidimensional and cultural fluidity of moving across and between ethnoscapes is highlighted by experiences such Kevin's. Athletes struggling with difference are relying on ICT to insulate them from these experiences (Kong, 2014). For athletes using ICT in this way, smartphone camera technology provides disembodied presence in real time through images and verbal responses, and allows athletes to transpose spatial boundaries (Nedelcu, 2012). ICT applications such as Skype and FaceTime provide images along with verbal interaction (Ros, 2010). As Brandon expressed:

> I can FaceTime somebody and feel like I'm in the room with them. I can speak to my sister for hours and check up on my nieces and nephews. I took it for granted before because all I wanted to do was play basketball. As I got older I knew that I had to be around for my family and be accessible to them. It was hard for me because I could literally go off the grid for months.

Similarly, Alexey suggests this ability to access family and friends readily can help offset difficult moments as part of the 'search for certainties' of their experiences (Appadurai, 1996: p.44):

> I was sick, right? So for four days I had a stomach virus and you want your family there. Your teammates aren't going to take care of you and that's when you want your mum or dad or sister around. It does help a lot to have access to them [via ICT] (Alexey).

Maintaining identities across borders indicates the manifold aspects of active engagement and resolution (Chib, Malik, Aricat & Kadir, 2014). In utilising these technologies, for example, individuals are physically absent whilst electronically present (Alonso & Oiarzabal, 2010). Brandon's comments present the negotiable nature of these communicative processes. He and his family have come to an agreement such activities are necessary to maintain and enhance their closeness, enabling his and their identities to be maintained. As he expanded:

My parents [used to] be like 'he's ok. If we hear from him once a month then he's ok.' I would literally send out an email once a month. I would go months without hearing my mother's voice and I would just go off the grid. It was just me being the person I am. My father's like that and my brother's like that. As people started worrying about me, I started making myself more available.

Brandon's experiences encapsulate how identities are negotiated, and how the outcome can be a tension between autonomy and appeasing familial expectations as mutual understandings are negotiated (Appadurai, 1990).

Such links between sport migration and family life have remained limited within the research literature (Van Der Meij and Darby, 2015). Focuses on individualisation in western cultures has shifted direction away from the management of family life (Roderick, 2012). In the case of Darius' family life, using ICT enabled him to feel some sense of a limited role in his daughter's life after finding the initial separation difficult:

I broke down a couple of times. Less this year than last year because I was the primary care provider for [my daughter]. Her mother was working so I was with her twenty-three hours a day for the first six months of her life. So when I came here it was straight from doing that, and I broke down probably four times and wanted to quit. She lives with her mother; it made me want to quit but I couldn't. [Communication is] big. My daughter's mother thinks it's bigger than I do. I feel like a lot of the time she's disinterested. She's two next month so it's hard to hold her attention on a computer or a phone and it's not Dora [the Explorer] on it or something.

Having fulfilled the role of primary carer throughout the early stage of her life, it is clear Darius felt some need to stay in regular contact with his daughter. The insulating nature of ICT use may have been negated somewhat by his daughter's age, the ability to communicate

enables the maintenance of their family union (Kang, 2012). This perspective is indicative of the need to represent the family as normal whilst engaging in movement across ethnoscapes (Appadurai, 1996).

Darius' experience is coherent with Madianou's (2012) findings on experiences of distant parenting. Madianou suggests 'although the frequency of communication through ICTs can often involve conflict and disappointment, for mothers it offers a more realistic experience of mothering and an opportunity to 'feel like mothers' again' (2012, p. 292). Similarly, Cabalquinto (2018) questions the seamlessness of family life lived at a distance, with multiple platforms and arrangements required. Darius' experiences enabled him to feel like a father despite the geographic distance caused by his pursuit of a professional basketball career. The staging of identities here are therefore seen to contain contradictory elements which position ICT use as both worthwhile and frustrating.

Seeking supportive relationships across ethnoscapes is not necessarily something players always try from the outset due to wanting to feel independent. As Taj outlines:

> I do speak to [my family] more frequently now because I learnt how much that conversation would be a boost for me and my morale and wellbeing really. I used to leave it like two weeks or three weeks and I'm a guy who kinda keeps things to myself. It used to not be too good because I'd be building emotions on top of emotions then I would talk to them and tell them that what's wrong with me, and they'd be like it's not that big, but it's been big for me for three weeks and I'm just talking to you now. So I try to keep up with them now. I talk to my youngest brother the most. Probably every two or three days; I talk to my parents once a week.

As with Brandon's comments on the use of technology, Taj indicates utilising communication skills is something athletes have to learn as they manage careers with

expectations. This process becomes part of learning to imagine worlds through identities important to them. Generations can be emotionally divided in obligations which are challenged by distance (Appadurai, 1996). For the players using ICT, appeasement through regular contact can be a way of satisfying families' emotional needs as they come to terms with the demands of having offspring pursuing professional careers overseas (Kang, 2012):

> I talk to my mum every day. Talk to my dad probably three times a week, but I don't think it's that important to keep in contact because if you know where you lie with each other you don't have to communicate like that. She's going to work…in the morning over there and it's [afternoon] here. She's calling me every day asking what I'm doing. It's afternoon and I'm not doing nothing. It's her comfort zone and she's used to talking to me; I'm her baby (Isaiah).

Consequently, our understanding of the benefits of ICT need to be expanded. In this instance, use amongst athletes could be perceived as much for the benefit of those left behind as it is for the athletes themselves. Such experiences highlight aspects of what Madianou & Miller (2013) term *polymedia*, with the moral responsibilities of agreed terms of usage highlighted through obligations expressed through distance. These obligations evidence a key tension in the accessibility of athletes, through a glimpse of diminished individual choice. Honouring of requests and the development of obligations are therefore key aspects of disjuncture between ethno- and technoscapes (Appadurai, 1996; Baldassar, 2016; Madianou, 2016).

Conceptual frameworks in this area could become entrenched in the idea of parents and siblings as the main contacts athletes have as they pursue a shared social bond (Benítez, 2012: Cabalquinto, 2018). Baldassar et al (2016), for example, continue this focus on transnational families, living across borders, but bounded in a traditional sense. Subsequently, in the pursuit of understanding careers, it is possible to overlook romantic ties which also play a significant

role in the maintenance and emotional pressures of transnational relationships (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2014). This oversight may have developed due to the view highly mobile lives are often perceived as the preserve of single individuals, and, as Vertovec (2007) suggested, marriage can cause those seeking mobility to create a more stable existence in one place. If this implication is generalised to those involved in basketball mobilities it could be the preserve of the unattached, however, one of the players, Kemba is married. This relationship is a significant part of his identity and decisions he makes as a professional athlete which impact on his life. In other words, the mutual understanding through his marriage impacts not only on the pursuit of his career, but also his use of ICT (Appadurai, 1990; Roderick, 2012):

> [My wife and I] just make sure we stay on the same page; talk to her every day. It's tough. We've been doing long distance our whole relationship because [we both went to different colleges that were] maybe like eight hours away. So, we're kind of used to it and we know how to deal with it now. Just make sure that we talk to each other all the time and stay on the same page…I probably wouldn't come out here [to play] if I couldn't talk to her on a regular basis. It wouldn't happen; I wouldn't be here.

Kemba was the only athlete out of the interviewed cohort who had formalised his relationship through marriage. However, other athletes had partners, which places stress on the relationship and is something some athletes try to avoid despite ICT providing regular and accessible contact points: 'I've had a couple of girlfriends and tried to do long-distance. That's always horrible and never works' (Alexey). This suggests maintaining identities across border is problematic, or, as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2014, pp. 48–49) suggest 'intimacy at a distance depends on firm arrangements if the inner bond is to be sustained (e.g., Skype every evening, meeting every six months). And this intimacy can always break down…How much nearness and distance can love survive?' Kemba's intimation appears to garner significant support for the viewpoint maintaining these kinds of relationships across borders is

difficult, with the mutual understanding concocted by Appadurai (1990) flowing through these experiences.

For those in relationships, pursuing diverse lives in different countries there could be found actions pulling in different directions as they pursue individual and combined goals. Blake's girlfriend lived with him during his previous season overseas, however, during the season in which he was interviewed, Blake was trying to maintain a relationship across borders. He suggested that:

> It's been harder for sure because I hadn't seen her for two-and-a-half months since [the beginning of the season], but at the same time it was easier because I would try to keep busy with basketball and I have school now to keep my head on. At the same time, she's pursuing her own dreams - she works [in the financial sector] – so she has her own dreams she needs to pursue. So, I kind of just accept it.

It appears that these interpersonal constraints shape their experiences as well as their engagement with ICT (Butler & Dzikus, 2014). The lack of geographical distance which creates problems in long-distance relationships has to be countered (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2014), and is something the athletes try to overcome:

> We've been dealing with [the distance] for a while. She's making moves with her career so it's not like she really wanted to uproot herself and come out here. This is something that I've had in the works for year so I wasn't going to let – I'm not saying I don't like this girl – but I'm not going to let it [relationship] deter me from playing professional sport. Then also I doubt she'd be able to come out here unless we got married, and I'm not ready to do all that (Steve).

Thus, the engagement with ICT is both part of short-term and long-term negotiations of identities, tempered by the 'siege of distance and time' (Appadurai, 1996, p.44). A key tension here may be time difference. It is often stressed ICT has fundamentally altered the way in which transnational relationships function (Nedelcu, 2012; Collin, 2014) and the speed of transmission has allowed these relationships to flourish a way unimaginable prior to the latter stages of the twentieth century (Banerjee & German, 2010). However, questions for further consideration are: to what extent have these technologies reduced the distance between geographically disparate spaces and to what extent do these technologies require day-to-day management in order to be useful?

'There's a little bit of a window…'

For athletes moving around the globe, time differences are a concern as they seek to keep in touch with loved ones to establish and maintain connections (Cordini, 2011). As Blake suggests when talking to his girlfriend in North America, 'we'll do thirty minutes while she's walking to the subway before work and then an hour or maybe less at night. Then on the weekends we talk more. We just schedule a time where we're supposed to be talking,' which suggests organisation is required for athletes using ICT for regular contact. Thus, the optimism which accompanies unconstrained mobility and communication needs to be tempered in these circumstances due the negotiations of particular temporal constraints (Ryan et al., 2014).

The presence of such negotiations suggests limitations to ICT use owing to temporal barriers formed by communicating across time-zones. Such actions by athletes highlights the disjuncture between the ethno- and technoscapes. The temporality highlighted by this disjuncture points to the production of locality, and spatiotemporally formed aspects of

reproduction and maintenance in the relationships producing ethnoscapes (Appadurai, 1996). As athletes negotiate maintained aspects of locality through temporal boundaries, suggestions of new and exciting forms of communication which transcend limitations thus become mundane at an individual level as athletes look to orientate themselves within and across temporal boundaries (Wilding, 2006). As Steve suggests:

> [being in a relationship is] tough with the time difference because [where my girlfriend is based] is…behind so she'll get up for work and message then there's a little bit of a window when she gets off work and late at night for me when we can talk. So there's a finite window where we can talk to each other.

It emerges athletes have to organise their day-to-day schedules in order to be contactable by those who are living across time-zones. This perspective was also presented by athletes such as Kemba who need to manage his long-term relationships. This process is an additional facet of learning to be away from intimate contact and organise their careers, and emphasises the individuality of these experiences, also raising questions about ICT's potential to insulate athletes.

For some, depending on their approach and place in the world, time-zones may be more or less of an issue. However, players organising their schedule in order that ICT is part of the strategy of identity management, including not only strategies for coping with feelings of dislocation and homesickness or in order to consider moves so they can further their career (Nedelcu, 2012), but also maintain family life:

> Without a doubt [ICT helps]. I'm able to see my parents and see my friends. The only time that I'm not in touch with friends and family back home is when I'm sleeping or they're sleeping because of the…time difference; being a social butterfly – I really

enjoy interaction with other people. I can't imagine not playing basketball without social media to keep me connected (Tyler).

As such, it is apparent the ameliorating effects of ICT and consequent security of being able to access a consistent social relationships of home, peers and significant others is challenged by these barriers (Wilding, 2006). However, attitudes towards time-zones differ and for those without such a significant gap there are fewer issues:

Regardless of where you are and what time-zone it is, you can always find a time to chat via FaceTime or Skype and any of these other great programs that are out there today. I know that my parents joke that when I move three hours away and was at the boarding school that we communicated less and it was harder to communicate than now or last year when I was [in college]. We're lucky to live in today's age where flying from here… is a five or ten-hour thing, and not a thirty-day trip on a ship (Victor).

It is worth noting that Victor, who is of European background, had spent his professional career in Europe and was on the same continent as his parents. Though there are several time-zones to transcend in Europe, the temporal boundaries are less intrusive than if Victor was to communicate from, say, Australia to Europe. The links between space and time is therefore apparent, with athletes able to transcend space, but the rhythms of daily life in their present locality is shaped by time and career expectations (Hunter, 2015; Madianou, 2012; Nedelcu, 2012). This situation was similar for Nikola, who was living in a time-zone which was only 2-3 hours from his own:

I have a fiancé. She's working…so she can't just leave her job and come with me so we have suffered. We speak every day. There's so much now with Skype and Facebook. We don't work out all day. We have gaps. We don't practise all day so we've got plenty of opportunity to speak with your family or friends.

It would appear, for both Nikola and Victor the issue was less significant. Their reported experiences may have been different had the time difference created a larger temporal boundary. These varied experiences support our suggestion temporal boundaries remain a factor in ICT use, linking inherently to locality and the production of those through which the athletes move (Appadurai, 1995). For other athletes where the time difference was much greater, the positive effects of ICT are often affected still further by temporal boundaries:

> I don't always get to talk to [my family] as much as I would like because of the time difference. It's a situation with my brother where I keep joking that when I get home my nieces seem to be getting taller and taller. So I'm missing them grow. That's the difficult part about being abroad and playing basketball because you miss out on actual time with your family and your loved ones. Even though you're missing it, you're doing something that you love so it's worthwhile. I love playing basketball and they know I love playing basketball, and I don't think they would have me at home doing something I wouldn't necessarily like doing (Tyreke).

In shaping our observations on the use of ICT, Tyreke's reflections here highlight the issues with temporal boundaries, linking to the insulating and negotiable elements of ICT use as fractured spatial arrangements are encountered in the maintenance of relationships across ethnoscapes (Appardurai, 1990).

Conclusion

ICT enables athletes to contact home in ways which would not have been possible until the emergence of internet and computer hardware during the late 20th and early 21st century (Banerjee & German, 2011). Utilising this technology has positioned Wi-Fi as a key facet of

contractual negotiations with clubs. An absence of this technology can create issues in the host country for both athletes and the host organisation. As demonstrated by the data, ICT is used to maintain, and attempt to maintain, series of relationships with family and partners. Utilising ICT is therefore thought to enhance athletes' experience of professional basketball mobilities by providing access to a familiar and readily supportive relationships. The athletes therefore stage identities as they move through, and communicate across, ethno- and technoscapes.

We suggest that clubs, agents and coaches should look to consider the social pressures on athletes more broadly than simply providing Wi-Fi. Seeking ways instead to provide athletes with training plans which accommodate issues surrounding time difference, and showing awareness of the familial and social pressures that manifest in the players' uses of ICT, namely negotiations of mutual understanding, generational expectations and the presentation of a normal family life in the face of migratory pressures. In so doing, these interested parties could help players manage fluxes in their points of arrival and departure (Appadurai, 1996).

We base this conclusion on the varying commitment to usage and opportunity of ICT to communicate with those beyond their direct surroundings. Interactions were sought to ameliorate the stresses of professional athleticism, whilst reconciling their athletic identities with those associated with families, friends and peers. The athletes involved in this study maintain pre-existing relationships (Alonso & Oiarzabal, 2010; Banerjee & German, 2010; Baldassar, 2016; Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016), which are often based at their returning point ('home') or where they went to college. Consequently, exploring ICT use requires appreciation of individuals who live dual – or potentially multiple – real-time lives spanning across national borders and connected to social relationships stretching beyond their direct surroundings (Banerjee & German, 2010).

Whilst suggesting that ICT has become a *sine qua non* of athletic life, the presence of time-zones significantly complicates this thesis and highlights the multidimensional nature of athletes' experiences. Whereas previously geographic distance was a significant barrier to taking part in the lives of those who live at a distance, ICT enables shared social fields to be constructed across vast distances so the issue of space has been reduced (Nedelcu, 2012; Baldassar et al, 2016; Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016). Consequently, it might be argued issues of space have been overcome while temporal boundaries remain an inhibitor in communicative capabilities, highlighting the spatiotemporal relationship between localities (Appadurai, 1990).

We suggest then, that the way in which these technologies are viewed need to be treated with caution and understood as a social endeavour. This social endeavour is shaped through mutual understanding across ethnoscapes, with conditions in localities shaping these experiences (Appadurai, 1996). Despite the drive for access, the availability of such technologies can exacerbate tensions, stresses and pressures (Kang, 2012; Madianou & Miller, 2013; Madianou, 2016). In so doing, we conclude by suggesting that sport migration research should explore beyond hosting ICT as a panacea. Research in the area should instead search for the social and relational levels on which athletes are able to reconcile their athletic identities with homesickness, loneliness and attachments to home, exploring the ways in which ICT is utilised at a personal level, probing also the lives of those left behind when athletes pursue their careers overseas.

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