The Oceania region has long been peripheral to the economies and geopolitics of global football. Yet, it contains a range of diverse footballing contexts, and despite geographical isolation has not been insignificant to the global game’s recent power struggles. In this chapter I reveal the dynamics which shaped the emergence and subsequent development of the Oceania Football Confederation (OFC), FIFA’s youngest regional body. I then discuss some of the uneven literature regarding football in Oceania, in particular noting its gaps and silences. Significantly, the smallest of FIFA’s six confederations, and the only one without automatic World Cup qualification, is predominantly made up of nations where football is in the shadow of competing sporting codes – a factor which produces unique dynamics and contexts. I then use the example of Aotearoa New Zealand to explore how football’s presence is contested and patterned by broader sporting and cultural hierarchies in nationally contextual ways. Finally, I conclude with suggestions for future research directions.

The OFC was initially recognised by FIFA in 1966 only as ‘an independent geographical entity’ (Sugden and Tomlinson, 1998), and was conferred full confederation status in 1996, by which time it had grown to 12 member federations. Following the withdrawal of Australia in 2006, it currently includes 11 national affiliates: American Samoa, Cook Islands, Fiji, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Tahiti, Tonga, Vanuatu and three associate members: Kiribati, Niue, and Tuvalu (which is not a FIFA member). In this sense it is constituted of widely varying socio-economic and cultural contexts, poised between small Pacific islands nations and the former white-settler colony of New Zealand. The recent reduction in national affiliates is reflective of the region’s entanglement within the shifting power dynamics of world football.

Roots of the Oceania Football Confederation

The idea of a confederation for the Pacific region, according to OFC histories, was first raised in 1964. Sir Stanley Rous, then FIFA president, Sid Guppy, chairman of the New Zealand Football Association (NZFA) and Jim Bayutti of the Australian Soccer Federation are credited with generating this impetus – spurred by the AFC declining both Australia and New Zealand for membership. After initial discussions in Tokyo, Charles (Charlie) Dempsey was
approached by the NZFA to work with Bayutti to put together the bid and garner support ahead of the next FIFA Congress two years later. They were successful and FIFA subsequently approved the proposal in 1966 with four founding member nations: Australia, Fiji, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea. New Caledonian representatives were also involved but could only be a provisional member as the territory did not have sporting autonomy from France at the time.2

Charlie Dempsey, a Scottish ex-patriot who acted as head of the New Zealand national governing body3 emerged as patriarch of the region. He was appointed OFC Acting Secretary in 1970, following the resignation of Bayutti in preparation for Australia’s planned withdrawal from the OFC in 1972 to join the Asian Football Confederation (AFC). Dempsey was confirmed as Secretary in 1972, and held that role for ten years as the membership of the Confederation fluctuated. Chinese Taipei (Taiwan) resigned from the Asian Confederation and joined the OFC between 1975 and 1989,4 while Australia rejoined the OFC in 1978. Dempsey was elected OFC president in 1982 and served for 18 years overseeing the body’s rise to full confederation status and growth in national association membership. In particular, Dempsey cultivated the growth of the game in the Pacific islands and the affiliations of: Samoa (1986), Vanuatu (1988), Tahiti (1990), Tonga and the Cook Islands (both 1994) and American Samoa (1998).

The initial impetus for the OFC had come largely from Australia and New Zealand, who subsequently dominated the confederation in both the boardroom and on the playing field. Australia appeared in its first World Cup in 19745 and subsequently in 2006, 2010 and 2014. It hosted FIFA U-20 competitions in 1981 and 1993, and Olympic football in 2000. New Zealand has meanwhile appeared in World Cups in 1982 and 2010 and hosted the World Under-17 Championships in 1999 and 2008. This involvement in the wider global game is contrasted with the small Pacific islands nations, none of whom have appeared in a World Cup. These imbalances were highlighted in Australia’s 22–0 defeat of Tonga, and 31–0 defeat of American Samoa in the Oceania World Cup qualifying tournament in 2001. Notwithstanding recent shifts in Australia, the status of football in the region has been characterised by low levels of commercial activity. Consequently, elite playing talent has consistently out-migrated to the core economies of Europe. Prominent examples include ‘pioneers’ such as Wynton Rufer (New Zealand) who enjoyed a lengthy career mainly in Germany, and Craig Johnstone (Australia) who enjoyed a prolific career with Liverpool during the 1980s. A raft of Australians have since played at the highest level in Europe including: Frank Farina, Robbie Slater, Aurelio Vidmar, Paul Okon, Harry Kewell, Mark Viduka, and Mark Bosnich. Additionally, Christian Karembeu (New Caledonia) played in Italy and Marama Vihirua (Tahiti) in France. Notwithstanding Oceania’s peripheral status, Sugden and Tomlinson (1998, 1999) reveal that the region has not been insignificant within recent FIFA geopolitics. In particular Dempsey was a power broker of Oceania voting surrounding the closely fought Blatter–Johannsen struggle to succeed João Havelange for the FIFA presidency during the late 1990s. Oceania in this regard, Sugden and Tomlinson (1998) argue, had previously benefited from Havelange’s alliances with less developed regions. It is in this light that Dempsey’s patronage of Pacific islands football, and the OFC’s Charles J. Dempsey Football Academy in Auckland, New Zealand, opened in 1999, might be seen.6 Despite this, Sugden and Tomlinson (1999) suggest that Dempsey was a supporter of Johannsen and in a close ballot the 11 Oceania votes that he was influential in marshalling (Australia excepted) made him a significant power broker. Dempsey was also subsequently at the centre of a scandal surrounding the third round vote for the venue of the 2006 World Cup. Dempsey’s controversial abstention secured the tournament
Football in Oceania

for Germany over the favourites South Africa amid rumours of bribes and allegations and that Dempsey’s life had been threatened.

As noted above, there is great social, cultural and economic variation within the Oceania region. In particular, there is very little written about Pacific islands football and research is needed to understand the significance of the game throughout the island nations of Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia. In particular, a range of varying colonial legacies have rendered differing postcolonial sporting landscapes across these regions, with netball and basketball courts, gridiron (US football) and rugby (union and league) fields predominating. There is a pressing need to understand both the place of football in these contexts, both in terms of the cultural politics that contour the local game – specifically its relative marginality; and local consumption of the mediated versions of the ‘global’ game.

The cultural politics of football in the white-settler colonies of the antipodes that initially dominated the OFC have taken varying paths. In Australia, where it has usually been called soccer to differentiate from rugby codes and Australian rules, Rowe et al. (1994: 670) note the game ‘has both its own distinct history as a popular sport and also a “mirroring” history, one that illustrates Australia’s various tensions, continuities and discontinuities as a nation’. It is in the context of the latter that Hallinan and Hughson (2009) note the game to have been socio-historically marked as a ‘foreign’, ‘un-Australian’ game, rooted in post-war associations with non-English-speaking ethnic communities. This was evidenced by state leagues and subsequently the national league (established in 1977) clubs being heavily organised around European ethnic affiliations. Of equal importance, however, Hay (2011) argues, it was mired in administrative structural deficiencies that hindered economic growth, with power being held by stakeholders rather than the national governing body (see also Dabscheck, 2007). Hence, the game existed as a semi-professional entity at the relative fringes of the nation’s sporting core that prioritised codes that embodied white-Anglo versions of Australianess such as cricket, and those that resonated with regionalised identities: Australian rules and rugby league. The Anglo-centric national media, Hallinan and Hughson note (2009: 2), ‘ha[d] long maintained distain for ethnic soccer clubs’ evident in the amplification of moral panics around crowd disorder, and the framing of soccer as ‘un-Australian’.

The more recent transformation of the game, such that Hay contends that football is now ‘a major part of the Australian sporting landscape’ (2011: 832) has been entangled with a range of local and global forces: commercial, economic and cultural. Organisationally this was marked by the decommissioning of the national league and the creation of the A-League in its place in 2005 as part of a substantive power shift which saw Soccer Australia replaced by the Football Federation of Australia (FFA) as the governing body (see Hay, 2011). The A-league was established along media–commercial priorities and explicitly rejected the ethnic affiliations of clubs/franchises. In Hallinan and Hughson’s (2009) estimation, the creation of the A-league, specifically the ‘de-ethnicisation’, was symptomatic of assimilationist approaches that characterised John Howard’s right-leaning Australia of the 1990s – a fearful, defensive narrowing of the national imagination which saw soccer redefined within an Anglo-Australian grid of a constrained multiculturalism.

The relative commercial successes of the A-league and subsequent geographical expansion, and the appearance of the national team at World Cups in 2006, 2010 and 2014 subsequent to a return to the Asian Confederation, however, has consolidated an emerging regional football power. Yet Australian football remains peripheral to football’s core European economies, with elite talent continuing to migrate abroad, while ageing European stars migrate to make up the A-leagues ‘marquee’ personnel including recently Alessandro Del Piero, Emile Heskey and Robbie Fowler.
The playing dominance of Australia compared to small Pacific islands nations and New Zealand within the OFC culminated in tensions, which saw them rejoin the AFC in 2006. This tension had stimulated a power struggle within the Oceania federation in which Dempsey’s leadership was challenged by David Hill of the Australian FA. In Sugden and Tomlinson’s (1999) analysis, the Australian desire to join Asia was driven by the unpredictability of the sudden-death play-off system which resulted from Oceania’s ‘half’ World Cup spot which necessitated competing against either Asian or South American qualifiers. Successive losses to Iran and Uruguay to miss the 1998 and 2002 World cup finals had reaffirmed the uncertainties of this system for Australia. While such pragmatic factors were prescient, Hay (2011) argues that the move to the AFC was also entangled with the broader political and economic reorientation of Australia towards Asia and emerging media–sport opportunities that resulted. The departure of Australia left New Zealand as the dominant playing force and, subsequently, opened the door for World Cup qualification. It is to the uniquely contested cultural politics of football in this country, and in particular an appearance at the 2010 World Cup that I now turn.

**The contested presence of football in Aoteora New Zealand**

Football has historically occupied a subordinate status within New Zealand sports space relative to the domineering presence of rival codes. Cricket, rugby league and most notably rugby union for men, and netball for women have dominated. Rugby has historically acted as a means to assert a unique male settler-defined national identity by consistently beating the former British imperial master at their own game (yet claiming the game to be ‘indigenised’ in playing style and ethos), while remaining connected to imperial networks in doing so. Football, in contrast, has not been celebrated as a national symbol in the same ways, and has not enjoyed playing success internationally. As Guoth (2006) notes, the media played a key role in popularising rugby union over football as the ‘national game’.

Notwithstanding the relative cultural marginality of football, Little (2002: 38) argues that it has been ‘more significant and popular than previously acknowledged’ and this has been borne out with (male-dominated) clubs, leagues and competitions dating back to the 1800s. Little’s comments reveal the disjuncture between the lived reality of football and its place within dominant narratives of national sporting cultures. Accordingly, football has enjoyed a significant history, infrastructure and degree of popularity – yet always in the shadows of rugby union as far as media attention, funding and cultural prominence. Historically governed by the New Zealand Football Association, the body briefly changed its name to Soccer New Zealand in the late 1980s, and then reverted to the name Football New Zealand in 2007 marketing under the slogan ‘the local version of the global game’. The game, however, has never surpassed semi-professionalism, although an Auckland-based professional franchise, and subsequently one from Wellington did enter the A-League in 2007.

Football reached its apex when the men’s national team – the ‘all whites’ – qualified for the World Cup finals in 1982 which momentarily heightened the visibility and status of soccer in the national media. Media narratives surrounding the team faced two key challenges at this point. First, half of the 1982 squad were born abroad which was problematic in the game being embraced as nationally representative. However, in relation to building nationalist narratives, Keane (2001: 56) notes ‘[sporting] success brings flexibility’. In this case the all whites’ arduous qualification for the World Cup finals meshed with an ‘underdog’ narrative, and the expat presence and British style of play resonated with the ethno-cultural roots of settler – Pākehā – New Zealand, to garner attention and popularity.
The second challenge to popularity has been an association with an inferior model of masculinity compared to rugby. Reflecting this, Keane (2001) notes that the game has historically been ‘known in New Zealand sporting culture as a game for “poofters”, “girls” and “blouses”’. An indication of how the historically gendered understandings of football endure are provided by female secondary school students who were interviewed by Ferguson (2004: 86). Of soccer, they observed: ‘people who play rugby hassle the people who play soccer as being, you know, poofs or less masculine because they don’t play rugby’; and: ‘I mean … even soccer … They are thought of as poofers or something you know [even though] they’re good and stuff. But compared to rugby it’s nothing’. Such observations reinforce how masculine sporting hierarchies imbricating ‘soccer’ entangle hierarchies of both gender and sexuality and can be understood and take on real consequences within lived experiences.

Notwithstanding associations with an ‘inferior’ model of masculinity, and common to many other contexts, the game in New Zealand has historically operated as a male privileging domain (see Cox and Thompson, 2004). As Cox and Pringle (2012) reveal, during the early 1970s broader shifts towards gender equity opened up possibilities for small groups of enthusiastic women to play and organise the game in ways that sowed the seeds for increasing involvement. These were, however, not uncontested as these female pioneers faced marginality due to male domination of club resources, playing and training spaces, and funding, as well as long-standing cultural constraints around ‘acceptable’ women’s physicality. Yet the women’s game gained a foothold, initially under its own governing body then under the nationals (men’s) governing body umbrella to grow rapidly during the 1990s.

The playing success of 1982 was not sustained and the game receded from the media spotlight during the late 1980s and 1990s. Subsequently, ‘1982’ became central as the high point of the New Zealand game, occasionally re-invoked, but often signifying the game’s subsequent ‘demise’ and continued marginality. Despite football’s peripheral status within national sporting narratives, youth participation rates surpassed those of rugby union in the 2000s. The response to this reveals much about the anxieties surrounding the place of rugby union as the dominant national symbol. Contextually, the transformation of rugby union during the 1990s in line with global media–corporate priorities, shifting on-field demographics and the collapse of old provincial and club loyalties through professionalism had led to much anxiety. With rugby a national symbol rooted in colonial circumstance, these anxieties mirrored the wider sporting flux of the postcolonial nation: fading imperial ties and related political certainties, calls for restitution of the colonial past, changing demographics and new economic anxieties characterised the country’s shifting position within the global age.

In these contexts, increasing football participation rates became a source of anxiety to symbolise rugby’s apparent malaise (see Falcous, 2007; Falcous and West 2009). In particular, journalists such as Joseph Romanos (2002) linked soccer’s growing popularity with the ‘browning’ of rugby, and relatedly ‘white flight’ – that is the departure from rugby of Pākehā who are pushed out by Māori and Polynesian players, who apparently have a physical advantage in rugby (see Grainger et al., 2012). The ‘browning’ of rugby is taken by the likes of Romanos to extend to the youth levels and soccer in this vision has emerged as a (less physically harmful) haven for displaced ‘white kids’. There are also fears for the dominant commercial position of rugby, which is seen to be under threat from football which enjoys global popularity and exposure. Romanos (2005: 177), for example, identifies football administrators as ‘the real threat [to rugby] who are ‘plotting the take over right now’. These anxieties reveal football’s entanglement in complex ways within the power dynamics and hierarchies surrounding the shifting New Zealand sporting imagination.
I now turn to reflect on recent research exploring how the mediation of football in New Zealand meshes with broader national anxieties and the cultural hierarchies they entangle. It is only through such richly contextualised case studies that we can understand football’s varying, nuanced and dynamic presence within specific national settings throughout Oceania. As I have noted above, the region is unique in that football does not enjoy the same cultural dominance or levels of popularity as in other regions such as Europe or South America. As the discussion concerning Australia above indicates, media are a key means through which football can take meaning and relevance socially. Qualification for the 2010 World Cup finals led to speculation that the appearance of the ‘all whites’ in South Africa could reposition football within the national sporting imagination. In a case study analysing press reportage of the team I reveal how these broader social currents, anxieties and hierarchies permeate subsequent media representation of the event (see Falcous, 2014). Adopting a critically discursive approach I collected, catalogued and analysed a total of 541 articles from national and regional newspapers and internet news sources throughout the tournament, which I now revisit.

New beginnings, old hierarchies? The 2010 All Whites

Pre-tournament coverage centred on how the ‘underdog’ All Whites – ranked 78th in the world – would perform. *The Waikato Times* acknowledged success was far from likely, noting: ‘we’re footballing minnows’ (19/06/10). As the tournament loomed, Chris Rattue in *NZHerald.co.nz* speculated that ‘soccer has the chance of a re-birth in this country’ (11/06/10). Reflecting the mood of flux, the *Otago Daily Times* (*ODT*) (12/6/10) announced the relegation of the term ‘soccer’ in favour of the term ‘football’ in its coverage, suggesting shifting perceptions of the game. There were also many references to the 1982 All Whites. Yet, while the 1982 team comprised mainly New Zealand-based amateurs, the 2010 team were almost all full-time professionals, most of whom play in overseas leagues, particularly in the United Kingdom. As the opening game loomed, Fred Woodcock of the *Dominion Post/stuff.co.nz* suggested that a win or draw in South Africa would be ‘a magnificent day for New Zealand sport’ (07/01/10).

A further article appeared under the title: ‘Here Come the Not-so-All Whites’ (*Stuff.co.nz*, 10/06/10), and presaged a theme that ran throughout coverage of the tournament. Worth quoting at length, it read:

> How times have changed since the New Zealand football team was primarily comprised of British expatriates. Of the All whites’ likely line up against Slovakia, only two … were born overseas. Defender Winston Reid, despite living half his life in Denmark, *is proud of his Maori heritage*, midfielder Jeremy Christie’s whanau [family] are from Northland, while midfielder Leo Bertos and striker Rory Fallon *have Maori mothers* … It may take another generation, but [they] will eventually become much more ‘representative’ of New Zealand … Football has long been characterised as a mainly middle-class Pakeha sport … Glance around your local junior football fields on a Saturday morning and you’ll see more Maori, Pasifika and Asian players. Some will graduate to the national ranks one day, which may change or temper the All Whites’ traditionally anglocentric style of play. [emphasis added]

Here the journalist, Tony Smith posits the presence of four Māori players in the World Cup squad as evidence that soccer is no longer solely a Pākehā domain, but is in fact now ethnically inclusive and reflecting broader social flux. In similar pre-tournament coverage, The *ODT* also emphasised Winston Reid’s ‘Maori heritage’, and his desire to ‘encourage more Maori
participation in soccer’ (11/06/10). Thus football was reframed in the context of the nation’s diversity, and distanced from an Anglocentric image.

**Battling Kiwis, and biculturally reconciled football fields**

During the tournament the lowly ranked All Whites exceeded expectations drawing three times, including with holders Italy, but were ultimately knocked out. Media coverage was frenzied and briefly knocked rugby from the spotlight. New Zealand’s goal in the opening game was scored by defender Winston Reid who became a media *cause célèbre* in the days following the game. He was headlined as ‘an instant hero’ (*stuff.co.nz*, 16/06/10) and ‘national treasure’ (*ODT*, 19/06/12). Most notably, and continuing the pre-tournament framing of football as newly ethnically inclusive noted above, there was an explicit emphasis on his Māori *whakapapa* (genealogy). The *NZHerald* (11/06/12), for example, noted Reid’s ‘Maori heritage’, emphasising he was ‘a Maori kid from the north’. Following his goal, the *NZHerald* headlined that ‘Reid carries Maori cause’ and further suggested that ‘soccer demographics are changing, aided by immigration and new perceptions’ (15/05/10). The *Waikato Times* (16/06/10) described Reid as ‘the 21 year-old Maori lad’. News website *stuff.co.nz* also emphasised his ethnicity, referring to Reid as ‘The maori viking’ (also referencing that he played his club football in Denmark). The *New Zealand Herald* noted that ‘Winston Reid’s whanau (family) say they’re bubbling with pride after watching their man become New Zealand soccer’s most famous name … [it] Bodes well for soccer’s ability to attract more Maori players’ (18/06/10). Thus, Reid was constructed as emblematic of the new-found inclusivity of football, his achievements posited as the vanguard of the ‘democratisation’ of the game by attracting more Māori players.

Similarly, defender Rory Fallon was profiled on *stuff.co.nz* as ‘proud part-Maori’ (18/06/10), a ‘proud member of the Ngati Porou iwi [tribe]’ (23/06/10), and All Whites coach Ricki Herbert was noted as ‘researching his Ngati Whataua ancestry’. Fallon’s desire to inspire minorities in to football was headlined in *stuff.co.nz*: ‘Fallon keen to inspire Maori, Polynesian talent’ (25/06/10) which emphasised football as a new site of non-European achievement. Football participation statistics, however, reveal media assertions of inclusivity at the elite level suggesting a larger democratisation of football to be distorting (see Table 38.1).

These figures demonstrate that Māori are actually *under*-represented nationally in football, Pākehā have roughly proportional representation and ‘Asian’ New Zealanders are *over*-represented on the nation’s football fields. In this sense, coverage lauding the apparent inclusivity of football at the elite level and in particular the presence of Māori players is profoundly distorting when the overall national picture is seen. The statistics also reveal the chronic under-representation of ‘Asian’ New Zealanders in the national team, despite over-representation nationally.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percentage of football participation</th>
<th>Percentage of population overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NZ European/Pākehā</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>67.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources: SPARC (2009); 2006 Census data.*
Furthermore, and tellingly, coverage ignored the complexities of Winston Reid’s particular case. Reid moved from New Zealand to Denmark aged 10, had represented Denmark 16 times at under-19, under-20 and under-21 level, took Danish citizenship in 2006 and played his club football there. Following FIFA rule changes he became eligible for New Zealand as he had not represented Denmark at senior level. In March of 2010, just three months ahead of the tournament, he opted to play for New Zealand. Reid himself was candid about his desire to put himself in the foremost marketplace of international football labour, noting, ‘one of the reasons I decided to represent New Zealand at the World Cup was to attract more attention’ (from a Danish newspaper website cited in stuff.co.nz, 30/06/10). Notably this quote did not receive widespread exposure in the New Zealand press, which largely ignored the complexities of Reid’s allegiances, instead emphasising his statements of pride in his Māori heritage and New Zealand connections. Stuff.co.nz, for example, referred to him as ‘Auckland-born’ and ‘the lad from Takapuna, via Denmark’ (Stuff.co.nz, 16/06/10). Reid’s case reveals how allegiances to nation are complex, indeed often flexible, especially for football labour migrants. Yet the media discourse was an essentialising and simplifying one, which worked to present an ethnically inclusive team (and hence, by extension, nation) with Reid the key embodiment of that, thus eliding complications surrounding his evidently fluid loyalties, and instrumental shift of national allegiance for the 2010 World Cup.

The Kiwi archetype and physical football

A consistent theme of coverage connected the team to idealised notions of ‘national character’. The NZherald.co.nz, for example, praised the team’s ‘good work ethic’ (11/06/10), while stuff.co.nz attributed the draw against Slovakia to ‘100 percent kiwi grit’ (16/06/10), and later emphasised ‘good-old Kiwi grit and determination’ (20/06/10). The Waikato Times referred to the team as ‘battlers’ (31/05/10), and credited the opening draw to ‘indomitable, never-say die Kiwi grit’, and later described a ‘team of kiwi battlers’ and ‘plucky underdogs’ (26/06/10). Buoyed by the opening game, stuff.co.nz, suggested the ‘big solid team’ was built on ‘physical prowess’ (18/06/10). NZHerald similarly emphasised ‘physical size and doggedness’ as a means to overcome a lack of ‘star power and raw talent’ of other teams (10/06/12). The aggressive and robust style of football, it was suggested was ‘a style ingrained in the national psyche’ by stuff.co.nz (18/06/10).

Following a surprise draw with World Cup holders Italy, stuff.co.nz headlined the ‘gritty All Whites’ (21/06/10) and framed the game as ‘one of the most heroic hour-long rearguard actions in the history of New Zealand sport’ (21/06/10). NZherald.co.nz noted the performance to be based on ‘sheer guts and determination’ (21/06/10). The idea of grit, determination and resourcefulness as nationally shared traits are rooted in white-settler circumstance and ideals that subsequently have been extended to all within the nation. As Ahmed (2000: 99) notes, the delineation of the discursive boundaries of nation ‘takes place alongside the production of national character as instances in which “the nation” itself is fleshed out as place and person’ (emphasis in original). As we noted above, this was borne out in the case of Winston Reid as an ‘exemplary other’, but also in important and differing ways through veteran Pākehā captain Ryan Nelsen.

Nelsen was conveyed as a consummate professional and leader, as ‘the on-field architect’ who ‘(led) from the front’ (Sunday Star Times, 14/06/10). Nelsen was also conveyed as a loyal family man, stuff.co.nz carrying a story about having his child’s name stitched on his boot and emphasising him as a devoted father who ‘would head home if his wife went into labour early’ (18/06/10). For the first game stuff.co.nz/Waikato Times emphasised his patriotism suggesting
‘Nelsen had set the scene with his focus … clutching his silver fern on his shirt and bowing his head as he belted out God Defend New Zealand’ (16/06/10). As a leader, Nelsen was heralded in glowing terms: ‘one player – Nelsen – is the irreplaceable driving force as well as being chief spokesman and hand shaker’ emphasised NZ Herald (11/06/10). He was also headlined as ‘Born to lead the all whites’ (stuff.co.nz, 13/06/10), and ‘captain fantastic’ (NZ Herald, 16/06/10; Sunday Star Times, 27/06/10), a ‘talisman’ (Dominion Post, 19/06/10), ‘straight-talking skipper’ (NZHerald.co.nz, 21/06/10), ‘a leader and defender who inspires his team–mates’ (Waikato Times, 12/06/10; stuff.co.nz, 12/06/10) and ‘captain courageous’ (stuff.co.nz, 23/06/10, Waikato Times 26/06/10). After the event he was described as ‘a great New Zealander’ (stuff.co.nz, 25/06/10), and as having emerged ‘as a national idol’ (Waikato Times 25/06/10). Here, Nelsen is presented as an archetype of an essentialised kiwi essence: determined, strong and leading in against-the-odds circumstances, yet also humble, family oriented and straight talking. As with Winston Reid, there is more complexity to Nelsen’s loyalties than the picture of an unswerving New Zealand patriot paints.

The heroic portrayal of Nelsen largely omitted to note that Nelsen was absent from the national side between 2004 and 2008 as he sought to establish his career in the English Premier League, and as a protest at the treatment of former national team coach Mick Waitt by the national federation. These complexities were ignored in coverage which portrayed Nelsen as an unswerving patriot. In marked contrast to Reid, Nelsen’s ethnicity was unspoken in all coverage. Thus, and in familiar ways, while Nelsen was liturgised as emblematic of New Zealandness, his ethnicity remained unmarked, yet it is clear that the ‘battling kiwi’ is a white – Pākehā – archetype. Just as the national archetype was ethnicised it was also gendered. With very few exceptions, female voices, as journalists, commentators, pundits or sources were entirely absent.

The idealisation of select ‘kiwis’ noted above was complemented by the caricaturing of ‘others’ outside the nation. Reflective of the ‘sibling rivalry’ of the (former) white-settler colonies at the outer edges of empire Australia’s poor performances in the tournament were mocked, while coverage of the Italians stigmatised and caricatured in ways that reflected a fusion of New Zealand’s history of wartime imperial loyalty to Britain, and an Anglo-whiteness that is privileged over Mediterranean white cultures.

In sum, coverage of the national football team was entangled in the complex postcolonial anxieties of national identity formation. In doing so it entrenched the mythic male settler-centred national character. Familiar tropes of New Zealand ‘character’: tough, loyal, determined, plucky, stoic and honest draw upon long-standing white-settler, male values valorising hard work and resilience in tough (frontier) circumstances. Framings of Ryan Nelsen as the archetypical kiwi informed these constructions, yet his Pākehā ethnicity was unmarked in this coverage as were complexities around his loyalty to the national team. Notably, it was the cosmopolitan Nelsen who has spent little time in the country who enjoyed prominence, not the New Zealand-based coach Ricky Herbert. Yet these complexities were disregarded in favour of football being framed as a site to idealise New Zealandness. Winston Reid meanwhile emerged as a celebrated symbol on the basis of his Māori heritage as an embodiment of inclusive football, and hence the nation’s apparent tolerance. Yet, the complexities of his flexible allegiances were ignored. In contrast, there was no mention of other players’ wide-ranging ethnic affiliations. The media emphasis on the inclusion of Māori alone coheres with a tendency to privilege biculturalism rather than multiculturalism within contemporary New Zealand nationalism. While the demographic reality of the nation is multicultural, the emphasis on bicultural inclusivity provides a bulwark to anxieties about whether the nation has reconciled its colonial past through an emphasis on Māori–Pākehā relations as the centre of the nation.
Illusory media assertions of ethnically inclusive football thus assuage anxieties surrounding both the legacy of contemporary social inequalities, and histories of eurocentrism within football. This apparent inclusivity is not reflected in broader participation statistics.

**Understanding football in Oceania: future directions**

What the above case study reveals is that the social presence of football is both contested and dynamic, and can only be understood in the context of the conjunctural cultural politics in which it exists. We have remarkably little research exploring the dynamics of football in the Oceania region, and more is needed. In particular, and most pressing, we need to know more about football throughout Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia about which little to nothing has been written. Tahiti reached a FIFA finals for the first time in their history when qualifying for a U-20 event in 2009, while the following year Papua New Guinea’s champion club, Hekari United, became the first club from outside New Zealand and Australia to win the OFC Champions League. These examples indicate that the game is both played in pockets providing meaning and cultural significance, and that shifting centres of power may be afoot.

Significantly, the presence of football in Oceania more broadly exists always in relation to dominant sporting, economic and cultural hierarchies. Consider, for instance, the Cook Islands, scattered over nearly 1.8 million square kilometres of ocean. The country gained FIFA recognition in 1994 and currently has 1,200 registered players. One of the principal barriers reported by the national federation to development is land acquisition. With coastal land scarce and traditionally owned by families and handed down through generations, officials reported spending two years securing low-lying land for pitches which subsequently required underground irrigation and drainage systems on which to develop facilities (cookislandsfootball.com (10/06/14)). With (men’s) rugby league and (women’s) netball the most popular sports and Australian rugby league widely broadcast and viewed, football development is defined in relation to rival codes locally and mediated ‘global’ varieties. Such geographical and cultural ‘contours’ then are the key contexts of football’s Pacific presence. Likewise, the gendered associations of football provides a rich vein of enquiry throughout the Pacific and antipodes. Indeed, the lack of football’s centrality makes the Oceania region a site of potentially unique circumstances and dynamics. In particular, critical approaches that locate the game within unique national conditions and contested socio-historical contexts hold rich potential to reveal insights into Oceania’s future footballing directions.

**Notes**

1. Oceaniafootball.com (accessed 10/06/14).
2. Oceaniafootball.com (accessed 10/06/14).
3. At this time the governing body was called ‘Soccer New Zealand’.
4. They were admitted to the OFC in 1975 as the ‘Republic of China Football Association’ but were subsequently suspended from the OFC due to ‘naming problems’ in 1978. In 1981, with the agreement of FIFA, they changed name to the ‘Chinese Taipei Football Association’, and were subsequently readmitted to the OFC in 1982 and then switched to the AFC in 1989.
5. Australia was not in fact a member of the OFC in 1974 as it was seeking AFC membership.
6. OFC subsequently moved in 2010 to another facility also in Auckland, New Zealand.
7. It was at this point that the game’s administrators aligned with the international usage of the word ‘football’, in preference to ‘soccer’, and to also distance itself from the failings of the old Soccer Australia, coining the phrase ‘old soccer, new football’ to emphasise this.
8. I use the term ‘sports space’ here to capture the capacity of a society to value a particular kind of sport and render it meaningful, and of social significance. Sports space is not simply a spatiophysical concept,
but should be seen according to Sugden and Tomlinson (1996) in ‘[the] context of culture and power relations in particular societies’ (p. 244).

9 It is also notable that this coincided with a decline in rugby’s dominance following the divisive 1981 springbok tour which featured vigorous anti-apartheid protests, and led to the questioning of rugby’s place in the national culture.

10 The most prominent iterations of this take the form of a popular discourse of decline and anxiety regarding heightened media and corporate control, the commercial transformation of the game, and changing demographics on the field. As has been noted elsewhere this discourse reflects rugby’s ‘crisis’ as metonymical with wider struggles of the nation.

11 As has been discussed elsewhere, this ‘browning’ discourse inverts the subjects of racism and obscures the institutionally entrenched way that ‘race’ can work to privilege whiteness.

12 Reflecting this struggle, the national governing body was initially called New Zealand Football Association (founded 1891), changed to New Zealand soccer, and in 2007 was renamed New Zealand Football (NZF).

13 For example, Ryan Nelsen (Blackburn, England), Chris Killen (Middlesbrough, England), Simon Elliott (Fulham, England), Tommy Smith (Brentford, Ipswich), Winston Reid (Midtjylland, Denmark), Chris Wood (West Bromwich, England), Michael McGlinchy (Motherwell, Scotland).

14 This was detailed in only one pre-tournament article ‘Nelsen reconciled with “naïve” Herbert after Vanuatu debacle’, *Sunday Star Times*, 23 May 2010, B1.

15 Largely ignored by most journalists, statistics from the tournament revealed the All Whites to have the fewest shots (15) and the fewest passes of any team (663). This reveals that the media valorisation of their ‘battling’, tough style could have been interpreted in altogether differing terms; as an uncultured game, lacking finesse and skill.

References


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