Gesturing Elsewhere and Offshore Memory: Amateur Elite Soccer in the Fiji Islands, 1980-1992

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This article studies the amateur elite National Soccer League in the Fiji Islands from 1980-1992 and the Fiji national-team’s landmark 1-0 win over Australia in 1988. We use the theoretical idea of “gesturing elsewhere,” taken from the work of popular music scholar Emma Baulch, to explain how the local Fiji soccer community receives its meaning and identity largely as the local-outpost or chapter of the global soccer scene. Therefore, a victory over the sporting powerhouse Australia boosts the self-image of the Fiji soccer world by temporarily upturning the established hierarchies. The shock 1988 win saw Fiji assigned extra credibility in the global context. We also look at the Indo-Fijian (Fijians of Indian decent) emigrant communities of the West and argue that, through their on-going love of Fiji soccer, they play a role akin to offshore memory or offshore library, cataloguing past history and revering past stars and classic contests.

Keywords: Fiji, Fiji soccer, football history, gesturing elsewhere, Indo-Fijians, offshore memory, Pacific islands, soccer history
Cowman, Gunn and Faire, and Strange refer to the important concept of “history from below,” which historically is associated with the rise of social and cultural histories in the 1960s and 1970s. Many of these were written by socialist and feminist authors and the “collective biography” method was frequently, but not always, used. It was a move away from the traditional focus on “history from above,” or the study of great men (and they nearly always were men) - politicians, royalty, and business-leaders. “History from below” involves, effectively, the study of the daily lives of ordinary people and especially those who have suffered from social marginalization in the past. Examples of socialist and feminist studies include Caine, Cowman, Hannam and Hunt, Harrison, Holton, and Levine. Although it is not obvious at first glance, because this article is about elite soccer, Fiji is a country which is part of the Global South and hence a study of Fiji players and ex-players may well constitute “history from below.” Fiji indeed suffers from extreme poverty and marginalization, and even the elite senior men’s game was amateur in the 1980s. Fiji’s remote location in the South Pacific Ocean has isolated it from global flows of information, commodities, capital, and labor to a much greater extent than geographically more strategically- and centrally-located countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia. The Fiji population, according to CIA World Fact Book Online, is only 926,000 (rounded to the nearest one thousand people) and Fiji’s G.D.P. per capita, based on purchasing power parity, is a mere USD9,800. This compares to the respective figures for Australia of 23,470,000 and USD50,400. Given that the Australian government spends so much taxpayers’ money on elite athletes, Australian sports sociologists Adair and Vamplew posed an interesting and provocative question: How would the Australian taxpayers respond if an under-resourced Fiji was to beat an over-resourced Australia in an international sporting contest? This is exactly what happened in soccer in November 1988 when Fiji defeated Australia 1-0 in Nadi in a qualifying match for the 1990 World Cup. This match is the primary focus of this article.

Paradoxically, one of the most important and strategic sources of connection between Fiji and the rest of the world has been the presence of an Indo-Fijian (Fijians of Indian descent) emigrant community in the West which, for the most part, has actively retained its identification and links with the (Fiji) islands. This emigration began in earnest after the two military coups of 1987 with annual settler numbers in Australia from Fiji peaking at 2,980 in 1987-1988. In certain respects, 1987 can be viewed as the year when Fiji’s post-colonial innocence was lost as the coups showed that the results of the democratic process could be (and might well be) overturned by military power. Other coups took place in 2000 and 2006. In this article we introduce two important new theoretical concepts – gesturing elsewhere and offshore memory. “Gesturing elsewhere” refers to the situation where the soccer community in Fiji receive its meaning primarily as being a local outpost or local-chapter of the global game. This makes all their efforts seem worthwhile as they are upholding their end of the bargain in doing the best they can (with limited resources) to make soccer prosper in their remote corner of the world. They accept the heroes of the global game as a given and revere great clubs and players of Europe accessible via Champions’ League and English Premier League (EPL) on the television. During the 1980s, attention was also fixed on Australia but this has lessened somewhat due to Australia’s exit from the Oceania Confederation. “Offshore memory” refers to the Indo-Fijian Diaspora community in Western countries retaining its family and affective links with Fiji over time. They take their
memories of Fiji soccer history with them overseas and, when they meet together, stars of the past from Fiji come alive through discourse – indeed they only have meaning overseas within the Diaspora community due to Fiji’s global remoteness and relative insignificance.

We use the theoretical idea of “gesturing elsewhere,” taken from the work of popular music scholar Emma Baulch, to explain how the local Fiji soccer community receives its meaning and identity largely as the local-outpost or chapter of the global soccer scene. Therefore, a victory over the sporting powerhouse Australia boosts the self-image of the Fiji soccer world by temporarily upturning the established hierarchies. The shock 1988 win saw Fiji assigned extra credibility in the global context. We also look at the Indo-Fijian (Fijians of Indian decent) emigrant communities of the West and argue that, through their on-going love of Fiji soccer, they play a role akin to offshore memory or offshore library, cataloguing past history and revering past stars and classic contests.

The Social, Economic, and Political Context of Fiji

The two main ethnic groups in Fiji are the Indo-Fijians (37.5%) and the indigenous Fijians (56.8%). These two communities live, play, and socialize largely in separate blocs, with their own main interests, aspirations, and pre-occupations. There is a balance-of-power equilibrium, which works fairly well, on the whole, whereby Indo-Fijians support soccer and attend mosque and temple whereas the indigenous people support the rugby codes and attend church. Indigenous Fijians dominate the military and the police, while Indo-Fijians control the business-world (especially the Small and Medium Enterprises or SME sector), the left-wing trade-unions, academia, and the press. Each group has its own carefully preserved and highly-valued culture. Over the top, as in the colonial era, and similar to Singapore and Malaysia, there is an over-arching post-colonial common framework centered on the English language, English law, and a Westminster-style parliamentary democracy. A limited form of democracy was re-installed following the military coup of 2006 and the two elections were won by the Fiji First party which is effectively a secular re-branding of the military regime. Having been treated harshly in the indentured-labor years, the Indo-Fijians feel that they deserve full-and-equal citizenship rights in post-independence Fiji. In fact, these rights were promised them long ago by the British government in its initial arrangements with the Indian government to export sugar-cane laborers from the subcontinent to the islands. Indigenous Fijians, historically, have worried about increasing Indo-Fijian influence and hegemony over the business-world and, more to the point, politics. The country’s first and only Indo-Fijian prime-minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, democratically elected in 1999, was removed by the George Speight (indigenous Fijian-backed) coup of 2000. Now, with indigenous Fijians having regained their numerical majority in the country, and the Fiji First party having both an indigenous Fijian prime-minister and president, these indigenous concerns have receded somewhat.

Indigenous Fijians live mostly in villages governed by a headman, assistant-headman, and a village council of elders. These represent an unusual, but fairly effective, combination of a traditional village and Western-styled public-housing. One village roughly equates to a tribe or an extended family so an indigenous Fijian cannot simply relocate to any village of her/his choosing – usually there must be blood or marital links. Non-indigenous people
cannot live in the village they concentrate in the cities and towns and along major roads. Chinese capital is a relatively new phenomenon and the Chinese, although there has been a history of Chinese in Fiji for over sixty years, have begun to entrench their positions as businesspersons and shopkeepers within the town areas. Many indigenous Fijians, in particular, appear nervous about the growing Chinese influence as it threatens to disturb the complex equilibrium which exists across the two main races.

The Indo-Fijian community includes people from all social classes and nearly all occupational groupings, as you would expect from a 330,000-strong community. It includes a Marxist urban proletariat or underclass working in the cities and towns in low-paying and menial jobs such as bus and van-drivers, barbers and barbers’ assistants, seamstresses, supermarket-cashiers, and restaurant and café employees. (The ex-Nadi player, Peter Dean, an Indian-Muslim, still drives the public-bus from Lautoka which arrives at Nadi Bus Stand at 5:00 p.m.) This group makes up the bulk of domestic soccer supporters and has the least prospects of emigration. Other Indo-Fijians lease out small, and often economically unviable or suspect, land plots from indigenous landowners. The Indo-Fijians are further subdivided by religion into Sangam (Hindu), Muslim, and Arya Samaj (reformist Hindu). Each of these groups has its own network of schools and its own social and youth annual soccer tournaments. Arya Samaj operates the private University of Fiji (established 2004), in Saweni township, located approximately one-third of the way between Lautoka and Nadi if you are approaching from the Lautoka end.

Ethnic stereotypes of the other racial group(s) abound but Fiji has had a surprisingly peaceful and non-violent history (excluding the military coups, the indentured-labor years, and domestic violence); generally the various groups treat each other with a tolerance bordering, for the most part, on mutual respect. The tropical weather and geographic isolation have helped to create an easy-going and mutually-supportive, collegial atmosphere. Real and imagined losses, suffered from past coups, however, still haunt members of the older generation and supporters of political parties other than Fiji First still perceive that their views do not get a proper hearing within the Fiji context. The large military and police forces, intimidating for some, can also be viewed as a form of welfare provision / subsidized employment for those who do not fit neatly within the Indo-Fijian-controlled SME sector.

The Indo-Fijian influence in Fiji (and it has always been more than an influence) has been overwhelmingly and undeniably positive. The community has set up and administered schools and religious networks and soccer associations which have proven to be robust, pragmatic, and durable, especially compared to those found elsewhere in Oceania. For example, Arya Samaj began a primary-school in Saweni around 1920, set up a secondary-school across the road, and later, adjacent to the secondary-school, the University of Fiji. These robust institutions, whilst seldom flashy, have stood the test of time.

The Organization and Structure of Fiji Football

As with Australian and New Zealand 15s rugby, Fiji Soccer is managed on an association basis whereby the associations represent provinces (or occasionally towns) and are responsible for the running of the sport, at senior level, within their demarcated boundaries. Vitally, the national-league teams represent their associations. Therefore, they can be
correctly termed “association” or “district” teams. They should not be called soccer clubs or club teams. Clubs exist in Fiji but they are one tier below the association teams.

One important concept which must be mentioned here is “soccer tourism” whereby Indo-Fijians now resident overseas (twice-migrants) plan their holidays back to Fiji so that they coincide with one of the three national-league cup tournaments, which are the Fiji FACT tournament, held earliest in the calendar year; the Battle of the Giants (BOG), held around July-August; and the most prestigious and traditional Inter-district Championship (IDC), held every October, which was first held in 1938. These three tournaments are totally self-contained (one doesn’t begin until the last one is well and truly over and there are gaps of a month or two in between). There are two groups of four teams; and then the two semi-finals and final are played over the same weekend. There is also a proper national-league, of home-and-away matches, so each year four trophies are available to win.

The Fiji national-team was relatively powerful, by Oceania standards, in the 1980-1992 era. The legendary German journeyman manager (or “coach” in Australian and American terminology), the late Rudi Gutendorf (1926-2019), arrived on the Fiji scene in 1983 after a failed stint in Australia; he introduced strategic wisdom and technical refinements to the team as well as boosting the self-esteem of the players due to both his personal charm and his long-term track record. Fiji narrowly lost 1-0 to a strong Tahiti team in the 1983 South Pacific Games Final in Apia, under Gutendorf. Fiji also beat New Zealand 2-0 in Suva on August 16, 1983 with both goals being scored by Suva striker Tony Kabakoro. Later, with Gutendorf’s influence still present, to some extent, Fiji defeated Newcastle United (England) 3-0 in Nadi on May 26, 1985; New Zealand 2-0 in Lautoka on November 17, 1988; New Zealand 1-0 in Ba on November 19, 1988; and Australia 1-0 in Nadi on November 26, 1988.

A Discussion and Reflection on the Research Approach

To give this study focus and clarity, we decided to interview as many ex-Ba and Nadi players who played in the classic and thrilling 1982 IDC Final as possible. (Ba and Nadi, based at either end of a sixty-kilometer stretch of coastline in Western Fiji, were the top two teams in domestic soccer in the early-1980s.) To the end, we interviewed four ex-Ba players (Meli Vuilabasa, Inia Bola, Semi Tabaiwalu, and Julie Sami) and two ex-Nadi players (Henry Dyer (multiple times) and Savenaca Waqa). We also wanted to interview at least one ex-player of Indo-Fijian ethnic origin due to the racial factors which surround, influence, frustrate, and hold back full fairness and equality within the game even today (due to the much higher percentage of Indo-Fijian players than indigenous players who manage to achieve coaching and administrative careers post-retirement). We interviewed the ex-Ba and Fiji player, Julie Sami, who is an Indo-Fijian man, after Dyer had set up the connection.

In total, the research project features interviews with five ex-Ba players; two ex-Nadi players; one ex-Nadi vice-president (Mr. Bobby Tikaram); one ex-Nadi team doctor (Dr. Raymond Fong); and the Fiji General Workers’ Union (FGWU) president who is also a devoted Ba Soccer Association supporter (Mr. Pravin Sharma). In the early-1980s, Tikaram was also president of the now defunct Airport Soccer Club in the Nadi club competition and recruited many high-quality local talents for Airport and Nadi Soccer. Table 1 lists our interviewees and the main matches in which they played. Every one of these ex-national-
league players also played for the Fiji team, as the Fiji team was heavily weighted towards players from the powerful Ba and Nadi squads, much to the chagrin of the soccer community in the southern region of Suva-Nausori. Please note that all interviewees were told that they had the option to respond anonymously, but none chose to take up this option. Dates of the interviews are also provided in Table 1. Participant-observation included the first author attending a Fiji Football Association Veterans’ Dinner in Nadi on October 4, 2014.

To avoid the beginner’s trap of “presentism” or, in other words, “seeing the past through the eyes of the present,” I (first author) made a conscious decision to aim to get a clear and detailed perspective of the “spirit of the times” in Fiji. What did the 1980s feel like in Fiji, especially in the world of Fiji soccer? Since I did not live in Fiji in the 1980s, I had to work hard to compensate for this by intensive interviews and conversations with ex-players and ex-administrators of that era. I read every soccer publication from that time which I could get my hands on. (Many old and difficult-to-find hard-copy publications were kindly lent to me by Bobby Tikaram.) I spent three full days at the Fiji Times head office in Suva immersing myself in old match-previews and match-reports. I did not interview or extensively converse with people who are still actively involved in Fiji Soccer today so that I could avoid the past being viewed through the eyes of the present. In all important conversations with people, I directed the conversations back to the 1980s.

In recent years historians have been paying special attention to physical landscapes and architectural features as part of the “spatial turn” within history. A lot of the architectural and visual world of Fiji has remained essentially the same and this assisted me in trying to visualize, imagine, and re-create the Fiji soccer world of the 1980s. The soccer stadiums of Ba, Nadi, and Rewa are all largely unchanged since 1982 other than the installation of floodlights at Nadi’s Prince Charles Park (which occurred in time for the Nadi-versus-New Caledonia match in 1983) and the replacement of the old grandstand on the outer-wing at Lautoka’s Churchill Park with a grassed bank. This latter change took place sometime between January 2016 and July 2017 which was after the end of this study’s fieldwork. The grassed bank is an incidental addition which comes as a result of a new multi-storey shopping center having been built between Vitogo Parade and Churchill Park. This venue reflects more modern architecture and is one of the few examples in Lautoka city-center of going beyond traditional “High Street” or “Main Street” shopfronts, most of which are housed in buildings built in the 1950s or earlier. To accommodate Churchill Park, the side wall of the shopping-center has a balcony which houses about three rows of seats which face out on to the playing arena although who gets to sit there and when remains unclear. The old traditional entrance-gates and ticketing-office at the Vitogo Parade end of the stadium remain unaltered and the shopping-center seems to end abruptly so that access to the gates is maintained. (Obviously this was a planning requirement imposed on the shopping-center building company by the authorities.) To sum up, my goal was to explore, investigate, understand, and bring back to life the Fiji of the 1980s, and, in particular, the world of Fiji soccer. Relatively stable visual architecture aided my task.
We chose to begin our time-period for analysis in the year 1980 as few of the interviewed players had had a major part of their senior playing career elapse by that date. Furthermore, the longer the time-period chosen for study, the more likely the analysis will be complicated, and perhaps compromised, by underlying changes in the external environment. An ex-player’s memories, on average, can be expected to be less sharp and accurate the further back in time we go during interviews, and this is a third reason why the time-period chosen for study was 1980-1992. A fourth reason is that Fiji’s 7s rugby team won three consecutive Hong Kong 7s rugby titles in 1990-1992 and the newfound popularity of the 7s game after that time impacted severely upon the health of Fiji soccer, at national-league level, as well as average attendances at matches.34

**Match Report: Fiji 1, Australia 0, November 26, 1988**

One legendary game for the Fiji soccer community is the shock 1-0 1988 win over Australia at Prince Charles Park, Nadi, which was the first-leg of a two-leg qualifying round for the 1990 World Cup. The game ended among ecstatic scenes with Fiji manager Billy Singh being chaired off the park and Australian manager, the Yugoslav-born Frank Arok, and players left seething in annoyance, frustration, and disappointment.35 A November 2014 article in *The Guardian Sport Online* headed “The forgotten story of … the Socceroos’ defeat to Fiji” besmirches and belittles Fiji, as a nation; Nadi, as an aspirational but somewhat confused tourist-town; Nadi’s Prince Charles Park, as a hopelessly primitive and ill-equipped stadium (famous for its frog population, which still abounds on the pathway in front of the grandstand); and, of course, Fiji’s national-team.36 But Vince Rugari, the writer of this piece, fails to give due recognition to the fact that this was a relatively competent Fiji team and indeed it is, arguably, the best national-team in the nation’s history up until the present-day. However, there had been some substandard results in the intervening two years, since the May 1985 victory over Newcastle United, which can, partly, be blamed on Gutendorf’s exit.

By 1988, new younger players had begun to replace the old-guard of the late-1970s and early-1980s. The brilliant Nadi goalkeeper Savenaca Waqa had retired in 198737; Joe Tubuna from Ba had died in a cruel motor-vehicle accident on August 4, 1984; and other Ba players Bola, Julie Sami, and Semi Tabaiwalu had either retired or fallen out of consideration due to declining form and influence whilst playing in the black shirt of Ba. (Bola and Tabaiwalu had been involved in the same motor-vehicle accident which killed Tubuna.) Dyer was selected to be national captain but was dropped for disciplinary reasons. A rising collection of young stars, including the late Pita Dau (also a 15s rugby international), Lote Delai, and Ravuama Madigi, had been brought into the national-team since 1985. By this stage, this promising young contingent had had a few years of national-league and national youth-team experience behind it, and anticipation for the match was high. The striker Madigi, in particular, was well-connected, in both indigenous Fijian and Ba Soccer terms, being Bola’s younger brother and a member of Ba under-21s’ 1980 IDC-winning team. A partial changing-of-the-guard was evident which fuelled local optimism.

Manager Singh (a local Indo-Fijian man) was also highly respected, being the son of legendary Ba manager Sashi Mahendra (S.M.) Singh ("the Father of Ba Soccer") (1920-1990). Billy was someone who had been nurtured and taught within the self-confident and
assertive atmosphere at Ba Soccer. Billy’s father had been a guest at the 1974 World Cup finals in West Germany and he had brought extra self-confidence and tactical awareness back to Ba Town upon his return, setting Ba up for its legendary six-in-a-row IDC title wins from 1975-1980. The ex-Ba and Fiji player, Julie Sami, commented in 2015 how he had visited S.M. Singh’s home back in the day and been stunned to find that his (Singh’s) VHS videotape collection was made up almost totally of soccer videos instead of Bollywood movies. Billy Singh was not much of a drop in standard compared to even Mr. Gutendorf. In Dyer’s words: “At the time of Fiji’s 1-0 win over Australia in 1988 there was still some Rudi [Gutendorf] influence as Billy Singh had been under him.”

The first-choice captain Dyer (by this stage of his career he had dropped down into defence at right-back) was removed from the Fiji team at the last moment due to his alleged connection to a rented motor-vehicle which had allegedly been involved in a robbery in Suva. Although disappointed at the time, Dyer says that he took the decision to drop him gracefully and he awarded his full blessings to the new young replacement captain, Pita Dau, from Western Fiji behemoth Lautoka Blues. Dyer revelled in and enjoyed the unexpected victory from the spectators’ side of the perimeter fence.

Dyer explained the complex chain-of-events as follows:

This [dropping from the team] was because our Lautoka team manager, Shah Anwaz Khan, (as I was playing for Lautoka then), was working for a solicitor. The solicitor asked him (the manager) to locate a vehicle which he had hired out for rental to a [indigenous] Fijian guy who was now living in Suva. The rental car was in Suva too while we were preparing for the Australia match. I had a lot of friends on the streets in all walks of life. They helped me to locate the vehicle in a very short time. The manager asked me to fetch the car back for him as he knew that I would be able to complete the task. He was a very good friend of mine and I played for his club (Leeds United in Lautoka). The name of the lawyer was Haroon Shah. What I did wrong was I was driving the vehicle around in Suva and did not let the lawyer or the manager know that I had located it. I kept it for about one week.

Fiji scored, on the back of an enthusiastic and vocal home support, through a Lote Delai pass in the 67th-minute, to his Ba teammate Ravuama Madigi. Madigi, then a 23-year-old, Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC) mill-laborer, had been brought on as a 29th-minute substitute for defender Jone Watisoni. The movement leading up the goal can be described as follows: Left-back Delai ran down the left-flank outer-wing and then sent in a knee-high cross towards the box at the hospital-end of the ground. Ba’s Vimal Sami (younger brother of interviewee Julie Sami) dummied and Madigi then scored with a perfect, one-touch left-volley which escaped the attentions of the Australian goalkeeper Jeff Olver (see Table 2). All three of the Fiji players involved here were also teammates for Ba in domestic soccer which explains the title of Gabriel Singh’s Fiji Times match-report: “Ba magic lifts Fiji to victory.” Australia was not able to equalize. Delai also scored a stunning, late consolation goal in the 5-1 second-match defeat (played in Newcastle, Australia on Saturday, December 3, 1988).
The first-match goal in itself greatly contributed to the legendary status which Madigi now enjoys in Fiji. As Gabriel Singh wrote in his Fiji Times match-report of November 28, 1988: “[A]ll it took was 30 seconds of Ba magic to turn soccer’s ‘bad boy’ Ravuama Madigi into a national hero.”46 In 2000, the Ba legend was appointed player-manager at Rewa, a well-supported but historically under-achieving team based in the Suva satellite-town of Nausori (think Motherwell in relation to Glasgow or Campbelltown in relation to Sydney).47 Madigi won Rewa’s first IDC tournament in a generation in 2001 (beating his old team Ba 1-0 in the final),49 which confirmed his legendary status in the capital-city region too.

Dyer and Vuilabasa commented about the Fiji-versus-Australia match as follows:

Henry Dyer: Madigi’s goal was a left-footer from the side of his foot that sailed through the defence and left the goalkeeper standing in the middle of the goal; he [the goalkeeper] could not believe that the speed of the shot had been so fast. It was like Sam Work’s kick from the left-flank of Churchill Park, on the wooden-stand side heading towards the hospital end, for Fiji against a Russian team Minsk Dinamo.50

Meli Vuilabasa: We beat Australia. We were very happy but we were very surprised. They were a good team, no doubt about it. I myself was surprised that we beat them. They were a better team than Fiji. When we went to Australia they thrashed us 5-0 [actually 5-1 – the authors].51

To conclude, Fiji’s 1-0 victory over Australia in 1988 showed the ability of the Fiji team to absorb the loss of some important senior players and rejuvenate itself successfully through the injection of some fresh young indigenous talents.

The first author met Madigi at the Nausori Club one night during the Fiji FACT tournament held in the first half of 2014. Madigi was then co-manager of the club and he introduced me to an Anglo-Australian couple who were his business partners. They told me that they had heard about his famous goal many times and he was very pleased that I, as a soccer historian academic, was able to confirm to the couple that it really happened.

**Gesturing Elsewhere and Offshore Memory**

A relevant theory is the idea of “gesturing elsewhere,” which is a concept first put forward by popular music scholar Emma Baulch in her classic study of Balinese Death / Thrash Metal (music) fans.52 This concept explains a situation where members of a fan community constantly receive their dominant rituals, practices, symbols, and even values from some far-away admired place, which in this case refers to the Death / Thrash scenes of the Global North. “Elsewhere” is, of course, a mythical place of unbridled excellence and perceived purity. Local actors can never hope to outshine it because it is their preferred benchmark. As Baulch writes, “there was an enduring stress on archival knowledge, which enthusiasts fetishised, thus revealing their desire to hold to [perceived] certainty and known truth. For this, it was outwards to the global scene that they looked, as if into a mirror, eager to get a fix on their true … selves.”53 These hierarchies, values, and musical styles and meanings were received by the local scene as authoritative and then interpreted, applied, and acted-out in the local setting. This local-branch-status validates and gives meaning to the local Death / Thrash community and is a source of community identity, resilience, and subcultural capital.54
Meli Vuilabasa (ex-Ba and Fiji player) stated that he had been waiting for years for someone to come to his village hear his story.55 There was a tremendous pride in beating Australia, Oceania region’s economic, political, military, and sporting powerhouse. It did not matter that I was then living in Fiji - what mattered to him was that an Australian national had come to hear his story. When talking with ex-players, I felt awareness of what Gallois terms “the historian’s duty to the peoples of the past” and this extends to those living people in the present talking about their own pasts.56 For decades, as soccer players, they had “gestured elsewhere” towards the soccer powerhouse nations of Europe and Australasia and, in particular, the colonial “masters” of Britain and the imperialistic economic “masters” of Australia. These countries had brought colonialism, development, and the game of soccer to Fiji amongst other things. Their presence had fundamentally and irreversibly altered the existing social order.57 Soccer was seen as a global game, invented in Great Britain. Unlike rugby-league, the powerbase of which was perceived to be close by in Australia, the powerbase of soccer was perceived to be in remote Europe. It is impossible to communicate how much the vastly economically less rich Fiji’s win over Australia meant to the soccer community of Fiji both then and now. It gave the local-branch of the world soccer community some credence in global terms. It symbolically helped to right the wrongs of colonialism and uneven development. It was a major source of ethnic, national, and regional pride and self-esteem. It showed that Australia was not invincible. That it was the skills of local Ba product, Ravuama Madigi, younger brother of Inia Bola (a player left physically and mentally scarred from the motor-vehicle-accident of 1984), which had cemented the victory only served to add a further poetic and righteous element to the entire drama.

The knowledge that soccer is a global game, whereas rugby and rugby-league are played in only a handful of countries, has been a source of inspiration and comfort for the Fiji soccer community – “it makes it all worthwhile” and “we are just a piece of the puzzle.” This knowledge builds self-esteem and is a ballast to fall back on during hard times. In the years immediately after Colonel Rabuka’s 1987 coups, which were built on raising the status of the indigenous Fijians and spreading their lifestyle and culture to the other ethnic groups,58 the Fiji Football Association was regarded with suspicion because nearly all of its administrators were Indo-Fijians. It was perceived to be a rival powerbase and, strange as it may seem to outside observers today, as an Indo-Fijian organization, it was suspected even of using soccer to mask a political agenda.59 A more recent example of “gesturing elsewhere” follows. At Ba Central Club pub, I arrived once in the late-afternoon to see the three barmen lined up on a row of chairs, studying intently an ancient brown TV set which was broadcasting Serbia-versus-Mexico (or some opponent other than Fiji) in the World Youth Cup 2015. (There were no other customers in the pub at the time.) There was a desire among the barmen that afternoon to watch high-quality soccer and to keep up with on-going trends and developments in the global game, thus confirming the local-branch-of-a-global-movement theory. In conversations within the Fiji soccer community, as with the Balinese Death / Thrash Metal music fans studied by Baulch, showing knowledge about soccer, both locally and globally, is an important source of intra-community prestige and authority.

The second theoretical concept that we introduce is the concept of “offshore memory.” Indo-Fijians resident overseas take on the role of “offshore memory” or “emigrant memory” or “hidden memory” as they recall, eulogize, applaud, categorize, and classify great teams
and players of Fiji’s soccer past from their remote vantage points in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the U.S.A. Their frequent trips back to Fiji inspire those left behind (in the islands) and allow Indo-Fijian emigrants to romanticize about their pasts, stay informed about the Fiji-present, and plan for the future. They take new and updated memories back to the West where they update and reorder their mental categories or mental libraries / museums. In their respective “absences,” both the local and overseas communities remember and recall each other. The two communities are connected in their respective imaginations and this extends far beyond actual flesh-and-blood kinship links.

What evidence is there to support our “offshore memory” thesis? Firstly, we need information on the number of Fiji-born emigrants, including Indo-Fijians, living in the four main receiving countries: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the U.S.A. Figures are difficult to compare, as they are taken from different dates, but they are certainly indicative. The number of Fiji-born in Australia, according to 2016 Census, is 61,473 persons, which includes 46,597 who are Australian citizens. The total number represents a 7.9% rise over the previous 2011 Census where there were 56,979 residents including 48,141 Australian citizens. The most popular receiving Australian states are, as at 2016, New South Wales (33,879), Queensland (12,614), and Victoria (10,825) which also is consistent with anecdotal evidence about the popularity of Sydney, state-capital of New South Wales. In terms of ancestral heritage, 30,494 nominated “Indian”; 19,180 chose “Fijian”; and 7,718 selected “Fiji-Indian.” Given that some (but probably not many) Indo-Fijians might have selected “Fijian,” this indicates that at least 66.58% of Fiji-born Australian residents are Indo-Fijians.

In New Zealand, the most updated information indicates that there are 52,755 Fiji-born New Zealand residents, up from 37,746 in 2006. The absolute number seems to be smaller in New Zealand than in Australia, but it appears higher as a percentage of total population.

In Canada, there were 25,155 Fiji-born residents, at the 2016 Census, of which 21,125 were Canadian citizens while 705 were dual citizens of Canada and at least one other country. In the U.S.A., as at 2010, there were 32,304 Fijian-Americans (citizens), but this figure probably includes those born in U.S.A. or in other countries other than Fiji. Of these, 19,355 were resident in California, the mainland American state which is geographically closest to Fiji (0.06% of the Californian population). The Californian counties with the largest numbers of Fijian-Americans are Sacramento, Sonoma, and Alameda. As at 2000, there were 30,890 Fiji-born residents in U.S.A., of whom 13,615 (44.1%) were U.S. citizens while 17,275 (66.8%) were not. The U.S. appears to rank third out of these four countries for number of Fiji-born if we focus on residents, rather than citizens, of each receiving country.

Secondly, we need evidence of the continuing interest in Fiji soccer demonstrated by the Indo-Fijian Diaspora. We present here two pieces of anecdotal evidence, followed by some systematic, quantitative evidence. In total, we view the combined weight of this evidence as persuasive but not conclusive. Further research is needed.

In terms of anecdotal evidence, firstly, Fiji Football president, Rajesh Patel, visited the community in Vancouver, Canada, at least once. An émigré Indo-Fijian journalist (name known but withheld) informed the authors that he (Patel) allegedly confessed to the Vancouver émigrés that some Ba players were “persuaded” by the Ba officials to use black-magic to secure their six IDC titles-in-a-row from 1975-1980. This shows, obviously, a continued interest in Fiji soccer among the Diaspora. Secondly, San Francisco resident and
ex-Nadi player, Shiva “Shiu” Naicker, returned to Fiji in the first half of 2019 to join other ex-players at the hospital bed of Nadi champion from its first IDC-winning team of 1969, Vivek Anand “Boy” Reddy. Such initiatives are launched by Nadi Legends Club, a social and support group formed by the ex-Nadi players and promoted via “The International Nadi Community” Facebook group by Bobby Tikaram and others.

In terms of quantitative, systematic evidence, in support of the “offshore memory” concept, the authors established a blog Nadi Legends Club on May 29, 2014. This blog features ex-player interviews, match-reports, ex-player biographies, and opinion-articles only about Fiji soccer. The blog provides statistics on country-of-access for each page-view and these cannot be manipulated or influenced by the blog administrators. Table 3 provides the top-ten countries accessing the blog for “last month” and in total from 2014-2020. The top-five countries for “last month” are (in order): U.S.A., Turkmenistan, Fiji, Australia, and New Zealand. The top-five countries for all-time are (in order): U.S.A., Fiji, Russia, Australia, and New Zealand. The Turkmenistan and Russian readerships are a surprise to us and we have no explanations for them. The other countries are either Fiji itself or the four main receiving countries for Fiji-born emigrants. Canada appears in 8th place for “last month” and 7th place for all-time, consistent with the “offshore memory” theory. We argue that if it was mostly people with no ancestral connections to Fiji accessing the blog, then populous European countries U.K., France, Germany, Italy, and Spain should appear in the top-five (and/or populous countries from South America, the Middle East, and/or the Far East).

**Insert Table 3 about here**

Remarkably, too, the local-overseas binary takes on and, to some extent, replaces the indigenous Fijian-Indo-Fijian domestic distinction. But it never does so completely because indigenous Fijians, by and large, lack the financial and social capital, professional qualifications, and kinship networks needed to emigrate. In that way they are “excluded” but they are “included” in the sense that Fiji ex- and current soccer stars live on in the collective memory of the Indo-Fijian Diaspora. They are not physically present overseas but the discourses about them continue to exist and thrive in multiple locations. They have spectral presences, of a sort, through these discourses. So, wherever there is a sizeable Indo-Fijian community in the West, a legendary star like Henry Dyer lives on through collective memory, collective reverence, and discourses. He and people like him bind communities together overseas and connect them to Fiji and to their own memories of their own pasts. He “exists” in several places at once through these discourses and is performing a great unpaid social service to the emigrant communities as a “saint-of-the-homeland.” The more difficult life becomes for the emigrants in their new countries, emotionally, the more significant such saints-of-the-homeland become for individual and collective mental health. Their Fijian history becomes a more valuable identity-marker for these communities overseas than does their Indianness because of cultural and historic reasons - they do not want to just “disappear” into the much larger groups of ethnic-Indians resident in these Western countries.

Because Fiji soccer matters so little outside of Fiji (other than among the Diaspora), soccer fans in Fiji assign it with more meaning and reverence so as to overcome this
meaning-deficit and their own feelings of alienation and marginalization from the wider world. Indo-Fijians overseas retain, and even magnify, this excess (but not excessive) devotion to Fiji soccer and Fiji soccer history. This then becomes a mark of authenticity and subcultural capital - one proves one’s “Fijianness” and authentic links to Fiji through one’s devotion to Fiji soccer and its past stars. This then becomes a reverse or complement of “gesturing elsewhere” - a gesturing back to Fiji (and by Fiji soccer fans to each other).

R. Prasad writes that the first-generation of Indo-Fijian indentured laborers still haunt the sugar-cane fields because they did not receive proper Hindu burials. There is still a sense of mourning and loss in Fiji today. We think this is, in part, due to the high rate of emigration since 1987-1988. People are eager to leave but they don’t want to appear publicly to be too eager. Extended families get split up only to meet again every year or two at best. It’s a long way back from Canada. I (first author) was at a Fiji soccer game when the names of past referees were called out. A vast number had either emigrated or died. With Fiji’s Third World hospital system, some might cynically say that these are the only two fates on offer. People still remember the glory days of the 1970s and 1980s – packed soccer stadiums filled with world-class talents. The sport now is just a shadow of its former self with teams like Solomon Islands and Vanuatu often being too good for Fiji whereas, in the 1980s, as Dyer says, Fiji would beat these countries 10-0 and 6-0. Emigration and the attractions of 7s and 15s rugby have made major inroads into the health and vitality of Fiji soccer. But it is emigration and the empty seats in the stands which sadden me the most. And I no longer live in Fiji. I am part of the problem whereas before I was a part of the solution. Maybe I can atone for my past decisions through scholarship and my occasional trips back to the islands. For the second author, he is proud to live in Ba Town and to support the legendary Ba soccer team, which has brought so much pride to this isolated heartland town for two generations now. He also revels in the inter-ethnic unity and bonding which soccer creates in the Western Fiji region.

Living On Overseas as a Saint-of-the-Homeland

In this article, we have reviewed and contextualized one famous match from Fiji soccer’s history: the November 1988 World Cup Qualifier between Australia and Fiji. In relation to this game, we argue that Fiji was the better team on the day, in its 1-0 win over Australia, and so the victory over Australia was neither hollow nor undeserved. However, during that era, Australia was the better team overall as it won the vast majority of games played between the nations.

“Gesturing elsewhere” might seem like just a trendy way to describe the copy-catting of overseas practices and influences. It is not that at all. It describes a situation where, feeling marginalized to some extent locally, a group of aficionadas; whether it be Death / Thrash fans or soccer fans, separate themselves from other local influences and local sources of prestige (reggae fandom in the case of the Balinese Death / Thrashers and rugby in the case of Fiji soccer fans). Feeling isolated, they withdraw into themselves and gain meaning and identity less from local mainstream sources and more from overseas specialized sources. Within the local group this is how subcultural capital is awarded. It is knowledge of foreign esoteric practices that count most within the local scene. Hence Fiji soccer fans watch and debate top-tier matches from Europe and see their local set-up within the context of the global game.
rather than something which is a source of meaning or validation in, of and by itself. This enhances, rather than diminishes, their love for Fiji soccer; it gives it a global context.

“Offshore memory” is a new concept introduced in this article. It reveals a new and unexpected source of validation for the local soccer scene. Indo-Fijian emigrants do not generally forget the Fiji Islands or Fiji soccer after emigration; in fact, in many cases, they love them more as they begin to romanticize their own pasts growing up in Fiji. Fiji soccer stars of the 1980s become “saints-of-the-homeland” who are recalled in overseas discourses when Indo-Fijians meet overseas as Indo-Fijian emigrants. There are large concentrations of Indo-Fijians in the outer south-western suburbs of Sydney, Australia, around Liverpool; in Auckland, New Zealand; in Vancouver, Canada; and in San Francisco, U.S.A. It is very similar to how Scottish emigrants to Australia, Canada, and the U.S. remain fans of Scottish clubs, including Celtic, Rangers, Aberdeen, Dundee United, and a host of other “wee” teams. However, that case is probably less remarkable than the case of Indo-Fijians, given that knowledge of and interest in Fiji soccer outside of Fiji is a rare thing other than through and in the memories of the Diaspora. By contrast, many people with no ancestral connections to Scotland follow Scottish clubs.

Acknowledgements

We express thanks to Dr. Mohit Prasad for starting the ball rolling on academic studies into Fiji soccer and Professor Narendra Reddy for giving the first author weekly afternoons off work so as to research this study during 2014-2015. We also want to thank Mr. Bobby Tikaram for his kindness, advice, information, and loan of Fiji soccer publications; Ambassador Kamlesh Arya; Henry Dyer; Dr. Raymond Fong; Anare Tuidraki; and the late Jai Chandra. We would also like to thank the Editor, Dr. Carly Adams, for her kind advice.
### Table 1 – List of interviewees and the key matches in which they played

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Raymond Fong</td>
<td>Nadi M.D.(^a)</td>
<td>07-24-2014</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bobby Tikaram</td>
<td>Nadi V.P.(^b)</td>
<td>08-14-2014</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Henry Dyer</td>
<td>Nadi &amp; Fiji(^c)</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Meli Vuilabasa</td>
<td>Ba &amp; Fiji</td>
<td>06-02-2015</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Inia Bola</td>
<td>Ba &amp; Fiji</td>
<td>06-17-2015</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Semi Tabaiwalu</td>
<td>Ba &amp; Fiji</td>
<td>06-20-2015</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Savenaca Waqa</td>
<td>Nadi &amp; Fiji</td>
<td>08-27-2015</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Julie Sami</td>
<td>Ba &amp; Fiji</td>
<td>10-01-2015</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Lote Delai</td>
<td>Ba &amp; Fiji(^d)</td>
<td>10-15-2015</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Pravin Sharma</td>
<td>FGWU(^d)</td>
<td>10-15-2015</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Dr. Raymond Fong was Nadi Soccer Association’s Medical Doctor in 1982. As at 2015, he was working as a General Practitioner on Ashram Road, Nadi Town Center.

\(^b\) Mr. Bobby Tikaram was Nadi Soccer Association Vice-President in 1982. As at 2014-2015, Tikaram was retired from the workforce and living near Nadi.

\(^c\) Henry Dyer also played for Lautoka Blues in the mid-1980s in between his two stints with Nadi. His first senior club game was for Bobby Tikaram’s Airport Soccer Club in the Nadi Association against Blues Soccer Club in 1981. In 2014-2015 Dyer was serving as assistant headman and village council member at Nakavu Village, Nadi.

\(^d\) Mr. Pravin Sharma was the president of the Fiji General Workers’ Union (FGWU) as at October 2015. Lote Delai worked for Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC).
Table 2– Fiji versus Australia, Prince Charles Park, Nadi, November 26, 1988 (WCQ)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiji (0) 1</th>
<th>Australia (0) 0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ravuama Madigi 67.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Venue:</strong> Prince Charles Park, Nadi.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Referee:</strong> Gary Fleet (New Zealand).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Crowd:</strong> 8,000.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manager:</strong> Billy Singh (Fiji).</td>
<td>Frank Arok (Australia).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Gabriel Singh; and Ozfootball.net.
Table 3 – Top-ten countries accessing the *Nadi Legends Club* blog (as at April 3, 2020)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Last month - country</th>
<th>Last month – page-views</th>
<th>All-time – country</th>
<th>All-time - page-views (2014-2020)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S.A.</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>U.S.A.</td>
<td>40,989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkmenistan</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>10,478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>9,070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>9,069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>5,627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>4,535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>3,881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1,548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>1,448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total page-views</strong></td>
<td><strong>765</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total page-views</strong></td>
<td><strong>95,788</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Blog URL: [www.nadilegendsclub.blogspot.com](http://www.nadilegendsclub.blogspot.com)
Notes


2. Strange, “Reading Language as a Historical Source,” 197.


6. Although the Fiji national-league was essentially amateur in the 1980s, the Fiji soccer historian Mohit Prasad argues that the elite game could be called “semi-professional” by 1999. Mohit Prasad, The History of Fiji Football Association 1938-2013 (Suva: Fiji Football Association, 2013), 100, 165.


14. Ibid., 54.
15. Ibid., 56.
16. Ibid., 24-25.
18. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
26. This article draws in part upon the previously-published article by the same authors, Kieran James and Yogesh Nadan, “Fiji Soccer History 1980–1989: A Philosophical and Sociological Analysis,” *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 6, no. 1 (2019): 1-19. We thank the Editor for her kindness in allowing us to draw upon this article.
27. Indo-Fijian émigrés living in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States’ continued interest in and affection for Fiji soccer (as also evidenced by teams and associations forming in those countries using the names of Fiji teams) might surprise some people. However, it achieves a similar purpose which popular music can achieve (according to George Lipsitz), i.e. it “plays an important role in building solidarity within and across immigrant communities,” in the face of, to cite Andy Bennett, “racial exclusion and intolerance.” George Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism and the Poetics of Place* (London: Verso, 1994), 126; Andy Bennett, “Editorial: Popular Music and Leisure,” *Leisure Studies* 24, no. 4 (2005): 333-342.
30. Sources for November 17 (versus New Zealand) and November 19, 1988 (versus New Zealand) match results: Prasad, *The History of Fiji Football Association*, 116; RSSSF website
31. There were five Sami brothers: Narend (eldest), Sunil, Kamal, Julie, and Vimal (youngest). Of these five, all but Sunil played for Ba while Julie and Vimal also played for Fiji and Kamal for Fiji Youth. These Sami brothers should not be confused with the other set of Sami brothers which included the Labasa player Anand. Julie Sami, interview with author, October 1, 2015, Ba Town, Ba Province, notes in


34. Henry Dyer, interview with author, April 9, 2015, Nadi, Ba Province, notes in possession of author.


37. Savenaca Waqa, interview with author, August 27, 2015, Namotomoto Village Extension, Ba Province, notes in possession of author.

38. Julie Sami, interview.


42. Gabriel Singh, “Ba Magic lifts Fiji to Victory,” 32.


45. Thompson, *One Fantastic Goal*, 201.

46. Singh, “Ba Magic lifts Fiji to Victory,” 32.


48. Rewa’s last IDC win, prior to the 2001 victory, was in 1972 (i.e. one generation previously).


51. Meli Vuilabasa, interview with author, June 2, 2015, Ba Town, Ba Province, notes in possession of author.
52. Baulch, “Gesturing Elsewhere?”
53. Ibid., 195-196.
54. Note that this is a different process from a simple “outpost-of-cultural-imperialism” (or “copycatting-of-the-West”) thesis which inaugural Indonesian president Sukarno once invoked, according to Sen and Hill, to explain the negative (in his view) impact of Western rock music in Indonesia. Krishna Sen and David T. Hill, Media, Culture and Politics in Indonesia (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 166.
55. Meli Vuilabasa, interview.
58. Appana, “Cultural Obstacles to Attaining MDGs,” 35; Appanna and Abbott, Race, Military Coups and Economic Reform, 13, 40, 56.