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Chapter

Imprisonment and Punishment in Fiji and the Links to Narrative Styles and Christian Culture

Kieran Edmond James

Abstract

Based on my extensive interviews with ex-football star Henry Dyer, I explain and contextualise the following events so as to illustrate how discipline and punishment worked in the Western Fiji towns from 1985 up until the present: the imprisonment of Dyer and his escape and recapture during the military coup year of 1987; Dyer’s removal from the captaincy and the Fiji team to play Australia in November 1988, due to his alleged involvement in criminal activities; Dyer jumping the stadium fence to avoid police before a national-league game at Lautoka; and Dyer’s recent release from court with the case dismissed. Also covered is: an Indigenous villager’s theft of money from a Chinese gangster. The main findings are as follows: Even as a criminal, you are still marked as an Indigenous Fijian, via the non-mechanical approach, and hence are always an insider and subject to rehabilitation logic. Loopholes are retained, in the interests of fraternity and the awareness that, in Western Fiji, remote and thinly-populated as it is, people tend to know each other and so justice should be specifically-tailored. The strong Christian foundation of culture means that ex-prisoners will often couch their quest narratives in terms of suffering and redemption.

Keywords: Christian culture, cultural criminology, Fiji Islands, imprisonment, narrative styles, political prisoners, punishment, rehabilitation, Western Fiji

1. Introduction

This chapter looks at a number of events and encounters in the life of assistant village headman and ex-football (soccer) star, Henry Dyer, that involve alleged criminality and, in some cases, gaol time. The aim is to investigate and interrogate how imprisonment, discipline, and punishment operated within Western Fiji from 1985 to the present day, and to reflect upon how the narratives used by Dyer highlight redemptive suffering, consistent with the Christian/Methodist culture of the Indigenous Fijian peoples. The method is a set of intensive personal interviews conducted with Dyer over the period May 2014 to April 2015. The interviews were primarily designed to produce a text for Dyer’s memoirs, which were eventually published in book form in 2023 [1], but have also been used for the purpose of journal articles with his permission.
I explain and contextualise the following events so as to illustrate how discipline and punishment worked in the Western Fiji towns from about 1985 until the present day: (a) The imprisonment of Dyer and his escape and recapture during the military coup year of 1987; (b) Dyer’s removal from the captaincy and the Fiji team to play Australia in Nadi in November 1988, due to his alleged involvement in alleged criminal activities; (c) Dyer jumping the stadium fence to avoid police before a national-league game at Lautoka’s Churchill Park; and (d) Dyer’s recent release from court with the case dismissed. Also covered is: (e) an Indigenous Fijian villager’s theft of money from a Chinese gangster en route from Nadi to Suva. Then follows a discussion section and lastly a conclusion.

That Dyer can now be elected as village headman at Nakavu Village, Nadi, shows that the villagers regard Indigenous village life as being a separate realm from town life and that they are not overly concerned by Dyer’s breaking of town-based, European-origin criminal laws. They may also be implementing Christian culture through playing their sanctioned role by forgiving Dyer after he has played his sanctioned role in terms of redemptive suffering ([2], p. 367f). Since Christian/Methodist culture is deeply embedded in Indigenous Fijian life, it is expected that his narrative took that form since a narrative is invariably told in a way that satisfies the culturally-based needs and preferences of both the storyteller and the hearers. The hearers included not only those present after his 1987 prison stay, but those he imagined, during the interview sessions in 2014–2015, would later come to read his website and later on the physical book. He had an awareness that he was writing for posterity and also to set the record straight.

I also conclude that gaps were allowed and encouraged in the administration of justice so that it did not follow a mechanical, procedureist, modernist approach but allowed for individual discretion and informality, a ‘criminality of informality’ ([3], p. 3) in a way. Inside the sparsely-populated Western Fiji area, where Lautoka and Nadi had fewer than 50,000 inhabitants each in this era, people generally knew each other, from within Indigenous kinship networks and/or sporting and school networks, and so the punishment was tailored and personal. It was flexible enough to respond to such things as the prisoner’s attitude and demeanour, the prison officers’ personal feelings about the prisoner, the way the prison officers wanted to play out their roles in relation to that particular prisoner, and the nature of the relationships that emerged between prison officers and prisoner. When all were Indigenous Fijians, Christian culture helped to script the roles that they were to play so that tough love, followed by forgiveness, could be acted out by the officers, in response to suffering, humility, repentance, conviction, and reorientation on the part of the prisoner. The rights-based attitude of the Western nations was never acceptable in this former British colony, and the emphasis remains on duties and responsibilities instead, within the context of the Christian idea that change must come from the heart. In terms of Arthur W. Frank’s categorisation of narrative types, we have quest narrative rather than restitution or chaos [4]. If we analyse the narratives, they might be termed (accounts of) redemptive suffering. However, the late British Anglican evangelical minister John Stott ([2], pp. 367–368) pointed out in The Cross of Christ that while the Roman Catholics have a theological doctrine of redemptive suffering, the Protestant understanding, the dominant one in Fiji, is that suffering can bring important spiritual benefits, but only Christ’s death is literally redemptive, in terms

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1 In 1986 the population of Lautoka was 39,000 and in 1996 almost 43,000, but it is not clear exactly how the boundaries of the urban area were defined at either of those censuses.
of changing one’s spiritual position from ‘outcast’ and ‘alien and stranger’ to forgiven citizen of the Kingdom of God.

In regards to Foucault, he talked about programmes, technologies, and strategies of power/knowledge [5]. Significantly, the fact that strategies very often fail and do not achieve their intended aims can be easily incorporated or re-incorporated into power/knowledge systems ([5], pp. 246–258). In the case of Western Fiji, there are failures in programmes and strategies due to lack of money, lack of expertise and academic training, corruption, laziness, and a lack of caring, but also gaps and weaknesses are permitted and encouraged both out of benevolence and to give the officer on-the-spot discretion to modify his or her actions in response to his or her own beliefs or whims and the changes observed in the prisoner’s attitude and behaviour. These can be viewed as being within the realm of tactics. So, strategies are never firmly fixed in advance, mechanical, or watertight - they retain an irony and humour, but also are implemented with an attitude and ambience of patience and forbearance.

The fact that Dyer was a football star and that his crimes were against the property of Fiji Indian shopowners (he had robbed jewellery stores afterhours in Lautoka and Nadi) also saw a more tolerant and benevolent attitude where he was seen as a naughty person who nonetheless saw robberies as a way to overcome his financial poverty. The Indigenous Fijian prison officers also perceived that he was vexed by Fiji Indian wealth, a not uncommon perception among the Indigenous Fijians who see themselves as the customary and moral landowners of the Fiji Islands. All of these things suggest rebellion against the logic of imported modernity and the alienation of human beings in the face of laws and technology [6, 7].

The (qualitative) methodology involved, firstly, 20 face-to-face interviews with Henry Dyer held in Nadi City Centre between May 2014 and April 2015. There were 20 individual sessions lasting about 3 hours each which means that total interview hours were about 60. The interviews were somewhere between what we term semi-structured and unstructured. Although designed to form the contents of the memoir book, they were also designed to give me an adequate knowledge of Dyer’s personal life history and his football career as well as an adequate knowledge of Fiji soccer history covering the period of Dyer’s senior career, 1981 through to early 1990s. I am a white foreigner who arrived in Fiji only in May 2013 so I had limited knowledge of Fiji football and had not seen Dyer play. Method was between semi-structured and unstructured because I allowed Dyer free rein to talk on a weekly topic area of his choosing and I would only ask questions to gain more information or to clarify a point. Unstructred was deemed most suitable due to my lack of prior knowledge on the topics explored. For complex or sensitive points, I would read the sentences back to Dyer and we would together agree upon suitable final wording. Dyer approved each interview transcript and sometimes suggested amendments. There was also participant-observation where I visited Namoli Village (Lautoka) and Nakavu Village (Nadi) to attend family and village functions. I was a guest at the 2014 Fiji Football Association Veterans’ Dinner held in Nadi in October 2014. During the interviews, I became aware of Dyer’s gaol term and his alleged criminal activities and so this chapter focuses on this particular aspect of his life in line with this book’s aims and scope. Between June and December 2015, Dyer and I together interviewed five ex-Ba players and two ex-Nadi players. These were the two top domestic football teams of the first half of the 1980s. These interviews took around 3 hours each and were held in players’ homes, Ba River foreshore, Ba Central Club, and Ba rugby ground. Overall, we interviewed six players who played in the famous 1982 Inter-district Championship (IDC) final between Ba and Nadi, which is 27% of the two teams, and I believe that
this was a reasonable result given that some ex-players have died while others have emigrated. Secondary sources were also consulted, including back issues of the Fiji Times, from 1982 to 1988, and Fiji football books from the 1980s kindly provided to me by Mr. Bobby Tikaram, a former Airport Soccer Club and Nadi Soccer Association president and administrator. Dyer and I agreed early on that I would only consult past newspapers after all interviews were done because then my knowledge base would be better and I could approach the newspapers in a more targeted fashion. I accessed newspapers at the Fiji Times office in Suva in November 2015.

The events described in the sections below were chosen because they relate most specifically to the concepts of imprisonment, discipline, and punishment in Western Fiji. These incidents emerged during the interview sessions, and opened my eyes fully to Dyer’s off-field activities, which had also coloured his reputation and limited his later opportunities to get involved in football coaching or administration. The chapter is structured in such a way that it follows a roughly chronological order, from 1987 to the present day. The Chinese gangster story dates to the early 2000s and is the only section slightly out of date order. This story has no football context and can be viewed almost as an appendix to the other results. My sections are as follows: (2) The imprisonment of Dyer and his escape and recapture during the military coup year of 1987; (3) Dyer’s removal from the captaincy and the Fiji team to play Australia in Nadi in November 1988, due to his alleged involvement in alleged criminal activities; (4) Dyer jumping the stadium fence to avoid police before a national-league game at Lautoka; and (5) Dyer’s recent escape from court with the case dismissed. Also covered is: (6) an Indigenous Fijian villager’s theft of money from a Chinese gangster. The chapter ends with a discussion section, followed by a conclusion section.

2. Escape, rearrest, and release from prison

Dyer was imprisoned in Lautoka during the year of Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka’s military coups, 1987. He was imprisoned for jewellery store robberies and especially for the robbery of a store located on Lautoka’s Vitogo Parade and directly opposite the Churchill Park stadium where Dyer had performed some of his footballing exploits. As Dyer explains it:

I was imprisoned for 15 months for the charge of breaking-and-entering into a duty-free shop opposite the Churchill Park Hockey Grounds close to Jamnadas. Today it is Bargain Box opposite the Hockey Grounds (which has developed now as Tappool’s). I was given a chance by the magistrate then. He asked me to plead guilty and he would give me a suspended sentence. However, I thought that I would be letting down my two other mates and betraying them. I thought I would give it a go to fight the case. We did not have a lawyer for the case. I believe that our sentence was very lenient given the value of the goods we had taken from the shop.

Dyer adjusted to the prison routine and spoke about how there was significant tension in the city and the region due to the military coups. The prisoners in there for regular, garden-variety crimes, rather than in connection with the coups, told each other to be extremely careful and restrained because of the tense atmosphere and the presence of officers armed with guns. It seems that the main preoccupation within the prison during these key moments of Fijian history was with events relating to the coups. Prisoners associated with the coups were the main objects of the
prison officers’ attention so that garden-variety criminals were either almost ignored or regarded as second-class and less relevant. These events, and the associated tense atmosphere, led to the prisoners regulating their own behaviour, which was what Foucault maintained was the goal of modernist-era institutions.

Dyer demonstrated his remarkable physical fitness and bodily agility by climbing over two high prison fences, a feat that he claims remains legendary today in Western Fiji and especially among prison officers and ex-cons. His body can be classified as a disciplined body, disciplined body self ([8], p. 265; [9], pp. 305, 317), or a disciplined and dominating body ([10], p. 32), the body that is naturally talented and fine-tuned through training and nutrition. It is also the image that an elite sportsperson carries around, about her or his own body, and it is the destruction of this image through injury that can be a major source of trauma and mental anguish. Dyer hides in the sugarcane field, but was spotted that very day by a Fiji Indian woman who reported Dyer’s presence to the authorities. As Dyer recounts the story:

I escaped from Block 3 at Natabua Prison. This is a fenced block so it was like a prison within the prison. I climbed over two fences with the barbed wire without help because I was so fit. I somersaulted over the barbed wire at the top of the fences without any cuts or bruises or tears to my shirt. I got caught four hours later in a cane-field outside the prison campus because I was waiting for dark. I did not know that there was a lady who saw me head for the cane-fields as I jumped the fence. She informed the authorities that I had headed for the cane-fields. That is how they got me. I got injured when they arrested me as we all know that is what you get for escaping from custody.

He was beaten up by prison officers after his capture, but he presents this as to be expected, because of his escape. He takes the beatings as divinely-ordained punishments and, in the telling of his narrative, he holds no bitterness towards the officers nor does he try to initiate a rights discourse that would centre on the infringement of his rights. As Dyer says:

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

Dyer was able to secure release to play for Nadi in an Inter-district Championship (IDC) tournament, as the then Nadi president George Karan negotiated on his behalf with the prison, which again shows the flexibility and pragmatism of the Fiji justice system. Later, he was released early as an Extra-Mural Prisoner (EMP), meaning he could serve the rest of his sentence outside with a community, church or government institution.

After his release, the officers, and a prison major, wish him well and advise him to stay on the straight and narrow path of moral uprightness. He expresses appreciation for their guidance and advice and mentions that the officer talks about Dyer’s future in terms of his future within the game of football. They honour Dyer’s football talents and achievements and do not insist on attaching to him the label of con/ex-con to the exclusion of kinder tags. In Dyer’s words:
There was a major called Major Macu (pronounced 'Mathu'). He has retired now and resides in Ba. He used to advise me on what life was all about and how some of the inmates had spent most of their lives in prison. After escaping from prison they had committed other crimes or been charged for other crimes which they had not committed. They could not get out of the offences because they had pleaded guilty to them perhaps because of beatings or because they did not know the law. He advised me not to escape again but to look ahead in life as I had a lot of talent.

And yet, in future situations, we see the football authorities holding Dyer’s known criminal status as a Sword of Damocles, ready to strike him down if he puts a foot out of line or does not do their bidding. In fact, they take advantage of this status by giving him extra onerous tasks that other players are not given and he is expected to quietly and faithfully execute these tasks to their satisfaction and not complain about them. Hence the network of power/knowledge continues on, deliberately tapping into and trading on his ex-prisoner status so as to make use of him and control him in self-centred and cunning ways that conform to many people’s impression of lawyers. (The manager of the Lautoka association or district team and his employer at the time were both Fiji Indian Muslim lawyers).

I have seen how labelling practices still operate in everyday contexts as part of almost subconscious ritualistic behaviour. For example, groups of ex-prisoners sometimes drink on grasslands in front of or adjacent to the Lautoka Club or on the ocean foreshore. As Dyer and I have walked towards the club, he has sometimes encouraged me to give ten Fiji dollars to his ex-prisoner friends so that they will not continue to disturb us by asking for money. The concern was always so that we could gain quicker access to the Lautoka Club rather than to facilitate the street- and park-drinking of Dyer’s old prison compatriots. This is not to say that there was no longer any genuine bond or affection between Dyer and the other ex-prisoners. It was more that their disorganised and drunken presence was hindering our quick and easy access to the Lautoka Club. Either these people could not afford to drink at the club or they had been banned from the club or they preferred to stay among their own group well outside the club’s institutional and disciplinary gaze [11–13]. It could be that any two of these factors were operating together or, even more probably, all three factors were in play. The last-mentioned reason also suggests learned guilt and shame as if the street- and park-drinkers had internalised that they had been permanently shut off from the rest of society and labelled as deviant and beyond hope. Hence, they no longer cared about the social appropriateness of their own behaviour ([14], p. 80) or how they might be perceived by passers-by. Dyer’s football-star and assistant village headman status had raised him, in his own eyes and in the eyes of others, to a status far above that of his former compatriots (especially within Indigenous Fijian society and among Fiji Indian football fans of his generation, although this latter status was contestable and open to debate and dispute within different spatial contexts).

The racial aspects of Fiji society come into play too since the ruling board members and most patrons at the Lautoka Club are Fiji Indians whereas the street- and park-drinkers are Indigenous Fijians. The higher status of Fiji Indians (37.5% of the population) relative to Indigenous Fijians (56.8% of the population) within town-space (as opposed to village-space) helps to strengthen the status gap between the drinkers inside the club walls and those outside. And the ex-prisoner status of the street- and park-drinkers clearly adds to the difference in status and also to the guilt and shame internalised by those people that received the ten dollars from us. There was a supermarket very close by where the group of Indigenous ex-prisoners could
go to buy a bottle of wine or spirits that would be much cheaper to purchase than drinks within the Lautoka Club that was widely known to be a middle-class Fiji Indian bastion. The framed photos on the club walls of long-dead ethnic-Indian men, in suits and ties, reinforce the respectable image that the club owners and members want to maintain. The stern Indian faces continue to gaze over the space inside the club and cast silent judgement on all the events that they witness. In that way, they live on, and continue to remind people of the values and the ambience that they expect.

3. Dyer being removed from the Fiji team for the Australia game

The events recorded here were not common knowledge prior to them being posted on our website in 2014–2015 and then being reproduced in the physical book in 2023 [1]. Dyer, by now considered an experienced old-hand football-wise (at twenty-six-years-old), had been released from prison by November 1988. Several years before, he had been recruited by neighbouring association (district) team, Lautoka Blues, which had taken over from Nadi and Ba as the best team in Fiji by the mid-1980s. In fact, they won the league proper in 1984, and the two other annual trophies available to Premier League teams at least once in the period from 1984 to 1986 ([15], pp. 90–91). Fans were jubilant in the Sugar City of Lautoka to see their team back winning multiple trophies as they had been the standout team of Fiji for much of the 1950s and 1960s before falling on harder times. Dyer was excited and honoured to be appointed as team captain of the Fiji national team for the game against regional heavyweights, Australia, to be held in Nadi on 26 November 1988. This game was part of a home-and-away set of ties that were part of the qualification process for the 1990 World Cup to be held in Italy.

Unfortunately, Dyer was then removed from the team as well as obviously losing the captaincy. As Dyer recounts the story:

On the eve of the Australian game (Fiji versus Australia), the president, Dr Sahu Khan, came up to me and said: 'Are you ready to lead the team?' You could tell from his countenance that he was coming to convey good news. I was happy to be told that I would captain the team so I took the news quietly, and with dignity and pride, as this was to be the biggest game of my life. It was great that I could hear the message directly from the president and not from one of the other members of the management team. I kept this quiet in my heart until, not long after this, President Sahu Khan comes back to me shaking his head in disbelief that I was to be dropped from the team and that he was to tell me the news. He did not ask me any questions as he had known or been told from the management as to why I had been dropped.

The background was that his Lautoka manager, the late Shah Nawaz Khan, was working for a solicitor, Haroon Shah. Shah had asked Dyer to locate a rental vehicle hired out by an Indigenous Fijian guy. He found the vehicle in Suva (the capital city of Fiji, located on the southern coast of the main island), but he was a week late in

\footnote{James [16] puts forward an argument that Lautoka’s decline since 1970 mirrored community anxieties within the city about the decline of the sugar industry and high rates of Fiji Indian emigration since the 1987 coups. There have been four military coups in Fiji history - the Sitiveni Rabuka coups of 1987 (twice), the George Speight coup of 2000, and the Frank Bainimarama coup of 2006.}
returning it to Western Fiji. There were rumours about a robbery that took place in Suva but these were not substantiated or proven. As Dyer explains:

>This was because our Lautoka team manager, Shah Nawaz 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 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.

Due to the allegations Dyer lost his place in the team, but he was keen to point out in his narrative, recorded for his memoir book, that he took the decision with good grace, consistent again with the Christian outlook expected in the islands. The replacement captain was his Lautoka Blues teammate, the late Pita Dau. Dyer cheered on a surprise Fiji win from the spectators’ side of the fence. Young Ba and former Fiji youth team striker, Ravuama Madigi, brother of an older Ba striker, Inia Bola, scored for Fiji in the 67th minute and the island nation held on to win the game 1–0 ([15], pp. 48, 94; [17]). Sadly, for Fijian sporting fans, Australia won the return match, held a week later in Australia, 5–1 and Fiji was not able to progress further in the competition ([15], p. 94). Dyer tells the story and here we see that he was not happy about the task he had been asked to perform, or the outcome, but he took it all in good grace:

>My teammate from Lautoka replaced me to become captain (Pita Dau). I can say that they used me to do a hard job but did not treat me with a professional and responsible attitude. However, nonetheless, Fiji won against Australia. I was happy to be there at Prince Charles Park to witness the game. I was also happy that Pita Dau, who was my teammate, was able to captain the team in my place. The highlight of that match was the cross from the left-flank by Lote Delai to Ravuama Madigi who scored a spectacular goal.

Although we are talking in this case about Dyer’s relationships with secular (sporting) authorities, and not the judiciary or prison officers, the case remains relevant for what it reveals about important aspects of Fiji society, especially the way in which ex-prisoners may be treated. Why was Dyer given the task of recovering the rental vehicle from Suva, which is a five-hour journey by public bus from Lautoka? Why was he assigned the task and not someone else? In his own words, it was because he was known to have ‘a lot of friends on the streets in all walks of life’ ([1], p. 42). While this can be interpreted innocently, and nothing less would be expected of a national-team football star, then or now, the further implication is that he was known to consort with criminal types. This allegation was held above his head like a Sword of Damocles. As a result, Shah Nawaz Khan and Haroon Shah (who were lawyers in their day jobs) were able to allocate difficult and tedious tasks to Dyer, knowing that, with his contacts and intelligence, he could probably achieve them and also that his ex-prisoner status could be used against him. He was on what is colloquially-termed a hiding to nothing or a no-win situation. If he found the car, he had just done his duty, and it
would raise question marks about his continued associations with criminal types. If he failed to obtain the car, he could be accused of negligence or laziness or corruption. Clearly, the task was a poisoned chalice. But, due to his humility, and the hierarchical and feudal type relationships in Fiji back then ([18], p. 86), he decided to commit himself to the task. His mistake, he admitted to me in conversation in 2014, was that he held on to the car for a week too long and a robbery was known or believed to have taken place during that allegedly suspicious time interval. It also meant that he missed a week of match preparation with the team back in Western Fiji.

This (rental car) case also reveals how labelling and stigmatisation of ex-prisoners was very real back in Fiji in 1988 and is probably still a regular feature of social life. The person cannot rise above the label and hence the community continues on with the ‘punishment’ of the ex-prisoner after his or her prison spell is over. The person never gets fully set free from his or her past transgressions. They always continue to be on the public record as a black mark next to that person’s name. Secular authorities can use the ex-prisoner status as a source of power/knowledge in order to press the person down and require them to commit to extra tasks. By agreeing to commit to the extra tasks, they effectively confirm their own second-class citizen, pariah status. Part of the motive of Dyer in pursuing the book was to clear his name and present his side of the story so that he could be judged fairly by posterity. There is some race/ethnicity-based animosity arguably revealed in this story too as the team management was controlled by Fiji Indians, the jewellery store robberies had been committed against Fiji Indian-owned businesses, and Dyer was a part-European of mixed Indigenous Fijian and white British heritage. In the Indigenous Fijian village networks, however, he has risen to village headman status (after a vote of villagers), showing that punishments in the town-based criminal law system are not necessarily a barrier to achieving a key position within village leadership. This could be due to both Christian forgiveness and the pragmatic awareness that none of Dyer’s actual or alleged criminal activities were conducted within village boundaries or against Indigenous people.

The small population of Western Fiji (back then Lautoka and Nadi were the region’s two largest towns and they had populations of below 50,000 each) meant too that someone’s life history and criminal record were widely known and remembered, resentments tended to simmer, and it was hard for someone to disappear off the grid by beginning life afresh somewhere else. For the poor people, emigration was never an option and a football star retains a high profile locally for the remainder of his or her life.

Although it could have been an oversight, and my intention is certainly not to cast any aspersions on the author, it is interesting and perhaps revealing that Dyer’s name is one of the few missing from Mohit Prasad’s official history of Fiji Football [19]. Other stars of that era of similar profile and with a record of equal achievement are named at least once in the book. Was this omission a reflection, possibly subconscious, of the negative label that Western Fiji society had assigned to Dyer because of his ex-prisoner status? Since the business and football communities are essentially Fiji Indian-controlled, was the fact that Dyer was perceived to be a robber of Fiji Indian stores ultimately held against him as a mark of intragroup solidarity [20]? Racial or ethnic politics are an important and sometimes frustrating aspect of Fijian social life, with each community and sub-community (e.g., South Indian, North Indian, Gujarati, Sangam, and Arya Samaj among the Indians) holding on valiantly to its ethnic identification and associated cultural norms and histories. Boundary-policing and the situation where every community demands its rights, within the sphere of everyday life as well as in the political arena, can be a source of empowerment, as well
as vexation and occasionally resentment. There is a postcolonial racial hierarchy that still exists with whites at the top ([21], p. 853; [14], p. 39), part-Europeans probably second and then the Fiji Indians and Chinese. Because they have their own hierarchies within Indigenous society, the Indigenous people switch from indifference to irritation when they perceive that the broader society does not assign a high value to them, respecting them only as sportspersons and an exotic attraction to bring the tourists in and entrance them via their sociability. Dyer’s status as a part-European has always been ambiguous within Fiji society, and arguably threatening to the Fiji Indians, as opposed to those other Indigenous Fijians who present as Indigenous and outwardly look black.

4. Escaping over the fence at Churchill Park

By the late 1980s, Dyer was an experienced and well-known rogue-about-town, as well as being a more seasoned and mature football player. Dyer had left Lautoka Blues and returned back to play for Nadi Jetsetters, which helped him logistically as all along he had been living in Nadi.³ He feels that he wasn’t made as welcome by the Nadi administrators the second time around probably because he had spent a few years with the rival team Lautoka. On one occasion, probably in the late 1980s, Nadi’s team was warming up on the field at Lautoka’s Churchill Park stadium before an away game versus Lautoka. The police arrived at the ground to arrest Dyer as he had failed to attend a scheduled court appearance. He was not allowed to play in the game so he made an instant decision to take matters into his own hands. As Dyer tells the story:

We were about to play this match in Lautoka against Lautoka. It was during the Sugar Festival, the Jimmy Ram Pratap Trophy. I was playing for Nadi. I think I was captaining the side that day. It was really funny when the management walked up to us while we were warming up towards the hospital end of Churchill Park. They mentioned that the police had come to them and told them that they had a bench warrant for me because I had not turned up to court. I really had just muddled up the dates so I was waiting for a time to go up to court to find the date again and clear myself. Then I asked the management to ask the cops if they would let me play the game first and then arrest me later after the game so I could go and clear myself at the court later. The management said: ‘no, they are going to take you now!’ So I said to myself that it would be very embarrassing to the team for me to be taken with the Nadi uniform on. I said to the boys: ‘OK, there is only one thing I can do now. I’m going to escape from Churchill Park and go later to clear my name.’ I was not going to give in to be arrested with the uniform on.

Dyer told his Nadi teammates that he did not want to dishonour the green Nadi shirt by being arrested on the field of play. When the team had run over to the hospital end, he handed his shirt to a teammate and climbed the outer fence. On the other side of the fence he was able to make his escape through the crowds attending the annual Sugar Festival on Churchill Park No. 2. Later on, he went back to visit the court and cleared his bench warrant by paying the fine or whatever the punishment was. As Dyer goes on to explain:

³ Lautoka is situated about 30 kilometres north-east of Nadi further up the coast.
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I got away and changed without them [the police] knowing that I had disappeared. They (the police) only knew when they came closer to the playing group and they found out that I had disappeared. Even the management did not know that I had jumped the fence. I had only done this because my conscience told me that it would look bad for me to be arrested with the uniform on. This would have made the team's morale go down. I did it in such a way that the game could carry on without me making a disturbance for the team. I wished the boys the best of luck and asked them to forgive me for what had happened. They said farewell and that they forgave me and we parted in a good way. An attempted arrest at the ground could still happen now for anyone with a bench warrant. It depends on how much trust they have in you and how they look at you. I got back to the Nadi Magistrates' Court on the following day and cleared myself of my bench warrant and luckily I was not arrested by the cops at Lautoka's Churchill Park. Otherwise I would have had an additional charge of escaping from police at the ground.

We see here Dyer's applied ethics in action, a complicated set of internal ethics that led him to make that instant decision to escape from the stadium rather than being arrested while wearing the famous green shirt. Cynical readers might see his action then and his explanation at our 2014–2015 interview as ultimately self-serving and deceitful. It was told in a way that appeared that Dyer appreciated the ironic contradictions involved - an ethical action that led to the police being outwitted - but he appeared to me to also be completely serious when recounting his motivations. Race/ethnicity and class may have had roles to play here. Although the police personnel were probably all or mostly Indigenous Fijians, the players would have been mostly poorer and younger Indigenous lads from the village communities. Dyer, then and now, was clearly very keen to model a life of honour in front of these village lads, some of whom he may have known through customary Indigenous affairs unrelated to football. As Arthur Frank ([4], p. 17) wrote, 'People tell stories not just to work out their own changing identities, but also to guide others who will follow them.' Furthermore, 'The idea of telling one's story as a responsibility to the commonsense world reflects what I understand as the core morality of the postmodern.'

The law enforcement officers are presented in the narrative as over-eager, in the beginning, and then as dim-witted and slow, as Dyer is able to make his escape very easily and then is not caught either among the Sugar Festival crowds or later on. These are inferences or readings that someone might infer from the text, but nowhere in the story are the police personnel outwardly or obviously disrespected. Here, football and village identifications merge, with the police being presented as remote, disconnected others who lacked the respect for the game of football and for the notion of honour by wanting to arrest the captain and a leading player before an important match against the neighbouring team. They are presented as being out-of-sync with Indigenous and football rhythms of life [22]. They (the police personnel) had their own rhythm, which is presented as petty, silly, ill-informed, and characterised by bad timing and poor judgement. Dyer explains that he missed his original court date by accident and the implication is that the police later realised that they had overreacted and hence there was no additional punishment or recompense.

A Christian ethic is arguably presented here in this narrative too, with honour being presented as being Dyer's key concern throughout the event/story ([23], Romans 12:10, Romans 13:7, 2 Corinthians 13:7, 1 Timothy 5:3, 1 Timothy 5:17, 1 Timothy 6:1, 1 Peter 2:12, 1 Peter 2:17). These events may well have caused Dyer's reputational and cultural capital to rise within Indigenous circles as he was able to
present his action in terms of honouring the Nadi shirt and his teammates (and by extension the villages and villagers of the Nadi *vanua*). (*A vanua* is defined as an area that has only one Paramount Chief to whom the various village headmen are accountable.) He asked his teammates to forgive him at the time when he explained the situation to them on the field during the warm-up, and the player who took the shirt back is mentioned as a secondary hero in the story, one who was quick to assist Dyer and who recognised his reputational and cultural capital. The Christian aspect is clear here as well with forgiveness being asked for and being received, both being key aspects of a lived Christian ethics.

5. Recent events

The last time I saw Dyer in the flesh was in July 2019 when I visited Fiji on a one-week holiday trip. He gave me an update on his ongoing court case one fine afternoon as we walked through Nadi City Centre. We said hello to Noah, one of the Nadi street boys whom I had got to know during my three years living in Fiji from 2013 to 2015. Noah’s Gang, in that era, included Boscoe; the Reggae Man Band members, Francis, Jake, and Ben (they used to play a nightly gig at Sitar’s Indian Restaurant in Martintar); another Ben from Nakavu Village; Dyer; and the ‘two Ronnies’. They earned money from hustling tourists and getting them to buy handicrafts at the handicrafts store. This day Dyer told me of his court case that had been postponed for six years or more due to the backlog of cases caused by the Frank Bainimarama military coup of 2006. This particular case may have been postponed for as long as eight or ten years. When Dyer attended court, the presiding magistrate, cheerfully and humorously, and in a typical Fiji eccentric and idiosyncratic style, remarked ‘Well, it looks like that ship has sailed’ and dismissed the case. The case reveals the inefficiencies of the Fiji justice system, but also how a pragmatic and utilitarian ending to the whole affair benefitted Dyer, and saved the magistrate and prison officers significant follow-up work, expense, and administrative effort. The rationale seems to have been that, now as headman of Nakavu Village, Dyer will not wander off anywhere and he can be monitored easily enough without the need to put him behind bars again. The feeling seems to exist that he did his time in the coup year of 1987 and rehabilitation has worked its perfect work upon his mind and soul.

6. The Chinese gangster event

Some time in the early 2000s, prior to the Frank Bainimarama-led coup of 2006, there was a Chinese-owned nightclub in Nadi City Centre. There was an unofficial, informal arrangement, so typical of the Fiji of that era, where some Nadi street boys, who were also villagers, served as security in the nightclub in exchange for beers. There were almost certainly no signed legal employment contracts. A story has been told, to the author, about a Nadi area villager, and a quite influential and well-known one, who was chosen to accompany a Chinese owner of the place on a four-hour car trip from Nadi to Suva. Another villager was also selected. Accommodation had been arranged in Suva and it was expected that the Chinese gangster would later take the villagers back to Nadi.

The Chinese man had a briefcase and a bag with him in the car. The bag contained fake Fiji passports. When he stopped at a petrol station and went to use the toilet, the
two villagers looked inside the briefcase and found that it contained large numbers of $50 notes. They had a quick discussion about what to do. The second villager wanted to take large amounts but the first villager, who told the story to me, urged caution, saying that they should take only $5000 each because then the chance of being discovered would be much reduced. This course of action was agreed upon by the second villager who could see the wisdom in the first villager’s arguments. In Suva, they all separated and the two villagers made their way back to Nadi via Sigatoka.

One day later, the Paramount Chief of the *vanua* (province) arrived at the house of the first villager and made subtle allusions to the missing money. The villager gave him some cash without saying directly where it had come from. But, beyond that, there was no recompense at all. The story may suggest gaps and weaknesses in power/knowledge (5, 11–13), but also that the Chinese man, knowing that he was a foreigner and a member of an ethnic minority group in Fiji (Chinese make up less than 5% of the population) decided that discretion was the better part of valour. He knew that he was vastly outnumbered by the physically-imposing and impressive Indigenous Fijian men of the Nadi region and that money will only take you so far. He knew that he was coming up against a rival system of power/knowledge, an Indigenous Fijian one. Power/knowledge is clearly never complete or all-powerful or all-encompassing and usually various rival sources exist with various different domains and places of influence. Each system has its own strengths and weaknesses, places or aspects of life where it is relatively strong or very strong and other places or aspects of life where it is weaker or very weak ([4], pp. 5, 7; [24], p. 161).

Another example might be how the sport of rugby league exists in the north of England as a rival power/knowledge domain to the sport of football among which it coexists.

In this story, we have criminal activity, very minimal discipline, and no punishment at all, other than perhaps the worry caused by the continued gaze of the (then) Paramount Chief and his business connection, the Chinese gangster. The situation created its own internal and pragmatic equilibrium, a balance of social forces, which, although it may not have left every single party completely satisfied, at least was an outcome that allowed everyone to walk away unscathed. Following John Stuart Mill’s [25] utilitarianism, the final outcome probably maximised the sum of everyone’s happiness or minimised the sum of unhappiness compared to feasible alternatives. As only $5000 each was taken out, out of much more, the Chinese gangster probably felt that he could live with that scenario. It had not cost him too much in either monetary or loss-of-face terms. He may have even quietly respected the first villager who demonstrated considerable restraint and wisdom by not taking more money than $5000 per person when the opportunity to seize more had clearly been available to him. The first villager ended the story on a pragmatic and realistic note: ‘When I mentioned what had happened to my other mates they said that in our type of life chances don’t come by twice or three times. When a chance comes you pick it up and work on it’ (source: interview, 20 November 2014).

7. Narrative life more generally

Dyer was forced to deal with matters of identity at an early age, due to his mixed-race status, the logic of colonialism and postcolonialism, and the race-consciousness of Fiji society. He constructed a narrative for himself that has constantly been updated and changed, responding to setbacks, and looking towards
a future that was always others-conscious and socially-aware ([26], p. 60). Ever since his ancestor married an Englishwoman ([1], p. 12), his identity, like some of his forebears, has encompassed these two ethnic identities, rejecting neither one nor the other [27]. This aspect has made him similar in every context, but also different in every context. His virtuous, altruistic or moral side is based on Christian and Indigenous ideals, while his rebellious side no doubt has some roots in, as well as present-day poverty, the Nadi Paramount Chef’s historic refusal to agree to the secession of Fiji to the British. We are entering tricky and sensitive territory here, but can we assert that Dyer’s European heritage helped instill in him a modernist outlook on the world and a positive view of modernity whereas his Indigenous heritage gave him a more traditional and communitarian approach to life, especially village life? Both outlooks were vital to him, with one side emerging stronger than the other according to context. As an aside, with authors like Giddens ([26], p. 93) asserting that boundary-forming is necessary to pursue a meaningful love relationship, based on equality, how does this gel with Indigenous Fijians living within hierarchies and a communitarian mentality while still having boundaries, especially with the sometimes large numbers of people sharing village houses? Their humility, flexibility, and adaptability would be key features, but also the fact that pragmatism and lived experience always trump ideology so that traditions become subconscious or are even observed ironically or in inverted commas as in ‘this is important to us, but we know the modern world is just out of sight over the hill and our mobile phones and vehicles are part of it. But we are always Indigenous Fijians’. Love can function within hierarchies, too, as hierarchy is not a full description of Indigenous life, and hierarchies allow someone to relax rather than to strive to create an identity; love, like power/knowledge, presumably flows through the gaps between people, between objects. The Fijians are proud to be the Indigenous peoples of Fiji and proud to be the moral landowners. This builds humility as to be the landowners implies a sacred trust.

8. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have looked at the alleged and apparent criminality of Fiji football legend and village headman, Henry Dyer, including his times of punishment and imprisonment, as well as brushes with secular (sporting) authorities. The primary data backing this account consisted of participant-observation in Nadi and Lautoka, Nakavu Village (Nadi), and Namoli Village (Lautoka), and 60 hours of interviews with Dyer designed primarily to provide the content for his memoir book (now published as [1]).

The main findings are as follows: (a) Punishment in Fiji seems pragmatic, almost half-hearted and ironic, in non-political cases, where there is a desire not to move completely, in practice, towards a mechanical type of administration of justice; (b) Even as a criminal, you are still marked as an Indigenous Fijian, via the non-mechanical approach, and hence are always an insider and subject to rehabilitation logic; (c) Loopholes are retained, in the interests of fraternity and the awareness that, in Western Fiji, remote and thinly-populated as it is, people tend to know each other and so justice should be specifically-tailored; and (e) The strong Christian foundation of culture means that ex-prisoners will often couch their quest narratives in terms of suffering and redemption.
We see in Dyer’s imprisonment for a jewellery store robbery how punishment was tailored, in a very pragmatic way, to meet the offender’s situation and character. He was beaten up by officers after his escape attempt, but he does not use a rights-based discourse, preferring instead to tell a quest narrative of redemptive suffering, which will provide a moral platform for his village headmanship. He is constantly aware of the potential future readers and hearers of his stories, and tries to urge them away from a criminal pathway, while nonetheless admitting to a colourful life that was very obviously available and attractive to a Western Fiji football hero of that era. Major Macu and the officers wish him well and aim to help him reintegrate fully into society, both Indigenous and mainstream/sporting. But, the following year, we read of his use by sporting authority figures to undertake a tailored task, to find a lost rental car. Here he is exploited by being sent on a mission (the poisoned chalice) that was trading upon his ex-prisoner status and that would have been almost impossible for others to have performed successfully. Nonetheless, he takes his dropping from the Fiji team for the important Australian match with good grace (and this phrase is used deliberately with its religious/Christian overtones being intended).

Then, after rejoining his original association team, Nadi Jetsetters, Dyer claims that he escaped police during the warm-up to a game by jumping the fence so as to avoid showing dishonour to the famous green Nadi shirt. His narrative here might be viewed cynically, but it fits into the character and values that he wants to identify with and be known for. As Arthur Frank ([4], p. 22) says, even a narrative full of willful omissions is a kind of social truth because it reveals the type of story that the talker desires. The redemptive suffering narrative fits well into a Christian/Methodist culture and hence it is a more perfect fit for an Indigenous village audience than for a Fiji Indian audience and that aspect itself is no doubt also willed and chosen by Dyer.

His loyalties to the Indigenous communities and his mixed-race status together present a conundrum, but also show how he has worked hard in practice in order to resolve it. His village identity is especially important to him and the prison system, although associated with the town-based, European-origin criminal laws, can also be used by Indigenous people as part of their own process of disciplining and then rehabilitating an errant offender. The communal moral landownership of the Fiji Islands is never at stake, and serves as both the ethical backdrop for rehabilitation and the ethical source of all daily striving.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.
Author details

Kieran Edmond James
University of the West of Scotland, Paisley, Scotland, United Kingdom

*Address all correspondence to: kieran.james99@yahoo.co.uk

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