



“It’s a long way to the Super League:” The Lived Experiences of Southern Hemisphere Professional Rugby League Migrants in the United Kingdom.

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Presentation Outline

- Background: Sports labour migration
 - Globalisation, Identity and sport labour migration,
 - The lived experiences of sports migrants
- Study Methods
- Results and Discussion
 - The Quest for Opportunity, Bargaining, Life in England, Reactions to Migration
- Conclusions

Presentation Aims



- To provide insight into the barriers and motivations for professional sports migrants on the pathway from Oceania to England in Rugby League
- To describe their lived experiences
- To gain an understanding of the impact upon their identities as professional athletes

Globalisation and identity

- Globalising world:
 - Flows of people, technology, capital and ideology in increasing intensity
- No longer simple core-periphery relationships (Maguire 2001)
- Global flows - resisted, reinterpreted and redirected:
Not only controlled by the established groups:
 - Unintended consequences.
- These interconnections have been studied in sport

Sport Labour Migration

- Labour migration has been increasingly studied in sport as a symptom of globalising processes
- A host of sports
- 2 methods of analysis have been taken:
 - ***Mapping power balances*** and how they contour the direction and intensity of migrant pathways (e.g. Falcous and Maguire 2005, Chiba 2004, Maguire and Possamai 2005)
 - ***The lived experiences of migrants*** themselves: What it means to be a labour migrant, motivations, barriers and narratives (e.g. Stead and Maguire 1998, Maguire 2004)

Rugby League Globalisation



Study Methods

- Participants:
 - **40 Elite rugby league players** in the European Super league XI. **26 Australian / New Zealand** nationals with ‘European’ heritage, **14 players with ‘indigenous’ Oceanian heritage** (including Papuan, Maori, Aborigine and Pacific Island ancestry) – 36% of total workforce
- **Semi-structured interviews** (14 participants), 45-75 mins
- **Questionnaires** (26 participants) with the same schedule
- **Themes covered:** **migrant motivations and objectives**, living as an overseas sportsman in the UK, the British rugby league experience, **attitudes to migrants ‘back home,’** other overseas experience and migration as part of a career.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quest for opportunity

- The Quest for Opportunity
 - More career opportunities
 - Also ancillary goals: Travel, experience another culture.
- National identities, national habitus'
- Opportunity played a part for the Islanders and Papuans, but motivations were often different:
 - “My **motivation** to come here to play rugby league was to **wear the national colour**. But **to come and be paid** to do what I love doing was a **real shock** for me. The word professional didn't even appear in my mind. I still think to this day **I am dreaming** everything now.” Epi, PNG international

Informed migrants?

- Finance was an incentive; particularly for international players.
- Personal contacts were key – inside and outside the sport: Established internationals had a network, others did not.
- Preparation varied from years to 2 days
- A personal experience: The majority negotiated their own contracts at an advantage – but not always as planned

Fickle conditions of employment

- “When I got on the plane, **I’d signed** to go to [another club]; **by the time I got off the plane the deal had fallen through**. My agent quickly whisked around, got me set up with [a club], but couldn’t contact me in the air...so **I turned up looking for someone and someone else was there** to pick me up, who I walked past about 10 times thinking ‘I know this bloke!’” Scott, Australian

Informed migrants?

The Pacific Islanders

- Negotiations were from a position of greater weakness: Forced out of contracts in NRL
- Financial exploitation
- Information was harder to come by, and the cultural differences more pronounced – particularly for those who had not played in Australia and New Zealand beforehand
- The way of life, including money was unfamiliar to some, mainly Papuans

‘From the first step to the 10th floor’

- “What’s in your head is like, what it’s going to be like, **till you come over and it’s real, it’s scary**. I come from right up in the mountains where you hardly see 10 cars a day, and to come here and saw the traffic lights, lot of buildings, a lot of cars and people, walking too fast, **a real shock! I would have gone home the next day, I felt that homesick**. But to come over to live here, it’s something you wouldn’t express.” Seru, PNG international

Life in England:

Australians and New Zealanders

- Australians and New Zealanders with European ancestry tended to be more solitary and to socialise with British
- The reception had also been mixed, and linked to performance levels:
- “In the first season I had a **bad injury**, and copped a lot of ribbing from fellow players, a bit of **joking type stuff but I’m sure a few of them meant it**, saying **you’re on holiday**, getting the big money and you break down.” Stuart, Australian international

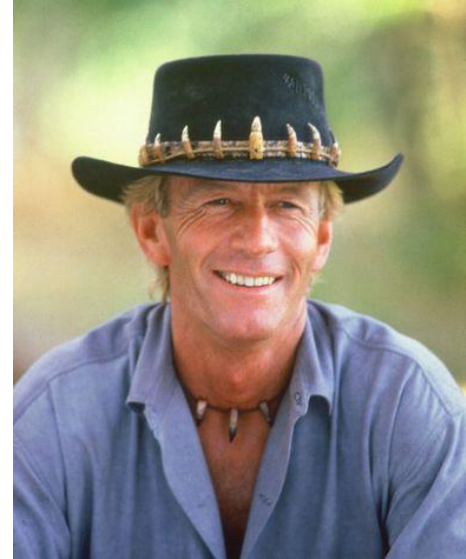
Life in England: Pacific Islanders



- For Pacific islanders and Papuans, personal networks tended to be limited to other players with a similar cultural background.
- “How to talk to the locals, how to cook, how to be independent.”
- Loneliness was endemic
- “I am **lonely** and starting to think **at night** when I am asleep and I think **what am I doing here**?...or in the afternoons after we’ve done stuff we come home and maybe half an hour we just stay there and we just talk. You know **there’s no family, there’s no friends.**”
Seru, PNG international

Reactions to migration: Identity

- Australian **Nationality**:
 - Corks, Convicts and Crocodile Dundee
- PNG and Islander **Race**:
 - “You will never shake hands with those white boys” (Seru, Papuan International)
 - Cannibals and the ‘3rd World’
- Playing stereotypes:
 - “Australians win at all costs”
 - Islander ‘physicality’



Reactions to migration: Identity



- Resistance: Increasing awareness of national identities
 - “There’s no way we’re anything other than Australians”
Brian, Australian
- Notably, several New Zealanders went on to play for England

Concluding thoughts:

Multiple interdependencies, multiple identities

- The threat of 'False Universalism' (Fleming 1994)
- Numerous identities, numerous cultures in this figuration of labour migration.
- Australian and New Zealand-European 'established groups' and Indigenous Oceanian 'outsider' groups
- A multiplicity of identities: E.g. Samoan/New Zealand internationals. 'Welsh' Australians? Ancestry...
- Migrant typology; May be specific elements in specific sports:
- E.g. Papuans: Pioneers, Mercenaries, Settlers

Take Home Message

- Migrant support cannot be generalised
- Career trajectories/experiences were key
- Cultural specificity contoured experiences and motivations



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