SCIREA Journal of Sociology
ISSN: 2994-9343
http://www.scirea.org/journal/Sociology
October 30, 2023
Volume 7, Issue 6, December 2023
https://doi.org/10.54647/sociology841206

Alcohol and National-league Soccer Players: A Fiji Islands Oral History, 1975-2015

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Abstract

The subject of this article is the role of alcohol in elite amateur soccer in the Fiji Islands covering the period 1975-2015. Based on interviews with six ex-Premier League players from the 1980s, and participant-observation as a friend and confidante of one ex-star (Henry Dyer), we conclude that alcohol was used as a comforter, bonding mechanism/social lubricant, form of currency, recreational drug, tool of tribute, tool of rebellion, and source of temptation. Alcohol-related events reveal the wealth disparity and income-inequality between the Fiji Indian businessmen, who manage, control and sponsor the sport, and the mostly very poor players (both Indigenous and Fiji Indian) who require payment and organization from powerful (sometimes remote) others in order to be able to go on overseas playing trips. The players resent this inequality, and find ways to assert their independence, but in a way which also maximizes the enjoyment factor and creates long-lasting memories, which can be later recalled at will as the years go by.

Keywords: *alcohol*; *Fiji Islands*; *Fiji soccer*; *Fiji Indians*; *race and class*; *sociology of soccer*; *sociology of sport*

Introduction

The subject of this article is the role of alcohol in elite amateur soccer in the Fiji Islands covering the period 1975-2015. Monsell-Davis (1986) found that alcohol consumption was a vital part of maintaining a masculine identity among unemployed youths in Suva, Fiji's capital, and was also a way of dealing with negative self-image. Vakaoti (2018, p. 104) reported that young unemployed men in Suva 'often consented to homosexual affairs with gay men in exchange for money and alcohol'. In this context, alcohol is both a form of currency and a source of temptation. Based on interviews with six ex-Premier League players from the 1980s, and participant-observation as a friend and confidante of one ex-star (Henry Dyer), we conclude that, within soccer, alcohol was used as a comforter, bonding mechanism/social lubricant, form of currency, recreational drug, tool of tribute, tool of rebellion, and source of temptation.

Alcohol is also a cause of contemporary problems as Henry has been banned from drinking in several Nadi pubs and friction has developed in his relationship with an ex-teammate and Nadi Club president due to the ban and Henry's continued efforts to overturn it. As the elite game was effectively amateur in the 1980s, players were often paid in beer cartons, rather than in cash, which furthered alcohol dependency and allowed the team management to fill a benevolently paternal role, consistent with Marx and Engels' (1994, p. 161) understanding of feudalism as 'feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations'. Being a form of currency saw alcohol take on even higher value within the player community. During Ba's six-in-a-row Inter-district Championship (IDC) (domestic) title years, from 1975-80, there were continual drinking parties held at the Ba River which could go on for days. Similarly, Edwin Jones (2009, p. 60) reports on lengthy parties of extended and extensive drinking during his ethnographic fieldwork at Qauia Village, near Lami town, just west of Suva. Sadly, one Ba and Fiji champion, Josaia 'Joe' Tubuna, was killed in a motor-vehicle accident, in August 1984, on the way back from a nurses' dance in the neighbouring town of Tavua. Drink-driving may well have been involved, and drinking certainly was. However, the drinking culture carried on regardless. At my six interviews with ex-players, I (first-author) 'paid' for their time in the old currency of beer and wine (this was both expected and a requirement because they were giving up their time and putting in the effort).

In this article, we use the oral history method and take selected passages from a proposed memoir book, written jointly by the authors and the ex-Nadi, Lautoka and Fiji star Henry Dyer. These extracts show the complex role of alcohol in building bonds in what was still a

traditional and feudal village-based lifestyle, within a semi-capitalist Fiji Indian dominated economic system.[1] Alcohol is also used as a source of temptation (see the Labasa match where the Labasa home fans tried to trick the visiting Nadi players into drinking too much on the eve of the game); and as a symbol of rebellion against regimentation and control by team managers on overseas national-team tours. The curfew-breaking drinking session at the 1983 South Pacific Games in Samoa (hereafter SPG) was also a subconscious act of resistance against a system of inequality (Jones, 2009, p. 88) whereby Indigenous Fijian villagers and Fiji Indian working-class players can only get to go overseas during their playing careers and not afterwards. Hence, drinking is an investment in themselves, so that the memories of as drinking session can be recalled at length, years later, when the ex-players gather together to reminisce. Alcohol-related events reveal the wealth disparity and income-inequality between the Fiji Indian businessmen, who manage, control and sponsor the sport, and the mostly very poor players (both Indigenous and Fiji Indian) who require payment and organization from powerful (sometimes remote) others in order to be able to go overseas. The players resent this inequality (Jones, 2009, p. 88), and find ways to assert their independence, but in a way which also maximizes the enjoyment factor and creates long-lasting memories, which can be later recalled at will when they meet.

Literature Review

Puamau, Roberts, Schmich, and Power (2011) report and summarize the results of two surveys about drug and alcohol use among youth in Fiji. A 1999 UNICEF survey found that alcohol was widely consumed, with two out of five (40.3%) of young people (13-15-years) having tasted it, compared to 32.3% for tobacco, 51.9% for kava, and 12.8% for marijuana. The percentage of current drinkers was 26% for men, but only 9% for women. Three out of five young people reported binge drinking of five or more alcohol drinks in one sitting. This is the type of drinking behaviour our ex-soccer players frequently engaged in during their playing days. By the time of a 2004 survey by National Substance Abuse Advisory Council (NSAAC) (sample size = 2,147 secondary students), the percentages had risen dramatically to 43% for tobacco, 51% for alcohol, 61% for *kava*, and 13% for marijuana. The desire for 'washdown' (beer drinking after a kava-drinking session) partly accounts for the alcohol consumption (Plange, 1991; Presterudstuen, 2020, p. 97; Puamau, Roberts, Schmich, &

[1] Fiji Indians refers to Fijians of South Asian descent.

Power, 2011, p. 169; Rokosawa, 1986; Toren, 1994, p. 160). While women drink alcohol in nightclub and social settings, they rarely participate in street- or public-drinking sessions not connected with a specific occasion (Puamau, Roberts, Schmich, & Power, 2011, p. 166). Men are more likely to binge drink at these sessions. These authors (ibid., p. 168) suggest that, at least back then, obtaining alcohol from shops was not hard for minors, and so drinking at an early age was facilitated, and drinking habits and addictions developed young (see also Adinkrah, 1995).

Anecdotal evidence in Fiji suggests that excessive alcohol use is linked to motor vehicle accident rates, violence and aggressive behaviour, unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, and criminal activities (Abusah, 1991, pp. 21-25; Kippax, 1986, pp. 24-28; Naiveli, 1986, pp. 34-35; Plange, 1991; Puamau, Roberts, Schmich, & Power, 2011, p. 169; World Health Organization, 2004). One motive for youth drinking is to 'manage their problems' (Puamau, Roberts, Schmich, & Power, 2011, p. 169), but other problems may emerge such as unsafe sex, crime and violence, and occasionally suicide (Casswell, 1986, p. 25; Kippax, 1986; Naiveli, 1986, pp. 34-35; Rokosawa, 1986). Alcohol was a contributor to 58% of all homicides from 1982-92 (Adinkrah, 1995, 1996); and approximately 80% of crime in the island nation is purported to be alcohol-related (Adinkrah, 1996; Puamau, Roberts, Schmich, & Power, 2011, p. 169; World Health Organization, 2004). Heavy alcohol use is associated with diabetes, heart problems, obesity, and hypertension (Adinkrah, 1995, 1996; Casswell, 1986; Gounder, 2006; Moulds & Malani, 2003; Puamau, Roberts, Schmich, & Power, 2011, p. 170). Social consequences include, but are not limited to, violent crime, domestic violence, and road fatalities (Adinkrah, 2003; Puamau, Roberts, Schmich, & Power, 2011, p. 170; Ratinisiva, 1991).

Jones (2009), referred to earlier, studied alcohol use among Indigenous Fijians via ethnographic fieldwork at Qauia Village, near Lami town, and at Suva nightclubs. His findings are paradoxical and contradictory, but nonetheless accurate, in that he found that beer-drinking sessions mirrored and replicated the formality and ritual of kava-drinking. For example, the usual long-neck bottle of beer was served ('*taki*') via one small glass (*bilo*), to one person after another, in a circle, with the most senior man usually being served first. On occasion, the glass would be passed around rather than always being returned to the server, and the exact order of drinking would depend on spatial considerations. However, beer-drinking also allowed people to break the extreme rigidity and formality of the kava ritual since beer-drinking was associated with modernity and capitalism, the 'town' rather than the

'village' (spatially and sociologically). Beer-drinking remained largely communal and homosocial, as with kava-drinking, but it opened up new space for economic capital to take on symbolic capital because the person paying for the beer was usually served first or second. Therefore, a financially better-off person could claim temporary higher status through purchases of beer for the group, but this was never possible with kava-drinking where traditional hierarchies were promulgated and reinforced through practice. More unruly and antisocial masculine practices were associated with or pardoned by alcohol consumption especially in Suva's Indigenous Fijian nightclubs remote from village control. This is due to the physiological effects of alcohol plus people changing their behaviour separately of these effects, but using these effects as a cover for or as a justification for more unrestrained conduct, such as fighting, arguments about personal or family issues, and pursuit of women, which are a part of hegemonic masculinity within these settings.

These findings were explained by Jones (2009, p. 86) in terms of Bourdieu's sociological contributions. For forms of capital to be valuable in a field, they must be used in conjunction with different forms of *habitus*, 'including one's body language, corporeal style and general etiquette'. In the crowded, noisy, male-dominated space of a Suva nightclub, it is physical capital (use of the body to control physical spaces and charm women) which is paramount in exercising masculinity. The regular *habitus* of a Fiji village changes to fit the nightclub context. The value of physical capital rises compared to that of economic or symbolic capital.

The on-field riot during the 1983 SPG final between Fiji and Tahiti can be explained in terms of *compensatory* or *protest* masculinities (Jones, 2009, p. 14) - in places where men find it difficult to 'prove their masculinity through the normal channels' (ibid., p. 14), violence can be viewed as functional and beneficial for those taking part. Up against suspect referees from the French-speaking nations, and being in a foreign country where Fiji hierarchies did not exist, could have created anxieties about masculinities which led to a riot to settle issues.

Tomlinson (2004a) puts forward a unique and controversial theory that kava-consumption is used as the literal backdrop for narratives of historical decline in Fiji so that kava-drinking becomes an embodied ritual which both mourns and documents this decline (Guinness, 2018, p. 320). Following Urban (1996), intelligibility and palpability are both present and active in terms of understanding and perceived historical decline during the kava-drinking ritual. Kava-drinking is portrayed as more common than in past times, as potentially connected to witchcraft, and having an ambiguous and strained relationship with the various branches of Christianity (Ravuvu, 1987, p. 25; Tomlinson, 2004b). The giving of the bowl to people in

declining order of their importance reaffirms hierarchy, but, more controversially, can be seen as mirroring and actually acting out decline. In relation to Fiji Indians, Tomlinson (2004a, p. 655) asserts that '[m]uch of the discourse of decline and loss that one hears expressed by Indigenous Fijians can be interpreted as attempts to come to terms with the presence of Fiji Indians in the life of the nation'. Tomlinson says then that the perception of decline and eternal lament sometimes leads to political action against Fiji Indians, such as in the 1987 and 2000 coups. Tomlinson's citation of the 1987 and 2000 coups are consistent with the inter-ethnic basis of these events. The concept of the acting out of lament about historical decline, via the kava-drinking ritual, which Tomlinson says occurred as early as 1883, still seems a powerful *felt* reality in Fiji, which can't be discounted or denied.

The fact that alcohol usually accompanies the end of kava-drinking, especially for young men (washdown), takes this acting out of decline, as described by Tomlinson (2004a), further still because of the perceived negative effects alcohol creates (Toren, 1994, p. 164), plus the argument that it is a response to a lack of social power. These observations are interesting, but, in our data, when alcohol was consumed by star players, it was seen as, in one case, being both a response to a temptation offered by opposing fans and a response to their respect, and, in the second case, rebellion against Fiji Indian team management and a desire to create a memory which would outlast the trip and later contribute to social bonding. The reference to the Fiji Indian management seems to gel with Tomlinson's (2004a, p. 655) assertion that '[m]uch of the discourse of decline and loss that one hears expressed by Indigenous Fijians can be interpreted as attempts to come to terms with the presence of Fiji Indians in the life of the nation'. The soccer players have seen themselves as objects to be used and then discarded. In this sense, alcohol can be viewed as a way to fight perceived decline, as well as reproduce or mirror it, consistent perhaps with Tomlinson's idea that the kava-ritual's performance of decline can spur political action to redress it. However, the notion of Tomlinson that political action is always against Fiji Indians seems dated, since the 2006 coup has divided the Indigenous community, with some supporting Bainimarama's concept of multiracialism and others opposing it.

Pigliasco (2010) studied the firewalking tradition (*vilavilairevo*) of Beqa Island, which was later commodified for tourism revenue, but remained under the traditional custodianship of the Sawau tribe as guardians of the ritual. The author points to its origins when an ancestral spirit allegedly gave the tradition to the tribe in perpetuity in exchange for his life. Within the three meanings of gift in Fijian language, this should be viewed as a gift coming under the

classification of gift as grant or permit. We should avoid, Pigliasco warns, opposing gift and commodity as absolute opposites; instead, we have a *sui generis*, inalienable commodity acquired via divine or spiritual origins. The ritual has become safer, since a tour of India in 1972, when the leader, Semi Raikadra, slipped out of consciousness - he passed it on in a form which was gradually modified, simplified, shortened, made safer, but one which kept its essence and popularity. More generally, in the Fiji village, property is a social relation between people, rather than a relation between people and things - it involves the performance of kinship obligations within a context which is primarily social, not economic.

Research Questions

This article attempts to address and answer the following research questions:

RQ1 - What are the roles and functions of alcohol among former elite Fiji soccer players?

RQ2 - To what extent does beer-drinking mirror, replicate, reproduce and subvert the hierarchical and organized focus of the kava-drinking ritual?

RQ3 - To what extent does beer-drinking reflect an acting out of decline?

RQ4 - To what extent does beer-drinking represent a cultural gift from older players to younger players whereby custodianship is passed on?

Research Approach

Introduction to Oral History

This article uses an oral history approach, combined with symbolic interactionism. Positive aspects of oral history are the illumination of the lived experiences of ordinary women and men within the context of a turn to 'history from below' (Cowman, 2016, p. 94). These men and women were usually excluded from the official record, under earlier approaches to history, as their lives were not deemed significant enough and/or they left few written documents behind. Samuel Hynes (1998, pp. xii, 30), a war historian, said that 'if we would understand what war is like, and how it *feels*, we must … seek the reality in the personal witness of the men who were there'. This seems to be a strong argument. In this study, we talk to ex-players from Fiji's Premier League who in one sense are famous persons, under traditional criteria, while, in another sense, their present-day poverty means that they remain

marginalized voices within the overall setting of Fiji and even more so when the global context is considered. At three of our interviews, wives were present (interviews were conducted at the ex-players' homes) and they participated spontaneously in the interviews. Of course, we encouraged this and recorded their words. By focusing on six ex-players who played in the 1975-95 era, and with a specific focus within that on Henry Dyer, we are writing history from a single narrative and hence, following Thomson (2016, p. 118), we 'treat it as a "telling case" which illuminates lived experience in a particular historical context and suggests questions or hypotheses for future research'.

Symbolic Interactionism and Interpretive Biography

We also utilize a narrative history approach, based on symbolic interactionism and the interpretive biography of Norman Denzin. This approach is somewhat different, as it encourages the researcher to talk and not only listen (Denzin, 1989, p. 43), whereas the usual oral history approach would encourage silence, other than to clarify content which has already been communicated (Brown, 2012, p. 57). Probably a mix of these approaches would work best, with relative silence during an interview matched by a genuine two-way conversation and exchange of views during the social interaction which occurs before, after, and on different occasions from, the formal interviews. In the Global South context of Fiji, this social interaction is at least of equal importance to formal interviews and the latter would be difficult if not impossible to achieve without the former.

Data Collection Method

I met Henry every Thursday afternoon, with my University's permission, at various Nadi Town centre venues, with the express purpose of helping him write his memoirs. Each afternoon session, of about three hours, was devoted to one chapter or part-chapter of the proposed book. It was agreed that I could also use the content in future journal articles on the broad topic of Fiji soccer. The first session took place on 1 May 2014 and the last took place on 23 April 2015. We had twenty separate sessions so the total interview time was approximately sixty hours. Through trial-and-error, we developed an effective working style whereby Henry would talk and I would usually only speak to ask questions to clarify certain points or to encourage him to pursue a point. Sometimes, but not too frequently, I would share a story or an anecdote, which seemed relevant to me, sometimes from Australian or European sport. I did not write these down in my notebooks so as to preserve Henry's flow. Our usual pattern of working was for me to repeat a proposed sentence back to Henry, word-for-word, so that he could agree to it or modify it. Sometimes we would jointly decide upon a sentence

or two in order to express particular important ideas or beliefs, especially where the content was viewed as sensitive or controversial. In such cases, I would check again whether Henry wanted to include the content in the project.

The Relationship between Researcher and Researched

Valerie Yow (1997) clarified that the relationship between interviewee and interviewer is crucial to determining how the story is remembered and told. Like any conversation, people tend to recount events and do it in a style which they think will impact on and resonate with the hearer. The storytelling will also be influenced by the narrator's style, her/his expectations from the research, and the relationship between interviewee and interviewer (Thomson, 2016, p. 110). This relationship also changes and usually deepens over time, and this was true for my twenty interviews with Henry, which took place over a one-year period and were interspersed with regular social meetings. Thomson (2006, p. 111) writes that: 'Less obviously, each participant perceives and imagines the other in certain terms, and these expectations can affect both questions and answers'. In our case, the unique temporal situations of both persons deeply impacted upon the narratives and stories produced. I was a white Australian expatriate lecturer in Fiji wanting to learn more about Indigenous culture and Fiji soccer history. Partly I wanted to acclimatize and settle in to Fiji life and feel like less of an outsider. I had been living in Fiji and watching Fiji soccer matches for a year before meeting Henry - I wanted him to fill in blanks within my own understanding in both the areas mentioned.

This study proceeds as a mixture of individual and collective biography, as defined by Krista Cowman (2016). The bulk of the content comes from the mouth of the ex-Nadi, Lautoka, and Fiji champion Henry Dyer, and so describes mostly his own personal experiences. However, we also interviewed five other ex-players, all of whom were from the same generation of Western Fiji-based Premier League stars. Five out of these six were Indigenous Fijians, while one was a working-class Fiji Indian. One player, in addition to Henry, played for Nadi in the national-league, whilst the others played for Ba. They experienced many things together, including being part of the emotional and intense Ba-versus-Nadi rivalry, whilst simultaneously being coworkers in the Fiji team and co-travellers with the Fiji team overseas (to Samoa in 1983 and New Zealand in 1985). All players experienced alienation and frustration in relating to the management and administrators of the association teams, and all have experienced poverty. The Indigenous players experienced strong bonds, which still connect them today, to each other and to the traditional hierarchies and protocols of village

life under the chiefly system. In fact, Ba's Semi Tabaiwalu said that he did not want to emigrate to New Zealand as he would miss the Fiji lifestyle of being able to drop in and stay for dinner or the night at people's homes. Several of the ex-Ba players were originally from Nadroga province, which is not far from Nadi Town, which validates the idea of many aspects of life being a shared experience for our six ex-players. The remaining five interviews will be drawn upon in the Discussion section to reinforce or extend certain points made by Henry, and the 'collective biography' approach best sums up the method adopted, since the five ex-players' experiences and that of Henry reveal and represent problems and worldviews common to many of his generation of ex-players. They also reflect and capture the relationship between soccer and the broader society, and how power relationships in one mirror and influence the power relations in the other. Coming to terms with being forgotten by the media and the younger generation of soccer fans is also a key feature of the experiences of our six ex-players. Collective biography has been often used to highlight the situation of marginalized peoples in feminist history and social history (ibid., p. 99). Our ex-players are marginalized because of two aspects: Fiji is part of the Global South (its GDP *per capita* is 10% of Australia's) and soccer is now overshadowed in the public's imagination by rugby due to the continued successes experienced by Fiji's 7s team.

Oral History - by Henry Dyer (Nadi, Lautoka and Fiji midfielder)

Playing Away in Labasa (Fiji Domestic Soccer)

Playing in Labasa was always something to look forward to. It was good to get out of Viti Levu [main island of Fiji] and go and set foot on the Vanua Levu [second island] soil. It had been my dream from childhood onwards to get to Vanua Levu as if it was New Zealand or Australia. So going there to play for the district at national-league level showed that you had gained what you had set out to achieve in life and in soccer. Any team from Viti Levu would have this same kind of relaxed attitude. The same applies vice-versa when Labasa comes to Viti Levu.

I can't remember which exact year. However, I think this match was in the late-1980s or early-1990s. On the eve of the match against Labasa we were going for a walk from the house we were staying down to the town-centre. This was about a ten-minute walk. Meeting people from Labasa, walking the streets we had not walked before, and listening to the Vanua Levu dialect was interesting and joyful for us to experience. This would have been about my tenth

time to play in Labasa. While walking the streets of Labasa some of the Labasa supporters noticed some of our senior players (such as Rusiate Waqa and Savenaca Taga) and invited them out for the night to show them around. The players wanted to go out for the night with the Labasa supporters. However, we were hesitant when we thought of the game on the next day so we were double-minded. A deal was stuck that we could not go out with them but they could buy us some beers for us to drink outside our camp. However, we did not realize that these supporters and officials wanted us to get drunk and to be incapable and out-of-form on the next day. We were thankful that the Labasa supporters came to visit us in the Vanua Levu custom and spirit. They wanted to warmly welcome us as the visitors but possibly they had two purposes. We cannot say that they wanted to get us drunk as it was a welcome. The responsibility was on us to think carefully and be smart. As the hours rolled on, during the night until the early hours of the morning, we had consumed around four or five cartons of beer. There was only around seven of us. It was not the whole team but I was there.

Our coach, Mani Naicker, was the national coach. He gathered his luggage and told the captain that he [would have] nothing to do with the team now and that everything to do with the team from then until the game at 1.00 p.m. the next day was totally out of his hands and not his responsibility. However, Mani came in a professional manner and spoke in a professional manner to the boys. He realized that nothing could be done now and only the players could redeem the situation out on the field. The boys felt for the coach because of how he faced the situation and how he talked to the boys. He did not panic or show anger. He kept all of his emotions to himself in a professional manner.

We had some food before going to sleep in the early hours of the morning. At about 11.30 a.m. the next morning we were awoken to have breakfast and shower to freshen up. When we woke up to have breakfast and shower we realized that everything was like a bad dream, which had now disappeared only to be replaced by reality. After freshening up, I realized that I had made a major mistake and it would not be easy to overcome. I was not sure how the other players would perform in the Labasa heat. I think that the other players would have been feeling the same way, not knowing how the others would perform. However, amongst ourselves, we were encouraging each other to be strong at heart and to do whatever it took to perform well and not to give in easily. We were known for these characteristics during this era. As mentioned previously, I think this match was in the late-1980s or early-1990s.

While walking around our camp, gathering our sports gear and getting ready to go down to the park, I could feel that I was not as fit and mentally prepared as I usually would be. Half of

my strength had disappeared from the long night and the consumption of beer. While walking down to Subrail Park, which was about 500 metres away from our camp, I could feel the tiredness creeping into my body. I was wondering to myself what I would be able to do to get through the match and not disgrace the team and the Nadi Soccer Association. Only we players, the coach, and the Lord above knew what the thoughts were running around inside our heads. While walking down to the park we were still encouraging each other to perform how we usually would. We were reminding ourselves to face tight situations in the manner in which we had done in the past. There were still some of us who were tipsy or under the influence. The players who had not joined us the night before gelled with us and did not blame us because we were the core of the team. I'm sure this event gave those innocent boys a scare as they were newcomers. They were not familiar with facing such situations unlike the senior core of experienced players.

While entering Subrail Park we could feel the warm welcome from the fans as we were one of the champion soccer teams of this era. We could hear the fans and supporters mentioning the names of the Nadi players in respectful tones. They were very impressed to see the star players of Nadi and Fiji there in the flesh in their own home stadium. However, they did not know that we were still suffering the adverse effects of the previous night's alcohol consumption. We were trying to recover our brains after coming down to earth again. The crowd was around 1,000 to 1,500. Subrail Park at that time just had ropes around the playing arena. The distance between the ropes and the sidelines of the pitch was only about two steps. We could almost hear whatever they were saying behind us or in front of us. We were playing with so many things on our minds, not only the cheering but we could hear every individual comment which was made in the crowd. Hearing these things made us snap out of our relaxed mood. It was like psyching up a player to perform. When a person is provoked he snaps back at you.

While warming up before the game, towards the river-side end of the park, there was this gentleman from Namotomoto Village in Nadi. We all called him Wadi Tom. He was Inosi Tora's (our centre-back) dad. He just happened to appear at the 11th hour of our walking on to the field because he was visiting his wife's family in Labasa. He had not travelled with the team. This gentleman had played for the Nadi rugby team and he had experience of playing away from home. He gave us some words of encouragement. He asked us if he could have a word with the boys after we had finished warming up and the boys agreed. We did not want him to smell the liquor on us. We all had realized that here was a true Nadi man. We

respected him for being at the ground. After warming up he said: ‘Wherever you are from, maybe from Tailevu or Nadroga or Indian or Vanua Levu, today is an important day because you are the ambassadors for Nadi here in Labasa. You are ambassadors for your family and for your supporters and fans and, when you leave from the shores of Vanua Levu, you will be the victors and you will go back with victory.’ Just his presence and his belief in us gave the boys a boost in spirit. So quietly we told each other that we had to prove ourselves today and not let our supporters and fans down as well as that old man who was there at the park that day.

At the beginning of the game, Labasa tried in vain to penetrate our defence. We could hear them saying that it won’t be long before we give in because of the heat. However, to their surprise, we scored in the last quarter of the first-half. This really created doubt amongst the Labasa team as they had given their all in the first three-quarters of the first-half.

In the second-half, we controlled much of the play and at times it was clear that the Labasa team had become discouraged and frustrated. It was our experience as a team that took us through to the last-quarter of the game. By then we had taken control of the game. They had thought that we would not play well because we were drunk. They had been told about the previous night’s events by the supporters and the officials. Whilst playing, their minds were not fully on the game. They had been surprised that our playing performance was not consistent with what the supporters had told them. On the way to the Labasa Airport, the Labasa soccer fans followed us down to the airport and bought us some beers. They mentioned in a joking manner: ‘We bought you some beers, you beat us and we are still buying you beers? How can this work?’ We said to them: ‘No, this is what you want.’

In this match, the relaxed and professional attitude of the coach Mani Naicker (with no panic but trust) assisted us in maintaining a positive mutual approach to the game. Secondly, the old man from Namotomoto, Wadi Tom’s words of encouragement acted as a strong motivator for the boys and boosted our performance. Therefore, in sport, a lot of small things can work together to influence the result and the performance of each individual and team. The drinking incident clearly should not have happened. I ask our fans and supporters to forgive us for the events of that trip. This should never happen again.

Word got back to Nadi because of our performance. There was a big welcome for us at the Nadi Airport. We were greeted as if we had won the South Pacific Games. We were greeted with garlands by the president of Nadi Soccer Association, Sri V. Chetty, and his family and fans. Because we had won that game, we were the winners of the national-league title.

1983 South Pacific Games (Apia, Samoa)

We managed to beat Solomons 10-0 and Vanuatu 6-0 to get into the final against Tahiti [see also Prasad, 2008, p. 43 and Appendix VII, p. 95]. … We all camped at one venue namely the Leififi Teachers' College in Apia, Samoa. At the camp it was good to mingle with the other South Pacific athletes. It was great to watch them prepare for a match on the school grounds. We used to mingle with the volleyball and rugby players from Fiji. We would listen to how they would prepare their game plan. We supported each other very much, especially the women's sports. They needed our support and we needed their support.

We would go for a walk in the evenings when given half-an-hour break. We would see the Samoan villagers walking on the street with big stomachs and without shirts. These were really big Samoans looking like sumo wrestlers. They would be holding the big sugar canes and chewing them. It was really scary to walk past them. It would be like they would just about whack you on your back and everyone was ready to run. They would not say much, not 'hey Talofa'. Down the road further, we would meet the landowners drinking beers on the side of the road. It was not prohibited. This made it even scarier until we grew accustomed to it. The beers were sold at every shop and very cheaply whereas in Fiji, at that time, you could only get beer at the bootlegger and at the supermarket. Today beer is sold at many shops in Fiji, just like in Samoa then. So the Samoan beer was tempting for a Fijian sportsman.

Four days before playing New Caledonia in the semi-final we were given a break for two hours and told to be back in camp by 8.00 p.m. I joined the older boys, Joe Tubuna, Upendra Choi, and Semi Tabaiwalu, and we went for a few beers under a tree close to the camp. The beer got sweeter and sweeter as the hours went by. Then the making up of excuses started. We went on until 10.00 p.m. I said to myself: 'I'm the youngest one. I will leave it to the older boys to take the blame.' Joe said: 'We are all going to give our own excuses.' We said: 'No, the captain must take the burden.' We were all joking amongst ourselves thinking that we were really in for trouble now. Little did we know that our manager, Jahir Khan, a police inspector, had the police attitude and he was lying (sleeping) across the door so we could not sneak in unnoticed. So we started calling from the door to Mohammed Salim, who was sleeping very close to the door: 'Salim, Salim' and then the answer was from Jahir Khan (manager): 'Were you looking for Salim? Salim is waiting for you. Open the door.' As we were drunk we wanted to laugh and every negative thought started to run around in our minds. Tubuna signalled to us to stay still. Then Jahir opened the door. He asked us: 'Where have you been?' Tubuna gave an excuse but Jahir said: 'Go and have a good sleep and wait for

tomorrow.' We did not sleep well that night. Some of the other players were laughing at us because they sneaked in before time. They had consumed beer but they were not caught.

In the morning I did not enjoy my breakfast, thinking about what was to happen, that I had let my teammates down and my country down. After breakfast, our coach Rudi Gutendorf arrived at camp. We were all called into the classroom and as a professional coach he scolded the team as a whole. He did not point the finger at anyone. He mentioned: 'I have this idea of sending you back to Fiji. You have betrayed Fiji. You have betrayed your family. You have betrayed yourselves [not pointing the finger at anyone].' So he takes our group of four for a training session in the Apia heat apart from the rest of the team. He made us sweat out the alcohol for quite some time and then he regrouped us all together again. I believe this camouflaged the problem in front of the other island nations' players whom we had camped together with on the same school campus. It was a very professional approach from our coach. He did not penalize us in front of everybody. This allowed us to maintain our self-respect and dignity which was great especially for me as a young boy.

Discussion

This paragraph reviews the chapter on drinking practices in the book by Geir Henning Presterudstuen (2020), who did fieldwork on masculinity issues in Nadi-area villages. He draws on Christina Toren's (1994) 1980s fieldwork at Sawaieke Village in remote Gau island. For Presterudstuen, drinking sessions now occur mostly in town in public, non-village spaces and sometimes extend beyond the one night. Whilst drinking by young men is frowned on in the village, by transporting it outside the village, the young men free themselves from the village gaze (Tomlinson, 2004a, p. 660). They no longer need to constantly negotiate masculinity practices with elders, but this lack of communication has a downside too. The boisterousness of drinking in the village is replaced with more assertive and antisocial behaviour as the young Fijians distrust police and other secular authorities of the modern state, in part due to the lack of legitimacy associated with the 2006 coup. Young men, according to Presterudstuen, find new ways of being modern, outside of village spaces, as they reaffirm bonds of sociality in more informal settings beyond the gaze of elders (Tomlinson, 2004a, p. 660). Presterudstuen acknowledges, but downplays, the fact that communal beer-drinking practices often mirror kava-drinking rituals, up to a certain point, while being more informal

and disorganized (see also Jones, 2009). Public group drinking thus is a way of reaffirming Indigenous Fijian masculine identity in new modern public spaces beyond village control.

Our data is somewhat different as Henry and his drinking-partners are now in their 40s and 50s and in senior positions within village structures. However, they still engage in informal street- and river-drinking sessions beyond village confines. Although boisterousness is still present, mentoring and collegiality are present as well, as a person's village role follows him into town, to some extent, in people's eyes. Senior people also want to set a 'good example' for the younger people present. The drinking at the 1983 SPG occurred when Henry was only 20-years-old, with the senior players, Tubuna and Choi, being perhaps ten years older, so remarks about youth-drinking apply here and to the Labasa case.

Not mentioned in Presterudstuen is that Indigenous youths' boisterousness and rebelliousness in public places can also be due to a perception that they are largely excluded from the Fiji Indian-dominated Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) sector.

The very interesting first passage, presented by Henry, describes events during and after Nadi's away domestic match against Labasa in Labasa, Vanua Levu. The events described here date back probably to the early-1990s. The Labasa fans, in those days of poorer communication, regarded it as a highlight and major event to watch the great Nadi team and its host of domestic and international stars. Figuratively speaking, Nadi was the 'big smoke'.

We see here alcohol being used in at least two ways, which are apparently contradictory. In Henry's words: 'They wanted to warmly welcome us as the visitors but possibly they had two purposes.' First of all, the fans wanted to drink alcohol with the Nadi players, on the eve of the game, with alcohol being used as a tool of tribute and bonding mechanism/social lubricant. On the other hand, there was evidently a plan to try to make the Nadi players drunk so that their performances would be weaker the following day. Therefore, alcohol was also used as a source of temptation. We see no signs of any 'professional outlook' being adopted by the four players. These players were vulnerable too, as they wanted to enjoy their trip to Vanua Levu, although it is probably not the case here that alcohol was used as a tool of rebellion.

The Nadi players got drunk, and were feeling the worst for wear at the next day's match, Then we get a surprise interjection from an unlikely source - village leader Wadi Tom, from Namotomoto Village, Nadi, and father of Nadi player Inosi Tora. He just happened by chance to be at the ground that day and he yelled out words of motivation (and implied rebuke) to the Nadi players to win the game for their villages and people back home. Being very well-

connected in Indigenous circles in Western Fiji made it very likely that the players would respect Wadi Tom, and his interjection was probably one factor which allowed them to gain victory that day. His use of the Nadi dialect stood him apart from the other spectators, and increased the probability that his message would stroke a chord. That he was there apparently by chance, and was not a part of the official team management, lent an air of divine appointment and divine rebuke to the proceedings, as the Indigenous Fijians are very religious and superstitious people. It also took the aspect of rebellion away, as Wadi Tom was an Indigenous elder and had no official connection to the team management. His being at the game was seen as akin to a divine appointment.

Now we move on to consider Henry's experiences in Apia at the 1983 SPG tournament. Here we see four players, including two senior stars and Henry, break a curfew set at 8:00 p.m. Instead, they stay out drinking and return two hours after the curfew. Clearly this was an act of rebellion, not just against regimentation and control, but also against the economic and social system, whereby the poorer Indigenous players could only travel overseas a part of a playing contingent during their playing days. By contrast, the Fiji Indian team management had and have access to a higher quality of living standards and lifestyles. There seems to have been a subconscious protest here by the players against their own alienation, with even the senior, respected players, including the late Joe Tubuna, being involved, and being a particular influence upon a young Henry. Alcohol is the tool of rebellion here; but there is also a sense that the players were consciously building up shared precious memories, which they could later recall together after their playing days were over.

Timothy Curry (1993) talks about certain friendships, practices, and discourses being viewed as encouraging and demonstrating a masculine worldview. Was the drinking of alcohol doing that here? A nuanced answer is required. At one level, the players' wives and girlfriends were back in Fiji, and part of that home environment, comforting and emotionally stable. The (Indigenous Fijian) men do affirm each other's masculinity through the drinking culture and the rebellion against other (Fiji Indian) men in more senior positions on tour and in more economically stable and prosperous situations back in Fiji. On the other hand, we learn of supportive relationships between the Fiji men's soccer team and women Fijian athletes. Here, the women were respected *because they were athletes* and part of the overseas travelling experience. Their elite athlete status binds them together, and gender just becomes a supportive element in the drama, creating mutual interest and affection. A Marxist perspective might point towards what all the athletes had in common - glamorous athlete status within a

context of exploitation. Henry enjoys quoting a Lautoka lawyer who once said that the Fiji Football Association treats the players as 'tea-bags' - to be used up and thrown away when they outlive their usefulness.

Symbolic interactionism emphasizes how interacting with others and self are enormously influential in determining actions, and how all these things continuously reinforce each other. The development of self-identity is crucial; and how identity is moulded and changed by interaction, while some aspects of identity remain resistant to change. Forward progress is influenced by the interactions one has with others and self, but remains limited by structural factors, although that is not a key aspect of this perspective (Charon, 1995, pp. 23, 33; Delaney & Madigan, 2015, p. 40; Wallace & Wolf, 1986, p. 221). How one interacts also depends upon the likelihood of achieving one's goals, but the goals also get shifted and modified (Schmid & Jones, 1991) in the process. Perspectives, too, are reinforced, or otherwise, by time, habitual practices, and interaction amongst like-minded individuals (Heilman, 1976). Here we see Indigenous identity challenged overseas, as Fiji Indians control the team management. Drinking practices and the rebellion involved reinforce Indigenous notions of masculinity, whilst these notions are also strengthened by the awareness that, away from Fiji, but still in the South Pacific, Indigenous power rises to reflect the local ethnic mix.

We observe guilt (Kearney, Murphy, & Rosenblaum, 1993) in the first case (Labasa) but not in the second (SPG). Why? There are many plausible factors to consider here. In Labasa, it was the respected Indigenous elder, Wadi Tom, who was the voice of encouragement and reason. And, although it was away from Viti Levu, Labasa is still located in Fiji and it was a national-league game. Professionalism was required - this incident was a little closer to home. In the second case, there was rebellion against the Fiji Indian official team management, for reasons relating to race/ethnicity and class differences between players and administrators. And the constraints and responsibilities of home life were further away. Disappointing the Fiji fans, too, seemed less of a real threat than upsetting Nadi fans, which was a close-at-hand 'reference group' (Shibutani, 1955) including family, close friends, work-colleagues, and respected elders in town and village. The concept of a 'Fiji fan' seemed and seems more abstract, especially due to the distance created by being in Apia; and no-one was a Fiji fan first and foremost. Ethnicity and class issues hence played a major role (James & Nadan, 2020), but the guilt was not purely defined by them - it arose from interaction. The Fiji Indian and Indigenous communities, in part, interact in daily life, at work and school, but, to a large extent, exist separately and perceive each other as separate, as a strange species. Similarly, an

early symbolic interactionist scholar Tamotsu Shibutani (1955, cited in Charon, 1995, p. 30) termed these communities 'reference groups' or 'social worlds'. In a very relevant comment, Charon (1995, p. 31) described the American society and African-Americans both as 'social worlds', meaning that African-Americans would belong to both of these worlds. Henry's reference group includes the two senior players, whom he respected and whom he wanted to impress, plus Tabaiwalu. He also respected Gutendorf, but he was more *remote*, both in his manner and because of his job description and race. Therefore, he was less of an influence on Henry's actions.

Beer bottles of Fiji Gold or Bitter (longnecks (Presterudstuen, 2020, p. 111)) are viewed as desirable and desired *social objects* (Charon, 1995, p. 38). The beer bottles (full-versus-empty) are interpreted jointly, by everyone, in the process of social interaction. They constitute social objects as well as 'symbols' (Charon, 1995, p. 52). A full beer bottle (especially a larger 'longneck,' which is equal to two small 'stubby' bottles) promise sensual enjoyment and social bonding; and is associated progressively with different meanings as the number of beers each person has consumed increases. In some ways, the first beer is the most enjoyable, in terms of taste, freshness, new sensation, and the literal satiation of thirst; while the beer which pushes one over into definite drunkenness is highly valued for that reason. Then, later beer bottles are almost viewed negatively as they are sickness-inducing (but continuing to drink might be viewed as masculine conduct and hence the player forces himself to view them positively). Furthermore, Samoan beer must have been perceived as a new exotic experience, to be tasted, enjoyed, commented upon in community, and catalogued, only to be recalled later. As Henry said, 'the Samoan beer was tempting for a Fijian sportsman.'

For Charon (1995, p. 43), 'Acts are not symbolic if they are not intentional, or if they are not meant for anyone else.' We are convinced that the acts of drinking and breaking the curfew (combined) were intentional and directed towards the Fiji Indian team management as a form of symbolic action, meaning rebellion and wanting fun. To decide whether an act is symbolic communication, we need to look at the actor and not the recipient (ibid., p. 44).

In our data, although firewalking (*vilavilairevo*) is worlds' apart from beer-drinking, we can still see social beer-drinking as a gift passed on from older player to young player (Pigliasco, 2010), as at the 1983 SPG, and held in high esteem as a bearer of social capital. Senior players Tubuna and Choy were unapologetic about passing on and approving this ritual, and it was done independently of the will of the Fiji Indian team management, who were excluded from Indigenous understandings. The specific context in which the ritual related to were overseas

trips by the Fiji national team. In Labasa, Wadi Tom inspires the Nadi players, recovering from the previous night's beer, to respect and perform obligation towards the district and their kin. This contained an ancient element, and a more modern element, by referring to the Fiji Indians of Nadi and newcomers to Nadi from other areas. Traditional hierarchies are under pressure from beer-drinking activities, but they do not disappear (Jones, 2009, p. ii). Wadi Tom was not just anybody - he was a senior Nadi-area village figure - but he was not at the Labasa game in any official capacity. Paradoxically, both of these factors seemed to have added to the authority and charisma which he embodied and communicated on that day. In part, he seems to have been respected as an authentic elder, while in part he seems to have been merely humoured as an old man from an era of more traditional values and rigid decorum. He was also respected for his mere presence at the ground when he was under no compulsion to be there.

Conclusion

The subject of this article is the role of alcohol in elite amateur soccer in the Fiji Islands covering the period 1975-2015. Based on interviews with six ex-Premier League players from the 1980s, and participant-observation, as a friend and confidante of one ex-star (Henry Dyer), we conclude that alcohol was used as a comforter, bonding mechanism/social lubricant, form of currency, recreational drug, tool of tribute, tool of rebellion, and source of temptation.

In one way, the club officials who paid the players with beer broke a duty of care by not considering the short- and long-term adverse effects of excessive alcohol consumption. They also violated the duty of care owed to players' wives and families by paying with beer rather than cash. On the other hand, the offering of beer by officials and supporters allowed for an atmosphere of camaraderie to be built up, strengthened the relationships between players and between players and fans, lowered players' perception of alienation, ensured a good time was had by all, kept relationships in idyllic mode by avoiding cash nexus, and provided a set of good memories which would sustain participants during hard times. We are reluctant to condemn people for encouraging practices which generated camaraderie and broke down social boundaries. We recall Jones' (2009) remark that alcohol played a 'compensatory' role for those who lacked social status in the new, more developed Fiji of the modern era. This comment has validity for our 1975-95 data-set too in that alcohol compensated for inequalities and lack.

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