



# Mental Health, Crime, Sport, Community, and Island Life: The Post-Retirement Struggles of a Fiji Soccer Hero

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## Abstract

This article explores the soccer career of the ex-Fiji national-team player, Henry Dyer, and his post-retirement struggles. He experiences ‘fragmentation’ because of two ‘epiphanies’ (traumatic life-events)—his failure to get an elite coaching job after retirement and failure to secure an overseas playing-contract. After a period of fragmentation, when he cut all ties with the sport, he has reinvented himself as a caring person who, through the social and support club, Nadi Legends Club, visits ex-players going through illness. We also use Henry’s story as a gateway to explore (1) race and class aspects; and (2) masculinity issues. We look at the case through the theoretical lenses of symbolic interactionism and Foucault on power.

**Keywords** Fiji soccer · Masculinity · Quest narrative · Race and class

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 General Introduction

Some important literature within the discipline of sport and physical education sociology (e.g. Gerschick & Miller, 1995; Sparkes & Smith, 2002, 2003; Sparkes, 2000) has attempted to study in depth, via the ‘narrative analysis’ method (Sparkes, 2015 page 21), one or more athletes who have faced traumatic life-events and how these events have impacted upon these people’s ‘sense of self’ (Smith & Sparkes, 2005 page 1103; Sparkes, 2015 page 21) and self-worth. This life-event is often a serious

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injury, such as the spinal cord injuries (SCIs) suffered by English rugby players (Sparkes & Smith, 2002, 2003), or severe disappointment (such as being passed over for a managerial career).

This study builds on the extant literature and is a bit different from prior work by not focusing on an athlete's debilitating injury or illness but on the serious disappointment and alienation faced by an international soccer player, Henry Dyer (born 1962), as a result of not being given an opportunity to manage or coach a team at the elite senior level within his home country of Fiji Islands.<sup>1</sup> (Fiji Islands, hereafter Fiji, is an island nation of 926,000 people located in the South Pacific Ocean.) Henry also feels disappointed at not receiving an overseas club contract during his playing days which would have secured financial stability for himself and his family.

Going from being a locally- and nationally-revered soccer star to a relative-unknown, living upon past glories, and having to pay his own way into matches, has been a bitter pill for Henry, and some of his elite contemporaries, to swallow. In Henry's words: 'When former star soccer players go to watch the senior games today the crowd does not seem to know them or consider them as somebody. However, they are unaware that they were the driving forces of soccer in that previous era' (source: interview with author, 26 September 2014). This article will also recount several stories involving Henry which are illuminating with respect to his mental response to his present situation and his attempts at self-re-creation. Henry's story also includes his descent into criminality during the mid-years of his playing career (he and his co-offenders committed several after-hours burglaries at jewellery stores in the western part of Fiji); and his prison-based rehabilitation after serving jail time in 1987, the year of the country's first two military coups. Cowman (2016 page 98) writes that '[g]ood collective biography does not attempt to divorce individuals' own views of their experience from the social and political contexts in which these experiences were situated.' As a part-European,<sup>2</sup> Henry's life was irrevocably shaped by the transition from colonialism to post-colonialism in Fiji and Colonel Rabuka's two military coups of 1987.

The fact that soccer is 'controlled' by the 340,000-strong Indo-Fijian community,<sup>3</sup> and Henry is of mixed indigenous Fijian and white British descent, has also added to his sense of exclusion and alienation from the sport's powerbrokers and institutions.<sup>4</sup> The criminal activities he was involved in, and the jail-time which he

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Dyer was one of the most colourful and flamboyant players of his era. He debuted for Airport Soccer Club and the Nadi Soccer Association team in 1981. He also played several seasons for Lautoka Blues during the 1980s and was a regular within the Fiji national-team set-up. He retired in the 1990s.

<sup>2</sup> Part-European' is the official name given to those of indigenous Fijian and white-British heritage in Fiji censuses and is a left-over statistical category from the days of colonial rule. This small community still maintains its own identity, networks and customs, to a certain extent, and is seen as more rooted and committed to Fiji than the 'Europeans' who are often on short-term employment contracts.

<sup>3</sup> In 2007, the ethnic composition of Fiji was: Indigenous Fijians 56.8%, Indo-Fijians (i.e. Fijians of South Asian descent) 37.5% (Appanna and Abbott 2018 page 18; *CIA World Fact Book*).

<sup>4</sup> It must be mentioned here that Fiji Soccer features the 'association-model' whereby the associations are responsible for running the game, at senior and junior levels, within their territorial areas. The national-league teams are thus 'association' or 'district' teams and so it is incorrect to call them 'clubs'. Each association runs its own club competition (although some of these are inactive or semi-active) and hence clubs operate one tier below the national-league. The national-league proper (est. 1977) has two

served, both during and after his senior playing career, were factors which lessened his chances of moving successfully into elite-level management ('coaching' in the American and Australian parlance). Unlike Australian Rules football's indigenous star, Doug Nicholls, Henry was not generally held up as a role-model for youth, outside of his own village community and networks (regarding Nicholls, see Gorman et al., 2015 page 1951). However, some of the reasons for Henry's present situation are structural and reflect the lack of finances, within the sport in Fiji, and the country as a whole, as well as the *cultural hegemony* which indigenous Fijians aspiring to management positions must contend with. It is easier for Indo-Fijian ex-players (about 25% of all national-league players) to become administrators and managers post-retirement than it is for indigenous Fijian ex-players (the other 75%). Rhoden (2006 page 124) describes a similar situation in the USA where black baseball and basketball stars rarely go on to own or coach teams or move into senior positions in sports' administration due to structural impediments.

Gorman et al. (2015) have called for research, regarding the history of indigenous Australians in Australian Rules football, which goes beyond simply recounting the careers of the greats to exploring the links to the broader social and political context and explaining what the sport means to indigenous people. A similar project should be embarked upon for Fiji soccer and its indigenous players. Although race is only one of several themes in this article, it is at work in the background, and it casts a shadow (as it always does in Fiji).

## 2 Research Questions

This article's four research questions are as follows:

- (1). What has been the mental and emotional state of ex-Fiji soccer champion Henry Dyer since his retirement from senior soccer in the 1990s?
- (2). What 'epiphanies' (negative traumatic life-events) have occurred which have contributed to Henry's past and present states of mind?
- (3). How has Henry attempted to attain a *restored self* or *salvaged self* post-retirement and how successful has he been?
- (4). What concepts of masculinity operate within contemporary indigenous Fijian society?

Bourdieu spoke about 'various forms of cultural capital' (Wellard, 2009 page 29). Cultural capital for the indigenous men is based on their roles within village hierarchies, where the village is essentially a tribe or extended family. For the Indo-Fijian

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Footnote 4 (continued)

divisions and there is an annual play-off game(s) between the bottom team of the premier-league and the top-team of the first-division. A key feature of the national-league is that the season is based around three short, self-contained mini-tournaments (as well as the national-league proper)—the Fiji FACT; the Battle of the Giants (BOG); and the most prestigious Inter-district Championship (IDC).

men, it is based on success as a businessman, especially locally in a prominent business, in academic pursuits and/or in achievements and profile in education or sports administration. These two realms of life clearly have different rules and rarely overlap. Past sporting achievements add to cultural capital too especially for indigenous men.

### 3 Research Method

The aim of this project was to interview a sample of retired Fijian elite-level soccer players, and gain information about their various post-retirement struggles and issues. Our first point of contact was the retired Airport Soccer Club president and Nadi Soccer Association administrator Billy P. Sharma (name changed). Through Billy, I (first author) was introduced to Henry. Via 'snowball sampling', I was introduced, by Billy and Henry, to a number of other ex-national-league players who had played during the 1980s. Because I was then living in Lautoka City, in the Western Fiji region, all of the ex-players were from one or more of the Western Fiji teams, Ba, Lautoka, and Nadi. The study's fieldwork was conducted over the period January 2014 to December 2015. Long-term immersion in the field is still regarded as 'undoubtedly optimal' (Sugden et al., 2019 page 279), even by those researchers who view short-term ethnography (STE) as a second-best but still worthwhile alternative.

We adopt here the methodological perspective of symbolic interactionism and, in particular, the form of interpretive interactionism and interpretive biography developed by Denzin (1989a, b). For Mohr (1997), interpretive interactionism is a 'multiperspectival qualitative research method that attempts to study the whole person in his or her historical, sociocultural, and biological context by using theoretical concepts from a variety of disciplines' (Sparkes & Smith, 2002 page 265). Denzin (1989a page 69) writes that the biographical method is 'the 'studied use and collection of life documents that describe turning-point moments in an individual's life'. The goal is to live one's way into the lives of those involved in order to see the world in the way in which they see it. We also aimed for a reflexive postcolonial mind-set which is now seen as 'the next logical step within the SDP [sport for development and peace] research paradigm' (Darnell et al., 2018 page 144).

Overall, the research process involved interviews with seven ex-Ba and ex-Nadi players. However, the present article focuses exclusively on Henry's story.

I had 20 formal interviews with Henry with most taking place on Thursday afternoons at various Nadi Town Centre venues. The first took place on 1 May 2014 and the last took place on 23 April 2015. The average interview time was 3 h so total interview time was approximately 60 h. I had further informal conversations with Henry in July 2017 and July–August 2019; and I used these to update factual information and to gain expanded answers on key points of interest. I also used these conversations to clarify certain points he had made back in the 2014–15 interviews.

Sparkes (2000 page 17), following Denzin (1989b), 'took the interviews to be a process in which two people creatively and openly share ... experiences with one another in a mutual search for greater self-understanding.' Sparkes (2000 page 17)

says that, during his interviews with Rachael (name changed), he ‘had no desire to position ... [himself] as a detached, disinterested, and objective outsider’, and I echo these sentiments here. Furthermore, Denzin (1989b page 43) points out that for a researcher to simply listen, but not talk, ‘creates distrust.’ I avoided listening only. I shared with Henry how I had been pushed out of an academic job in Australia and had come to the developing island-nation of Fiji in order to redeem myself and get my career back on track. Henry and I had many social lunches, dinners, and drinking sessions and I made it clear to Henry that I was a soccer fan and a friend, as well as a researcher. I made sure that Henry was not being used, or might even perceive that he was being used, as a means to an end, with the end being future journal article publications and job promotions (Chua, 1998; Kim, 2008). Significantly, Henry’s eldest son told me personally that ‘people had written him [Henry] off. But you gave him a second chance.’

Bond et al. (2015) make some important comments about research into indigenous Australian sports history, which should be discussed here. Although not aware of their article during the fieldwork, their reference to the concept of ‘yarning’ is important and has inspired us. It refers to the concept of storytelling, which is important to indigenous culture (as with indigenous Fijian culture). It can turn a distressing ‘straight-line’ story of oppression into something positive and life-affirming. Whether storytelling itself can achieve this or it is the emotions that are invoked when telling a story is hard to say. But we wanted to co-operate with Henry in co-producing and recounting his story and feel his emotions to the extent that that was possible. The story’s ending is unwritten but it is imbued with hope as he has raised a large family, all of whom have reached adulthood, and he is respected among his village community and the broader Nadi village system. Difficulties have increased his empathy and his desire for long-term planning as shown by his urging of ex-players to make Nadi Legends Club a soccer club (fielding teams) rather than just a support network.

Lastly, we also make use of Michel Foucault’s mid-period writings on power in modern societies, and apply this to the power exercised by the football regulatory bodies and the power and resistance exercised by Henry and his ex-player colleagues when they organize a village-based soccer club and a veterans’ tournament to raise funds for a deceased ex-player’s family. Foucault is used because a weakness of symbolic interactionism is commonly held to be that it pays insufficient attention to social structures (Wallace & Wolf, 1986 page 221; Charon, 1995 pages 23, 33; Delaney & Madigan, 2015 page 40). The analysis here is complicated and multifaceted due to the existence of both feudal and capitalist/modern power structures and ways of thinking and behaving in the island nation. Sometimes it is difficult to conclude who is exercising power over whom, and who has the most power in a given context as power is traded and negotiated, exchanged and compromised in dramatic re-enactments of customary acts of give and take within a benevolently paternal system.

In the following quote from a 1978 interview, Foucault (2020 page 284) introduces his approach to the problem of power:

For me, power is what needs to be explained. When I think back on the experiences I have had in contemporary societies or in historical investigations I have done, I always come up against the question of power, a question that no theoretical system - whether the philosophy of history or a general theory of society, or even a political theory - seems able to deal with. That is, those facts of power, those power mechanisms, those power relations at work in the problem of madness, of medicine, of prison, and so on [note that this is where he chooses to look for power]. I have been trying to grapple with that bundle of empirical and poorly elucidated things which power relations consist of, taking them as something that needed explaining. But I'm still only at the beginning of my work; clearly, I haven't finished it. And that's why I don't understand what has been written about the fact that, for me, power was a kind of abstract principle that asserted itself as such, which I wasn't accounting for finally.

No, power was not an 'abstract principle', it was the firm and harsh reality of a deputy headmaster's hand smacking upon my ten-year-old bum in my Australian primary-school back in the 1970s—it is as real as that; it is where the rubber hits the road, so to speak, and is always working in conjunction with administration, grading, and record-keeping (Hoskin & Macve, 1994 page 18). Similarly, in Fiji soccer, a player was controlled and disciplined by the media and the administrators who would grade performances in matches and off-the-field behaviour, and respond with rewards or punishments. An *ex*-player would then be summarily ignored, and dismissed from consciousness, as an irrelevancy post-retirement. The *ex*-player absorbed the way he was treated during his playing career and then submitted or resisted.

In a second quote, from the same 1978 interview, Foucault (2020 page 288) reveals his method of working and his approach to ethics:

My role is to raise questions in an effective, genuine way, and to raise them with the greatest possible rigor, with the maximum complexity and difficulty so that a solution doesn't spring from the head of some reformist intellectual or suddenly appear in the head of a party's political bureau. The problems I try to pose - these tangled things that crime, madness, and sex are, and that concern everyday life - cannot easily be resolved. Years, decades, of work and political imagination will be necessary, work at the grass roots, with the people directly affected, restoring their right to speak. Only then will we succeed, perhaps, in changing a situation that, with the terms in which it is currently laid out, only leads to impasse and blockages. I take care not to dictate how things should be. I try instead to pose problems, to make them active, to display them in such a complexity that they can silence the prophets and lawmakers, all those who speak for others and to others. In this way, it will be possible for the complexity of the problem to appear in its connection with people's lives; and, consequently, through concrete questions, difficult cases, movements of rebellion, reflections, and testimonies, the legitimacy of a common creative action can also appear.

The following quote from the same 1978 interview shows Foucault (2020 pages 294–295) outlining his theory of power and resistance. He was inspired by the fervour of the radical students during his time teaching in Tunisia. But he also wanted to respond to the criticisms he had received from French Communist Party members who misread him as a reactionary servant of the bourgeoisie and a neo-functionalists:

When I study power relations, I try to study their specific configurations; nothing is more foreign to me than the idea of a master who would impose his law on one. I don't accept either the notion of mastery or the universality of law. On the contrary, I'm very careful to get a grip on the actual mechanisms of the exercise of power; I do this because those who are enmeshed, involved, in these power relations can, in their actions, their resistance, their rebellion, escape them, transform them, in a word, cease being submissive. And if I don't say what needs to be done, it isn't because I believe there is nothing to be done. On the contrary, I think there are a thousand things that can be done, invented, contrived by those who, recognizing the relations of power, in which they are involved, have decided to resist them or escape them. From that viewpoint, all my research rests on a postulate of absolute optimism. I don't construct my analysis in order to say, "This is the way things are, you are trapped." I say these things only insofar as I believe it enables us to transform them. Everything I do is done with the conviction that it may be of use.

Foucault is clearly on the side of the oppressed and marginalized, and we too want to hear those voices which have not yet been heard and which have been deprived of a voice because they do not fit within hegemonic power structures. This is why it is important to hear the voices of the ex-players in Fiji who were effectively amateurs in their playing days and do not live in luxurious circumstances today. However, it is absolutely not our intention to stir up trouble between the ethnic groups or to side with one against the other within the complex set of cultural relationships which exist in Fiji where a type of equilibrium between the groups has been worked out and is acted out. In fact, the 2006 coup, agree with it or not, was fought for this reason—to stifle inter-ethnic strife.

## 4 Findings and Discussion

### 4.1 Attaining to the Restored Self or Salvaged Self

'Athletic identity' has been defined as the degree to which an individual identifies with the athletic role, as opposed to other roles and identities which she/he might choose to take on in life (Brewer et al., 1993; Wiechman & Williams, 1997). Ronkainen et al., (2016 page 57) state that: 'athletic identity can be a positive source of meaning and self-esteem, but also highly problematic for well-being when sport is not going well or the career is abruptly terminated.' The concept of 'identity foreclosure' was expanded upon by Brewer and Petitpas (2017 page 118) who, in more recent work, have created this as a separate concept with its own definition as follows: 'commitment to the athlete role in the absence of exploration of occupational

or ideological alternatives.’ When a traumatic event occurs, the negative emotions are likely to be intensified for a person with a strong ‘athletic identity’ plus athletic ‘identity foreclosure’ (Sparkes & Stewart, 2019 page 467).

We would describe Henry as having a strong exclusive athletic identity and role engulfment. Henry’s new role as assistant village headman, to some extent, trades upon his original athletic identity but, to some extent, is a new role requiring new skills.

Henry Dyer: I am sorry that up until today only a few of us former national reps have made it into coaching. This is one fact which no-one has investigated or commented upon. This may be partly because the Fiji FA does not advertise coaching training clinics in the newspapers or on TV.

Lamont-Mills and Christensen (2006) claim that, as a social role, athletic identity is formed in response to group affiliations and social interactions. In the 1980s, a large number of talented indigenous players came out of Nakavu and neighbouring villages and went on to play for Nadi and Fiji. There were also strong bonds with the indigenous Ba players as many of them were originally from Nadroga province not too far away from Nadi Town. This group of talented players, bound by strong indigenous community ties and of the same generation, today maintain strong exclusive athletic identities.

The negative traumatic life events considered by this literature are also called ‘epiphanies’ (Sparkes, 2000 page 16). They can include serious injury and illness and, in Henry’s case, inability to secure an overseas playing contract and inability to secure a high-status managerial job after retirement. Another epiphany for Henry, which he specifically brought to my attention during our conversation on 1 August 2019, was the rejection he faced from Nadi fans when he switched from Nadi Jetsetters to Lautoka Blues in the 1980s (but continued to live in Nadi).<sup>5</sup> He claims that the depression following this mass rejection was a major factor behind his descent into criminality.

Dr Stuart Wong (name changed), ex-Nadi team doctor in the 1980s, told the authors how Henry had remarkable ability and he had no doubt that Henry could have succeeded at English Premier League (EPL) level. Dr Wong, his eyes and voice filled with empathy, also told me how, if Henry gone to play in a developed country, ‘his life would be much different now’ (source: interview with author, 24 July 2014, Nadi).

In pioneering work, Charmaz (1987 page 287) set out a list of hierarchies of preferred identities, and this list will form part of the theoretical base for the present study, and was used as a similar foundation by Sparkes (2000). The four selves are as follows:

- (a) The *supernormal identity* level assumes success, values, social acclamation, and struggle in a competitive world;

<sup>5</sup> The distance from Lautoka to Nadi, via the Queen’s Road, is 29 kms (18.02 miles).



- (b) The *restored self* which is defined as the identity level in which people hope and expect to return to their former lives after a period of recuperation and preparation (Sparkes & Smith, 2003 page 310). People with such aspirations assume that the normal course of events is to fully recover from illness, injury, and serious disappointment (as in a Hollywood movie script) (Sparkes & Smith, 2003 page 318);
- (c) A *contingent personal identity* is an identity which people regard as of questionable value and merit but perhaps possible in the future; and
- (d) A *salvaged self* is the identity level which athletes, post-epiphany, can accept as worthwhile although it is still a disappointment. They try to reconstruct their self-image and view themselves in the best possible light.

Also relevant is the five-stage model of dramatic self-change put forward by Athens (1995 page 571). For him, the first stage is fragmentation, meaning ‘the splintering of their own selves’; the second stage is provisionality; the third stage is praxis, meaning subjecting the new selves to the ‘test of experience’; the fourth stage is the consolidation stage; and, finally, the last stage is social segregation, meaning finding a peer group where one feels comfortable whilst avoiding negative or hostile groups.

Clearly, these two theoretical frameworks can be combined as the first focuses on end-states whereas the second talks about the (five-stage) process of self-change.

The ‘fragmentation’ (Athens, 1995 page 571) stage for Henry corresponds to the years he spent without any contact with the sport after retiring as a player but before he moved into management with a village-based club team. His *salvaged self* revolves around his assistant village headman role at Nakavu Village and is predominantly an indigenous Fijian identity (a non-indigenous person could neither live in the village nor serve in this role):

Henry Dyer: After playing active soccer, I became very committed to the community village life and to the protocols. ... Most of us soccer players who had played together for Nadi in the same era just completely dropped out of soccer commitment. It was like a guillotine or an axe on our shoulder or on our back. ... We just completely dropped out and lost contact with each other. We did not go to watch Nadi games unless there was a tournament here in Nadi and there was an invitation. *We had the feeling that we had done our part and that was it.* ... We all just forgot about soccer until we formed the Nadi Legends Football Club in 2004 [authors’ italics].

As we can see, from the above quote, Henry’s retirement was followed by several years out of the sport as he devoted himself to village activities and customary obligations. Henry functions as an indigenous person within the village, but is also comfortable with the part-Europeans, which make up several interconnected strands of his wider family tree. Furthermore, his stepfather, the late John Pettitt, an Anglo-Australian company director, was an influential figure for Henry in his teenaged years. Henry returned to soccer in the 1990s as a part of the coaching and administration team of the Sweats Soccer Club (hereafter Sweats SC), a village-based team which began as a junior club in its first year, a senior club in its

second year, and then was promoted up to the first-division of the Nadi club competition in its third year. (Clubs exist one tier below the two-division national-league and cannot be promoted into it.) Rusiate Waqa and Sosi Kaitani, both indigenous villagers from the local area and ex-Nadi players, served as the other coaches. The late village headman, Inia Namua, officiated as the club's president. Later on, the club experienced financial difficulties and could not survive. The club lasted for about five or six years.

Henry even now expresses bitterness towards the Nadi district soccer power-brokers who failed to give Sweats SC any special consideration or financial or moral support during those times when it was on a downwards spiral but perhaps could have been saved. As at December 2015, there were no village-based (i.e. indigenous) clubs in the Nadi club competition (after the demise of Sweats and Tanoa). Henry feels that Sweats became too successful too quickly and that the Nadi Soccer Association was happy to see the club disappear:

Henry Dyer: In the sense of sporting fair play, Nadi Soccer Association also did not do much to help. If they were really happy about the [indigenous] Fijian guys forming a club they would have come to see us and worked out ways to help. They waited for us to drown. They did not offer us a hand to escape the deep water. They possibly thought that we were too good for the other clubs and so they began to work for the other clubs.

A more recent development was the Veterans' Tournament to raise money for the family of the late Ba champion Jone Nakosia (real name) held in 2012–13. This tournament was an ex-player initiative which involved five teams of veterans representing their districts-of-origin in a one-off tournament. It was arranged outside of the auspices of the Fiji FA and the Fiji FA was displeased at the players' initiative as it felt that the ex-players were stepping across a line into an area which should be its exclusive concern. Fiji FA has retained an effective monopoly on tournament organization since then:

Henry Dyer: All the former soccer players were very happy to play the game again and to give back to a friend. This tournament was held around 2012 or 2013. It went worldwide on the web. Then the former soccer players from Fiji overseas started calling us and asking Nadi Legends why they were not invited. We said that we did not have the funds to bring them over and another thing was that the tournament was organized at short notice. We just wanted to give something back to the Nakosia family in appreciation of his service to the game as a player. ... [But] Fiji Football felt that they had lost out on a marketing opportunity.

An analysis of power based on the ideas of Foucault is worth pursuing here. In these last two quotes, we see Henry and his colleagues struggling against an Indo-Fijian bureaucratic power structure not totally dissociated with feudal traditions given the role of patronage and religion in Indo-Fijian society. At the same time, there is the *petite-bourgeois* mentality of the small businessperson (the day jobs of most of these administrators) which helps explain these

interactions. Henry and his colleagues have, in many cases, positions of influence and respect within their indigenous communities, and their ex-soccer star status adds to their cultural capital. But they are powerless in dealing with the machinations of the Fiji soccer regulators, and powerless to find ways to effectively resist other than continue with their own discourses and practices. Sweats failed due to a lack of funding, and Henry sees this being used as an excuse to help the other clubs and cut Sweats adrift. Fiji Football was able to make its displeasure known to the ex-players over the grassroots and community-based Jone Nakosia Veterans' Tournament. It began to regard the ex-players as a rival power source to be feared and then controlled through the exercise of conventional hegemonic regulatory power. Ever since their junior playing days, players are used to being controlled and disciplined via benevolently paternal 'fatherly talks' and punishment practices for 'offenders' involved in drinking offences and other unapproved absences. Ex-players come to 'know' and respond to the language of disapproval.

As a follow-up to, and partial revival of, Sweats SC, ex-Nadi players have got together in recent years under the banner of Nadi Legends Club aka Nadi Legends Football Club (est. 2004). The Nadi Legends Club is a social and support group made up of the ex-Nadi district players of a certain generation, mostly the 1980s, since players from earlier eras are becoming thinner on the ground due to death and emigration. This group visits members who are sick or in need of special support and group meetings are photographed and promoted via 'The International Nadi Community' Facebook group. According to Henry:

Marika [Vuniyawayawa] was a veteran full-back for Nadi. He played many years before my playing career. We visited him two weeks before he passed away at his home. He had some kind of sickness in the throat and he could not speak well. However, at our appearance, he sat up just to meet us. He could hardly talk but he was talking with the fire from inside. This shows you how a veteran feels when he sees another colleague or mate coming to visit him in his time of need. As old friends, we told him to go and have his rest as we could see that he was struggling to talk to us.

The Nadi Legends Club represents Henry at the social segregation stage (Athens, 1995). Henry frequently reminds the other ex-players that Nadi Legends Club is something that they should pass on to the next generation. He says, with this firmly in mind, that the club should go beyond just being a social and support group to fielding a senior team in the Nadi club competition, following on in the footsteps of Sweats SC. This club has succeeded because Fiji Football was not concerned about it intruding into their areas because it was low-key, restricted to ex-players, was not organizing games, and was essentially just a social support and friendship network. Although run in indigenous style, Indo-Fijian ex-players and ex-administrators are also involved, but the indigenous have kept effective control. We also see, in Henry's quotes, an absence of corporate-style discourses, which the regulatory bodies have been moving towards, as well as maintaining an Indian folksy-style of leadership.

## 4.2 Application of Narrative Types

A third relevant framework is that of narrative types (Frank, 2013)—these narratives are the ones which a person believes in and applies to her or himself and/or to others. A very common narrative in Western culture is the *restitution* narrative (Frank, 1995 page 77; Sparkes & Smith, 2003 page 308; Sparkes, 2015 page 32; Sparkes & Stewart, 2019 page 465), which goes along the lines of a person being healthy, then sick or injured, and then healthy again, the person recovers and is ‘as good as new’; nothing of value is lost except the time and money invested in recuperation and recovery. Such a narrative often leads to unrealistic expectations and further disappointments (Charmaz, 1994; Shakespeare et al., 1996; Sparkes, 1996, 1998; Sparkes & Smith, 2002 page 271).

The *chaos* narrative (Sparkes & Smith, 2003 pages 310, 311), by contrast, assumes that things never get better; the stories are characterized by chaos and there is an absence of sequencing or causality.

Lastly, a *quest* narrative (*ibid.* page 312) involves facing the epiphany head on and using it as part of a journey which can be called a quest. As Sparkes and Smith (2003 page 312) explain, ‘[w]hat is quested for may never be wholly clear, but the quest is defined by the person’s belief that something is to be gained [including wisdom and friendships] from the experience of becoming, and being, disabled.’ As Seymour (2002 page 139) notes, ‘[b]y repossessing the past a person may abandon or rework an earlier life script: the “cleaned slate” may enable the person to reconstitute him or herself in a more purposeful manner.’ Therefore, within a *quest* narrative, a person may well accept and find meaning with reaching a *salvaged self* in those situations where a *restored self* is unattainable (Seymour, 2002; Sparkes & Smith, 2003 page 312).

We would argue that Henry’s narrative shows aspects of all three, but especially the last two. The *restitution* narrative would highlight his overcoming his disappointments to play a major role in Sweats SC, the Jone Nakosia Veterans’ Tournament, and Nadi Legends Club; as well as his important role as assistant village headman. However, this narrative is far from being a perfect fit as it is not true that, for Henry, ‘nothing of value is lost.’ By contrast, the *chaos* narrative is relevant to explain his continued frustration at his own poverty and lack of opportunities to coach at national-league level. After his retirement, his days and years of nothingness, living life as a subsistence farmer in the day and drinking at Nadi pubs at night (when he can afford it or someone else is buying), stretch on and generate a perpetual *future-in-the-present* (Roberts, 1999; Sparkes & Smith, 2003 page 311). There is a *cyclical* aspect to time too (Brockmeier, 2000; Sparkes & Smith, 2003 pages 297, 303), as Henry has little to look forward to other than the next indigenous or mainstream festival, soccer tournament, Christmas or Easter:

Henry Dyer: The league is not interesting. It is a formality or a process like in education where you progress through the grades. ... The national-league and the tournaments are just repeated over and over again. In Fiji soccer, *it is a normal daily routine equivalent to the sun rising and setting and rising again*. There is no passion there [authors’ italics].

Henry was in prison during the year of the coups (1987). The *quest* narrative well explains the story of the physical and mental punishment which Henry received from prison-officers and the relatively positive view he has about this, in hindsight, which suits a Christian-styled *quest* narrative of sin, suffering, repentance, absolution, and restoration. This type of narrative is a generally accepted *metanarrative* (Somers, 1994 page 619; Sparkes & Smith, 2002 pages 274–275) within indigenous Fijian Christian culture. As Varani-Norton (2005 page 243) explains, '[i]ndigenous Fijians generally acknowledge and celebrate the important role the church plays in community identity and solidarity.' Henry is still struggling to accept his *salvaged self*, and work within it while looking at ways to create a meaningful future for himself and for others. This struggle has not ceased, but his worst days, mentally and emotionally, are probably behind him (as with 'Max', the 46-year-old rugby player with spinal cord injury in Smith & Sparkes, 2005 page 1098).

### 4.3 The Disciplined Body Self

There is one other important term which we want to introduce here. First of all, according to Frank (1991), a *disciplined* body or *disciplined* body self (Sparkes & Smith, 2002 page 265, 2003 pages 305, 317), or *disciplined and dominating body* (Sparkes, 2015 page 32), becomes predictable due to its regimentation. As Frank (1991 page 55) writes, '[s]o long as the regimen is followed, the body can believe itself to be predictable; thus being predictable is both the medium and the outcome of the regimentation.' In other words, the body of the athlete is technically superior to the non-athlete's body and can perform remarkable feats.

Being in prison in the year of the coups was an interesting experience. Henry's burglaries were non-violent and non-political. Whilst in prison, his crimes were perceived as marginal, barely a footnote to history, and of little social or political relevance in the broader scheme of things (as compared to the history which was being made by the coup-makers and the resisters). Yet again, time and events were passing him by and rendering him obsolete in ironic, comedic fashion. A year of imprisonment, when he was 25-years-old and at a career peak, also stopped the momentum of his playing career:

Henry Dyer: I was imprisoned in 1987. This was the year of the coup. The prison was at times surrounded by soldiers with rifles pointing at the cells and the dormitories maybe because there were rumours of an outbreak to help in the takeover of the government or the military. I may be wrong but this is how I perceived it. We talked to each other in prison not to do anything stupid or we may be gunned down even though we might be innocent. We tried to keep away from any hostile talk about an uprising against the system.

One occasion when Henry's *disciplined* body self (Frank, 1991) was in operation was when he miraculously escaped over two high prison fences during the year of the coups. His escape was 'almost supernatural' (Sparkes & Stewart, 2019 page 462), and was widely admired at the time and after. Only Henry's physical fitness, connected to his soccer career, had allowed him to perform such an impressive

feat. This escape reaffirmed his *disciplined* body self, within his own mind and in the minds of people who became aware of his actions. Being apprehended by the authorities immediately, because a woman saw him heading for a sugar-cane field after his escape, adds a touch of black humour to the mix and this complements Henry's image as a charismatic, but woefully unlucky, character:

Henry Dyer: The wardens joked that when they caught me they did not see any cuts or bruises on me and my clothes were all in one piece and not torn. They said they could not imagine how I had got over the fences from Block 3. Even until today people who were in prison with me will say to me they still remember the picture of how I jumped. It was just like a movie in their minds.

Henry is not resentful of the beatings which he received from prison guards. (Another ex-player, Ronald Randall (name changed), told the author on 1 August 2019 that the prison guards broke Henry's leg but Henry declares this rumour false.) For Henry, the beatings were the revenge of bitter non-sporting authorities but they were laced with admiration for him, as well, or at least Henry chooses to view them this way. His humble acceptance of the beatings, in recent years, appeals to an indigenuous Fijian audience which respects all governing authorities in line with Church teachings. He states that to accept the beatings and not to harbour 'grudges', or a sense of moral outrage, was the 'manly' approach:

Henry Dyer: After this had happened the wardens had pity on me because they had beaten me up and we became friends. I did not take the beating up as a grudge against the wardens. I took it as a man and I accepted it. It was because I escaped and life goes on. I bided my time and got out of prison with the advice of senior wardens who taught me what life is really all about.

Coffey and Atkinson (1996 page 77) state that 'storytelling is culturally situated and relies for its success on culturally shared conventions about language and the hearing of stories'. In Henry's case, he has access to European, 'part-European', and indigenous Fijian traditions which adds to the richness and variety of his narrative accounts.

#### 4.4 Consequences and Tellability

Sparkes (2015 page 31), following Frank (2010), explains how narratives take on a life of their own, thus effectively becoming social 'actors' with their own 'inherent morality'. They can cause real trouble and real consequences for people including the storyteller. This also relates to the concept of 'tellability' (Norricks, 2005; Smith & Sparkes, 2005, 2011; Sparkes, 2015 page 38), where *chaos* narratives are on the 'upper-bounding side' (Smith & Sparkes, 2011 page39) between 'tellable' stories and stories which are so shocking and unpleasant that nobody wants to hear. Some people, especially elite and middle-class Indo-Fijians, find Henry and his narrative distressing and hence they avoid him. His clothing, lifestyle, poverty, and 'village ways' 'speak loudly' and some people perceive they might need to buy him all his beers if conversations get prolonged. Others might strongly disagree with his

narrative of Indo-Fijian discrimination within soccer. Even Henry's life-long friend and confidante, Billy P. Sharma, was obviously distressed to hear Henry and I raise the 'discrimination theory' with him as we walked into our favourite Nadi restaurant for lunch one day in 2014–15. Henry went quiet, his face downcast, and tone apologetic as he said 'it is the truth, Billy, you just don't know' as he followed us both to our seats. (He avoided eye-contact with Billy due to the timing of the delivery and this was probably intentional on his part.) As Gubrium and Holstein (2009 page 32) write: '[t]he appearances [and locations] of people's bodies, the location of rooms and objects such as doors and furniture, and lighting can ... [facilitate] particular kinds of storytelling.'

#### 4.5 Fiji Masculinity

It is worthwhile looking here at what narratives of masculinity operate in Fiji among the indigenous Fijians. Henry talks about boys from the remote Yasawa islands who attended Ba Provincial Secondary School with him—they were perceived to have a purer, more innocent version of Fijian lifestyle than the 'town-boys':

The students from the Yasawas were very cheerful and they had a traditional [indigenous] Fijian style at school. You could tell from how they talked with other students including the jokes, taunts, and gossip. ... There was this vice-principal, [Master Epeli] [name changed]. He was from Yasawa and he was a very strict guy. He was very strict because he did not want the relaxed culture of the Yasawa Islands to spoil the Yasawa children's education. The Yasawa boys wanted friends and we also wanted their friendship because they were good ukulele players and good singers.

Despite influence from other ethnic-groups and the internet, the indigenous Fijian culture remains relatively intact and uniform with clear and well-established gender roles. For the men, the warrior culture has been embodied, in modern times, in the culture of the rugby player. This masculine culture is strongly evident in the police and the military (Teaiwa, 2005)—these two organizations, and especially the latter, have remained very much indigenous bastions (Sugden et al., 2019 page 279; *ibid.* pages 209–210), relying upon an indigenous version of masculinity. Douglas (2003) writes that Western feminists have had a hard time in attracting adherents among indigenous Melanesian women who identify more with race than gender. Although Varani-Norton (2005 page 241) is sceptical, Douglas (2003) suggests that Church-based women's groups will provide a more effective and suitable type of 'Melanesian feminism' than their Western secular counterparts. Indigenous Fijian women do not, in fact, regard themselves as being in conflict with indigenous Fijian men (Turner, 2005 page 387; Varani-Norton, 2005 page 242). Instead they have compassion for them as they have 'lost so much' (Turner, 2005 page 387) since the coming of colonialism (*ibid.* pages 382, 387). Henry explains further how Fijian masculinity works:

When the indigenous Fijians get together, that creates its own new and different reality. Even the people who lived with us every day [i.e. non-indige-



nous people] would not know what was happening. When the day is over the damage is done. This is to show that Fijians (indigenous Fijians) are always intact. If there is a big game, such as Farebrother's Rugby Challenge from two *vanuas* (from different provinces, say Nadi and Naitasiri) (a *vanua* means that there is only one paramount chief in that area) the emotion gets intensified and they could kill each other in the nightclub after the game. However, after this has happened, because of the links of our ancestors (the first Fijians), we both declare that we were wrong and that the violence should not have happened. We accept our oneness and unity. This is what the Fiji military force is all about.

We see, in the above quote, the statement that non-indigenous Fijians may often not recognize secret and subtle understandings among the indigenous people so that actions and meanings remain partly hidden or ambiguous. Henry rejoices in this indigenous power, as do the other interviewed indigenous ex-players, as it is their only available counterbalance to the regulatory power exercised by the mostly Indo-Fijian soccer administrators. In an interview, ex-Ba and Fiji player, Semi Tabaiwalu teases Henry by saying that the Nadi area indigenous gods were behind Nadi's early-1980s title wins. Both rejoiced in this hypothesis as it excludes Indo-Fijians from the discourse and is also a naughty dig at hardcore indigenous Christians who reject the idea of such gods or would label them as demons. In another case, Henry claims that the indigenous Ba players agreed to 'gift' the indigenous Nadi players two 'free' goals so that Nadi could win the title over Lautoka one year in the early-1980s. He says that the non-indigenous players were shut off from these understandings. We observe clashes, in these instances, between the largely incompatible indigenous and Indo-Fijian power domains, with their different sets of hierarchies, discourses, and practices.

As a Solomon Islands woman, Pollard (2000 pages 4, 6) aims to replace the dominant 'ideology of female subordination to men', in the Pacific Islands, with another concept, 'the parallel female conception of their centrality.' She makes the following interesting statement which has been subject to unpacking by later commentators, both women and men:

Paradoxically, the women do not actually see their role in society as degrading. Instead, a Solomon Islands woman is proud of herself and her supportive role; she knows that the success of husbands – as of men in general – is simply a reflection of the success of their wives, and of women in general.

Even though Bronwen Douglas (2003 page 10) worries about the hegemonic aspects of these pronouncements, she asserts that they must be taken seriously because they are so widely held in the Melanesia region of the Pacific. Furthermore, she says, '[t]o ignore or dismiss these expressions as simply hegemony or mystification is ethnocentric and arrogant.' To ignore or dismiss such comments, she argues, would be to 'collude with indigenous men in demeaning entire domains of actual female expertise, decision-making, and (largely unpaid) action which underpin the economic and moral existence of families, communities, and ultimately nations' (Douglas, 2003 page 10). Henry's wife, Liku (now deceased), was a major source



of encouragement and practical and moral support for him both during and after his soccer career. He credits her for keeping family and home together and notes that, after she died several years ago, around 2017–19, their adult children all drifted away:

Henry Dyer: My wife comes from a very religious family. ... I always respect my wife for being polite and humble and for being able to look after our family in the good and hard times. She has a reputation of being able to give me good advice when I am feeling down or confused.

The *hegemonic masculinity* theory of Connell (1995) has been updated through the Inclusive Masculinity Theory (IMT) of Anderson (2009) and Anderson and McCormack (2018). According to the IMT, the youngest generation of men now place a stigma upon homophobia rather than homosexuality (Cleland, 2018 page 414). They often form masculinities which are more inclusive towards women and LGBT persons, accept LGBT persons into their friendship circles, despise bullying, and permit the displays of behaviours and lifestyles once thought feminine or unmanly. Those who still act out the old ways are termed ‘orthodox masculinity’ or ‘more conservative’ masculinity (Adams & Kavanagh, 2018, pages 315, 318). Some mid-teen English academy players interviewed by Adams and Kavanagh (2018) expressed inclusive attitudes towards gay peers, but in the presence of homophobic attitudes tended to stay passive, creating a ‘balancing act of masculinities’ (319). Supporting the IMT hypothesis of a general movement towards inclusive masculinities, Magrath (2021) found that 31 out of the 35 ‘out’ gay football fans he interviewed believe that English football has become increasingly acceptant of gay men in recent years; whilst 26 out of 35 felt safe attending matches and believe that previous feelings of being intimidated have declined. Cashmore and Cleland (2012) surveyed 3,500 fans from 35 different countries and found that 93 percent of respondents reject homophobia and support players who ‘come out’. Some change has surely occurred in Fiji too because of frequent contact with tourists and via the internet. Interestingly, Wellard (2009) refers to an ‘expected sporting masculinity’ at the straight and gay British tennis clubs where he did his fieldwork. For him, this is a situation where gay and straight sportsmen act in the same way—to project a tough and competitive outward form of masculinity which avoids any sign of effeminacy. If we want to try to reconcile Wellard with Anderson, the following quote seems illuminating: ‘Clubs can support participation, however they can also actively restrict participation through inequity and discrimination [and an overly competitive atmosphere]’ (Bevan et al., 2020 page 2). The situation in Fiji is complex, on the ground, as versions of *hegemonic masculinity* remain in place<sup>6</sup> (two primary ones are the indigenous Fijian and the Indo-Fijian), but effeminate gay men and trans people exist on the margins. They have their own hangout spot—a basketball court at a Nadi high-school—and they have a place within the indigenous nightclub scene. Notably, many gays and non-gays alike view campness as a key aspect and symbol

<sup>6</sup> Regarding the idea that there can be ‘competing masculinities, many of which become (temporarily) hegemonic in specific local contexts’ see Wellard (2009 pages 38–39).

of gayness. Gayness is thus viewed as an identity and as an aesthetic so the idea of sex per se does not have to protrude into the public's imagination.

## 5 Conclusion

As at August 2019 Henry served as assistant headman at Nakavu Village and lived a life of subsistence farming, village council meetings, night-time *kava* and drinking sessions, and practical poverty. He went on regular fundraising activities, on behalf of his village, and, ironically, usually received higher donations than anyone else because of his soccer-legend status (and, perhaps, he also benefitted from collective guilt that an ex-star player lived in such difficult conditions.) He had arrived at a *salvaged self*, after much anguish.

In terms of contribution and relevance, this study explores the lives and trials of ex-star soccer players in the Fiji Islands of mostly indigenous Fijian and part-European descent, within a postcolonial context, in a poorer, multiracial country with two main ethnic groups. We believe that we have given a voice to a marginalized and alienated group of stakeholders within Fiji soccer and society, with a special focus on Henry Dyer's story. Using Foucault's approach to power, we observe how the ex-players have minimal ability to oppose the hegemonic power exerted by the football regulatory bodies, but they still try to resist in their own ways. Examples include the village-based Sweats SC and the ex-player-organized Jone Nakosia Veterans' Tournament. On a personal level, Henry's escape from prison shows his willingness to resist the governmental authorities although later he co-operates and responds by adopting a Christian-influenced *quest* narrative of personal growth, repentance, and redemption. Because most prison officers are indigenous Fijians, this attitude still fits in with indigenous masculinity notions and power structures based on traditional hierarchies.

We can't really deny that the study's findings will be mostly relevant to Europeans as Fiji was a British colony until 1970 and the English language remains the language of business and the means of communication between ethnic groups. The British and Australian cultural and economic influences remain extremely important and influential in the Fiji of today. However, the Indo-Fijian 'control' of the sport of soccer is an undeniable force to be reckoned with and the Indo-Fijian influence on Fiji life has also been writ large and overwhelmingly positive. The data highlights the balance between the ethnic groups, in terms of separate power structures ruled ultimately within the soccer sphere by the Indo-Fijians. Poverty limits opportunities for meaningful engagement with the sport for many ex-players who often cannot afford match admission tickets or travel to games. Along with emigration of referees, players and administrators to Western countries, this adds an aspect of sadness to the sport of soccer, which is now living on past glories in the shadow of rugby.

One implication of the study for Fiji and elsewhere is the urgent need to financially support and integrate ex-players into social networks. Indigenous networks of ex-players exist in the Nadi area, but this is unlikely to be exactly replicated in other districts. Financial support for medical and living costs should be a priority area, and governments and the football regulatory bodies should recognize that they have

some responsibility in this regard. (Despite this assertion, governments with limited resources should not necessarily prioritize sportspersons over nonsportspersons.) In Fiji, schools and universities should be flexible in offering students a joint pathway to success in both sporting and academic aspects. Ex-players could be brought into schools as coaches and physical education teachers. Although not always possible for every ex-player, media opportunities and coaching roles with association and club teams should be opened up, and companies should consider advertising campaigns featuring ex-stars. We also suggest that Western countries and other richer countries, with interests in the region, should find ways to recruit, reward, and train young aspiring players and skilled managers. In fact, rugby has made major inroads with its various East Asian (Japanese) connections and soccer has fallen far behind.

The intersections of race, class, and cultural hegemony in Fiji Soccer and society are well illustrated by a final example. Lautoka was struggling in the first-half of the 2015 BOG Final at the National Stadium against Rewa. At half-time Henry and I entered the Lautoka dressing-room. Henry first greeted the Indo-Fijian Lautoka manager who was addressing his charges. The manager gave Henry a sharp greeting, accompanied by a glare, to indicate that he didn't really appreciate Henry's presence but, as a former Lautoka star, he did not really want to ask him to leave either. Henry spotted an indigenous Fijian player sitting by himself, in an adjoining room, looking terribly depressed. He had either been sent off for rough-play or taken off by the manager (I can't recall which but I don't think it matters here). With a short pep-talk, in the Fijian language, Henry encouraged and inspired this player who was looking much less depressed after Henry's one-on-one intervention.

## Declarations

**Conflict of Interest** On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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