

# Sporting mythscapes, neoliberal histories, and post-colonial amnesia in *Aotearoa*/New Zealand

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**Abstract**

Andrews (1999) has argued that under conditions of market-based liberalization, the sporting past has increasingly been put to use for the purposes of accumulation. This selectively rendered “sporting historicism,” he argues, results in “a pseudo-authentic historical sensibility, as opposed to a genuinely historically grounded understanding of the past, or indeed the present by rendering history a vast, yet random, archive of events, styles, and icons” (2006). Under such conditions, power-laden and selective “mythscape” emerge. In this paper, we carry Andrews’ contention forward by arguing that critical sport scholars should further problematize the uses of the sporting mythscape—particularly by calling into question those re-historicizations that emerge in public discourse and excavating whose interests they serve. Here we interrogate the politics of how sporting pasts are mobilized in contemporary *Aotearoa*/New Zealand; in particular at the juncture of a globalized “free-market” economy and fluctuating (post-)colonial identity politics. We point to various cases that help reveal how specters of sporting pasts circulate within national mythologies in selective and politicized ways.

**Keywords***Aotearoa*/New Zealand, cricket, mythscapes, neoliberalism, rugby

In this paper we explore sport as an evocative site through which the past can be invoked to serve the selective interests of the political present. In doing so, we engage David Andrews (1999, 2006), who draws upon Jameson (1991), to argue that the

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current historical juncture is marked by a new “sporting historicism” (2006: 121); that is, a condition characterized by the proliferation of “a cacophony of historical sporting referents in product designs, advertising, television, the celebrity economy, and the built environment” (2006: 121). Andrews (1999) cites examples of Mohammed Ali’s recasting as (bounded) countercultural brand embodiment by adidas, the uses of architecture that evoke collective memory in Niketown stores or “retro” baseball parks, and Sir Bobby Charlton lacing up Reebok boots alongside Ryan Giggs in time-effacing television commercials.

In a similar vein, Carrington’s (2001) critique of Martin Luther King Jr’s false cultural exhumation in time-effacing mobile phone television commercials provides a further example of how the past can be re-imagined as little more than commercial *simulacrum*. In Carrington’s analysis, the television commercial featuring English soccer players Ian Wright in a “one-to-one” conversation with King capitalized on the appearance of “cool black radicalism,” but not the (threatening) real thing in a way that allowed marketers to cross “racial” and class boundaries to tap into (but critically, not alienate) the “highly prized high spending youth market” (p.115). The ultimate effect, Carrington notes, is that “the demands of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s ... get emptied out of their serious critique of global capitalism and colonial racism and effectively repackaged in order to help sell mobile phones to the affluent of the overdeveloped West” (p.116).

Jameson’s (1991) critique proffers that such selective turns to history are characterized by appropriations of the past as a series of depthless or emptied-out stylizations (or pastiche) to be commodified and consumed. The resultant weakening of historically informed understandings, and the apparent victory of such commodification over other spheres of life, provides the essence of Jameson’s (1991) critique of the postmodern condition’s reliance on the “cultural logic of late capitalism.” In keeping, the sporting manifestations of this are interpreted by Andrews as characterizing a “hegemonic positioning of late capitalist corporate sport” (2006: 121). The result, he concludes, is the creation and circulation of “a pseudo-authentic historical sensibility, as opposed to a genuinely historically grounded understanding of the past, or indeed the present by rendering history a vast, yet random, archive of events, styles, and icons” (2006: 123).

For our purposes here, we make the case that commercially rendered representations of the sporting past tell us much about the power to narrate, omit, and select (in) the present. Whilst such examples are fleeting, seemingly ephemeral, in their circulation they selectively inform what Bell (2003) has termed “mythscape”; that is, “the temporally and spatially extended discursive realm in which the myths of the nation are forged, transmitted, negotiated and reconstructed constantly” (Bell, 2003: 63). Critically, Bell’s formulation is neither static nor deterministic. He acknowledges the significance of “social agency” and dynamism, in that mythscape are contested and contestable. Bell extends by suggesting that “the mythscape is the page upon which the multiple and often conflicting nationalist narratives are (re)written; it is the perpetually mutating repository for the representation of the past for the purposes of the present” (p.66). Thus it is possible to identify “governing” or dominant myths that are characterized by simplification, dramatization, and selectivity, as well as alternatives.

In this light, and as Andrews notes, the question becomes: “What is the nature of the sports history to which we are returning?” (2006: 121), and, we would add, whose interests dominate sporting mythscape?

Addressing these questions, we explore the contemporary sporting mythscape of *Aotearoa/New Zealand*. Our empirical approach, following a cultural studies trajectory, deploys the concept of “articulation” as a “methodological sensibility” (see King, 2005: 27). We seek to reconstruct the articulated network of social, political, economic, and cultural power dynamics that infuse the iterations of sports history that circulate within everyday lives. We explore the “relationality” of “everyday” sports history artifacts as they are both produced by and productive of the multiple and intersecting power axes of contemporary *Aotearoa/New Zealand*. In doing so, our approach can be described as “critically discursive” in that we seek to explore the selective “framings” of elements taken from the past and reveal how these may be entangled with contemporary issues and concerns. In this way we can uncover contradictions and ambiguities, hence revealing often obscured power dynamics that run through the sporting mythscape of *Aotearoa/New Zealand*.

By means of a “detour through theory” (see King, 2005), we are sensitized by Said’s (1978) longstanding critique of the power to narrate selective histories in the context of “post-colonialism.” That is, we explore what Featherstone describes as “the complex investment of [historical] narratives within the systems of political and economic power that conceived and administered empires and colonies” (2005: 167). In particular, in the preface to the 25th anniversary of his magnum opus *Orientalism*, Said notes that “the capacity for imperial narratives to reinvent themselves, barely disguised, in the political and economic executives of globalism and new world orders should be a constant source of concern” (2003: xi). Here, Said reinforces the on-going relevance of post-colonial critique in the context of new global economic conditions, and we are guided by this to make sense of how the sporting past is mobilized in the present.

Specifically, we look at how renditions of the sporting past can evoke a particular, or dominant, historical mythscape whilst simultaneously glossing over, and thereby absolving, the lived social, political, and economic formations upon which colonial histories were forged (in both the past and present).

We tackle these concerns by first contextualizing the shifting and contested national sportscape of *Aotearoa/New Zealand*, detailing the nation’s contemporary late capitalist, neoliberal trajectories and (post-)colonial legacies. We then explore how the sporting past is mobilized within the (politics of) representation(s) of the present. Specifically, we looked to the banal, everyday encounters with evocations of sports history that characterize lived experiences. We found them in advertising, television trailers, place marketing, sports trophies, and even cereal box branding. What we found were examples of selective recasting, ignoring, and silencing—which we explicate below—that demonstrate the selective narrativization of the “collective” sporting past as entangled with the intersecting power dynamics of the present. We summarize by arguing that the examples on offer here conjure a historical amnesia, whereby material history weighs on the (post-)colonized, marketized lives of the present and yet is selectively decoupled from the active sporting mythscape.

## Neoliberalism at the outer edges of (post-)colony

First delivered at the 1999 *Sporting Traditions XII* conference in Queenstown, New Zealand, Andrews' essay (1999) sought to problematize sport in light of Francis Fukuyama's (1989) assertions that the increasingly homogenized, globalized local(e)s of the world would soon see the "end of history." Fukuyama had argued that in the Western liberal democratic model (undergirded by "free-market" capitalism), human ideological evolution has reached a triumphant end point. Around the time of the Queenstown conference, many observers were similarly suggesting *Aotearoa*/New Zealand—once a loyal [commercial and political] outpost of the British "Commonwealth"—had broken free of its colonial dependencies and joined its Pacific neighbors as a seemingly sovereign, flexible importer–exporter artery of the global marketplace. In that moment, Andrews and fellow scholars found themselves surrounded by a radically changing nation-state. A national polity was defined largely by the praxes of outspoken market proponents—such as Roger Douglas, Roger Kerr, and Ruth Richardson—and the promise of unyielding prosperity through the erosion of the social welfare state.

This late-century order of things, stood in stark contrast to a nation's political-economic history (that was, as Fukuyama was predicting, coming to its end). When the first wave of European colonialists arrived they found various Māori *iwi* (loosely translated as "tribes") living in what has been referred to as a "state of kinship-based communism" (Jesson, 1999: 30). For decades thereafter, white settlers—*Pākehā*<sup>1</sup>—extracted the islands' resources (gold, land, fish, etc.) for export into colonial trade routes. More importantly, by imposing market industrialist practices and relations on the indigenous Māori and the land, the settler-pioneers were able to establish—and subsequently protract—political-, economic-, and social-colonial hierarchies that remain intact to this day (see Kelsey, 2002).

The internationally connected market economy put in place during colonization took a radical turn toward the *laissez faire* during the 1980s (Oliver, 1989: 20–22). Specifically, in 1984, the aforementioned Economic Minister Roger Douglas effectively eliminated many features of the welfare state in favor of national deregulation and privatization. Douglas and his Labour Party contemporaries infused the prospect of "unlimited prosperity for all" under conditions of free-flowing capital into both national narrative and political discourse.<sup>2</sup> The neoliberal premise was simple: a society is made up of individuals; those individuals *can only* be "free" if allowed autonomy from the state; and that autonomy *can only* be achieved through unbridled market relations, whereby the individual is able to accumulate, and freely expend, capital. For these free-market exponents, to engage in capital exchange is a voluntary act, and individuals will only voluntarily engage in those transactions that benefit both themselves, and thus the society that they make up.<sup>3</sup> These advocates of free-market capital, echoing their North American and European counterparts (e.g., Thatcher, Reagan), popularized the notion that in the age of the global market, "there is no alternative" ("TINA") other than to fully integrate the national economy into the global free market.

Whereas the welfare state supposedly "shackled" the freedoms of the nation's entrepreneur class, "Rogernomics" (a reference to Ronald Reagan's national deregulatory schemes, often referred to as "Reaganomics") promised to "open up" *Aotearoa*/New

Zealand's commodity streams "to the world" (Collins, 1989: 190). While the domestic economy was once bound to the systems of 19th-century colonial commodity transference, and following the 1973 collapse of (post-)imperial market "guarantees,"<sup>4</sup> this new liberalized economy promised the coming generation of neocolonial investors larger markets, less trade regulation, and fewer constrictions on the concentration of wealth. In a body politic forged over generations of colonial excavation, *Aotearoa*/New Zealand was once again a resource outpost for an emerging empire—in this case one less bound to colonial-bourgeois patriarchy and more to time-space accelerations of late capitalism. These policies allowed foreign investors and New Zealand's political and financial elites to extract surplus value from the social welfare infrastructures in retail, communications, energy, transportation, and financial sectors (see Douglas and Callen, 1987). To such an end, the international investor class in particular was able to capitalize—in the short term—upon the billions of dollars of equity owned/shared by the people of *Aotearoa*/New Zealand (Easton, 1989).<sup>5</sup> As a result of that deregulatory process, *Aotearoa*/New Zealand now has one of the world's "most liberal" national economies (annually ranking in the "top 10" in the *World Index of Economic Freedom*).

However, the nation's incontrovertible linkages to the global "free market" have most recently resulted in economic instability. Unlike other, more welfare-"embedded" (Harvey, 2005) nation-states (e.g., Scandinavia), *Aotearoa*/New Zealand's economy has been on the decline (in terms of real wages for its workers, debt to gross domestic product (GDP) ratios, and trade deficits) in each of the decades since the 1984 reforms were put in place. New Zealand's Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) ranking fell from ninth in 1970 to 19th in 1999; during that time the economic growth rate was the lowest among all OECD nations. Furthermore, the national debt has ballooned (as a percentage of GDP), overseas ownership of the nation's assets has increased, and economic inequality and crime have substantially increased (see Jesson, 1999). Most industry growth has been confined to previously state-owned sectors, such as banking, communication, transportation, and energy (see Kelsey, 2008).

Most importantly, the wealth gap between rich and poor widened, which has held particular consequence for working-class families and those marginalized ethnic groups over-represented therein. As such, neoliberal reform reconfigured the national economy largely along old [colonial] accumulation lines, whereby short-term capitalization of the public good created a boon for those best positioned to mobilize their investment capital (accumulated over the generations). Although there is evidence that the country's economy has been somewhat insulated from the most recent economic global financial crises in 2008 (see NZ Treasury, 2013), the liberalization of the domestic (political) economy has created new conditions within which the nation looks forward. In these times defined by expanded wealth inequality, heightened jobless rates, increased national debt, and outmigration of workers and corporations, questions of the state within the throes of global interconnectivity have invariably led to tensions surrounding the present, and future, political and cultural economies of the "once thriving state" within the national narrative. Of note in this regard is the fact that these shifts have received much endorsement from segments of the populace, the center-right National Party, for example, currently holding political power.

We argue in what follows that sport (and particularly sport history) occupies a space in the on-going national storytelling project—a popular and important site for framing the nationally discursive present in ways that at once assuage these neoliberal tensions and smooth over the effects such transformations have had on overall national well-being. Within these economically uncertain times—times when the nation moves forward along an established free-market trajectory—we find narratives seeking to reconnect to apparently better times, times of national distinction and colonial ubiquity, a narrative that evokes the past to define the nation's collective future—forging the cultural politics of history as both commodity simulacra and architecture of political hegemony.

### **Sport and (post-)colonial “crisis” in the present**

While the neoliberalization of the *Aotearoa*/New Zealand economy has in some ways solidified economic hierarchies established during the age of colonization, it has concurrently unsettled longstanding national governing narratives—overwhelmingly premised upon the privileged status of *Pākehā* values and institutions. More broadly, wide-ranging political, economic, and social shifts have challenged the certainties of the past, forcing reassessments of the national imagination (Fleearas and Spoonley, 1999). The nation subsequently finds itself in what Simon During (1985: 367) terms a “crisis of *post-colonial* identity,” characterized by the on-going search for a coherent “national narrative” amid the new uncertainties of de/re-colonization and economic flux. One index of this post-colonial tension is the resurgence of *mana* Māori (Māori empowerment)—gaining pace since the 1960s—which has challenged the myth of historically harmonious “race relations” and benign colonialism. Furthermore, new waves of immigration rendering an increasingly multicultural future, the waning legacy of colonial ties to Britain, and subsequent re-orientation to Asia-Pacific have further challenged the apparent economic, political, and social certainties of the past (see Grainger, 2006).

In this context, Pearson (2000) notes “the re-invention and promotion of new national ideologies and discourses, and the fashioning and re-shaping of myths of origin and destiny” (p.96). Pearson's observation here highlights not only the importance of “looking back” to “origins” to define the contemporary moment, but also of the ways in which history is deployed as a [neo] colonial technique. In *Aotearoa*/New Zealand in particular, as Claudia Bell (1996b) posits, myths and nostalgia act as key features of a national ideology, which in turn sustain the colonial circuits of capital and *Pākehā*-privileged cultural politics. These myths have been premised on the assumed settler qualities of Christianity, democracy, law and order, Anglo-European virtue, conventional morality, and conservatism transposed from Victorian England. These work in conjunction (and, at points, in tension) with those validating the settler-pioneers: conquest of land, egalitarianism, opportunity, community co-operation, and “racial” harmony. Avril Bell (1996a) notes—critically for summarizing our point—“mythology binds the volatile present to the regularity of the past, to a nostalgic version of the past” (p.148). In this way, nostalgia “has a highly functional role in the perpetuation of mythology” (Bell, 1996a: 153). Yet myths must constantly accommodate new circumstances as they emerge.

Sport has historically been a key site for the projection of national mythologies—nostalgic and otherwise. Crawford (1985) makes this point clear, arguing that

articulations of national identity “[have] been more sharply delineated in sport than in any other sphere of cultural activity” (p.77). More accurately, selected sports have historically been given patronage as symbols of a hegemonic national consciousness. Thus, sport has been significant in evoking New Zealandness, with a particular *Pākehā* masculinity—stoic, modest, loyal, lacking pretension—as the key locus of a “national character” inferred to all. As Cosgrove and Bruce (2005) reveal, the deification of selected sporting icons as epitomizing a mythic “national” character have been central to these articulations (p.342). In particular, a host of authors have argued that the heteronormative, “hard man” performativities of rugby union, perhaps more than anything else, have promulgated a distinctive version of “national character” (Crawford, 1985; Fougere, 1989; Hope, 2002; MacLean, 1999; Phillips, 1987; Ryan, 2005).

The interlocking processes that characterize the state of flux of the nation noted above have reshaped the national sportscape, in profound ways. That is, it is increasingly characterized by globalized networks of corporate ownership and control, intensified sports labor migration, “brand” marketing and diversified accumulation activities, mass consumption, media alignment, a quest for global markets, and interdependence with transnational corporations. It is in this context that we see a series of “reconciliations” of national anxieties [re]surfacing within sporting mythologies. Bestirred by the anxieties of an island nation at once swimming amidst the sharks of global corporate capitalism, and no longer buoyed by colonialism’s political-economic certainties—those very conditions upon which the romanticized settler imagery was grafted—the linkages between the mythologized sporting past and present seem to offer the comforts of [an imaginary] unity and prodigious achievement in times of uncertainty. For example, Jackson et al. (2001) and Scherer and Jackson (2010) identify a series of advertising campaigns, in which adidas employed nostalgic imagery and music, in conjunction with sport heroes of the past and present, to artificially insert themselves within a longstanding national rugby tradition. In doing so, however, adidas eviscerated the contested and divisive nature of rugby, re-entrenching a mythic narrative of rugby’s centrality to national unity and harmony. The place of the past within this shifting sportscape is not uncontested. As Scherer et al. (2008) and Scherer and Jackson (2010) note, some aspects of the appropriation of national sporting and indigenous symbolism, and heightened corporate control in the case of rugby, has been met with “resistance and resentment” (p.100). Yet, such resistance to heightened corporate influence and representations of the past are not *necessarily* driven by a progressive cultural politics, but may in fact take the form of reactionary and wistful yearning for “simpler times”. In what follows we offer a series of critical readings, pointing to everyday encounters of an historicized national sporting mythscape.

## **Sports history, mythscape, and (post-)colonial tumult**

Out of shifting national conditions—fluctuations of political economy and identity and cultural politics—selective renditions of (sporting) history have emerged. We read this as part of what Nairn (1977: 438) terms a “Janus-faced response” of a national (sporting) imagination in flux, and hence fraught with geo-temporal anxiety. That is, both forward- and backward-looking occur in conjunction, whereby looking to the past assuages the

anxieties of uncertain futures or flux in the present. The result is the valorization of particular, selective, versions of the past and of New Zealandness. Within the sporting myth-scape each artifact may come and go in a few seconds—from a TV commercial, to a cereal box—but each circulates within the national popular culture in interlocking ways to reveal an intersection of nostalgia, sport, national anxieties, and the production of economic value(s).

Take something as apparently banal as a series of Weet-bix breakfast cereal boxes featuring variously revered “Kiwi” icons such as cricketer Sir Richard Hadlee (under the heading “he’s still good old paddles”) and golfer Sir Bob Charles. The corporation that produces Weet-bix, Sanitarium, has attempted to locate the brand as a “traditional Kiwi breakfast” and thereby part of the national consciousness in a string of recent advertising campaigns mobilizing sporting stars of the present and past. Specifically, one box presents Hadlee as an affable, “Kiwi bloke” (who is unencumbered by fame or fortune) whose success was down to resourceful perseverance and hard work. He is quoted reflecting: “I used to practice batting in the garage by putting a ball in a sock and hitting it again and again.” Golfer, Charles, meanwhile, is framed as unassuming and modest, quoted as saying “when you love a sport, it’s easy to do it for years.” The series locates each athlete as a homespun folk hero, embodying the “hard work” egalitarianism and pragmatism that has characterized the settler-defined national *mythos*.

More importantly, the promotion alludes to the type of box Hadlee and Charles would have eaten Weet-bix from during the 1940s and 1950s—thus further historicizing the brand within the national imagination. However, as Carter (2004) notes, following Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), such allusions are merely elements of “invented tradition,” with porridge, not cold cereals, dominating breakfast tables during those decades. Thus, the promotion at once associates the product with a selective rendition of “treasured sporting icons” and reinserts the brand within broader imaginings of heroic *Pākehā* masculinities, and national myths of an essential Kiwi “character” rooted in the settler imagination.

To such an end, a third box closes with a feature entitled “Weet-bix – Part of New Zealand’s history” underscored with the following:

Weet-bix was first made in October 1928 and has always played an important part in New Zealander’s lives. In 1936, when Jean Batten first flew across the Tasman, Weet-bix set the record as New Zealand’s fastest selling cereal. When in 1953, Sir Edmund Hillary reached the summit of Everest and Weet-bix became the “gold standard” for a healthy, nutritious breakfast. And in 1996, when we won the America’s Cup.

This cereal box history weaves a narrative intertwining Weet-bix and selected sporting/pioneering nostalgia. Critically, in doing so it reinforces the centrality of *Pākehā* men as key embodiments of “national” values, asserting the prowess of pioneering and sporting New Zealanders within global affairs in a continuous linear progression (whilst Batten was female, she is not featured on the box in greater detail, unlike Hadley and Charles). As an offering of sporting history then, it is selective in its invocation of a Eurocentric (all three are *Pākehā*, and the America’s Cup dominated by *Pākehā*) nostalgia and achievement framed as unifying and liturgized.



The inauguration of the Gallaher Cup contested between New Zealand and France in rugby union in 2000 is another recent example of the explicit narrativization of the sporting past. The Cup commemorates Dave Gallaher, captain of the 1905–1906 All Blacks who later died in battle during WWI in 1917. It is not by chance that Gallaher was chosen to be liturgized in this way. The 1905–1906 team that toured Britain—known popularly as “The Originals,” even though they were not the first New Zealand representative touring team<sup>6</sup>—looms large in the popular national consciousness as foundational and defining, with Gallaher, as captain, a key figure. It has been asserted in popular histories as the event that entrenched amateur rugby as the national code, and initiated a proud and unifying heritage. Alongside Gallaher’s commemoration in the naming of a contemporary trophy, his presence on the national sportscape has been consolidated in a glut of recent popular histories that valorize the “Originals” (e.g., Howitt and Howarth, 2005; McCrystal, 2005; Tobin, 2005), and in a delegation of contemporary All Black players visiting Gallaher’s grave in Belgium in 2000, and also his birthplace in Ireland in 2005 (Lewis and Winder, 2007: 209).<sup>7</sup>

Alongside celebratory popular authors, academic historians such as Sinclair and Phillips have been charged by the likes of Ryan (2005) and Daley (2005) with “complicity” in “inventing 1905.” Daley (2005), for example, argues they overstated it as “nation defining” and simplify or omit certain sources of data. Whilst Daley challenges the facts of the event—and certainly attunes us to how the selectivity of sports history writing connects with national myths—she says nothing of *why* the myth has prospered and whose interests it may serve in broader terms. While this reconstructionist historians’ conflagration serves some use in “getting the facts straight,” perhaps more pertinent to our purposes here are the politics *of* history telling (rather than simply politics *in* history telling). We follow other scholars in arguing that the emphasis on the 1905 tourists—and the reprisal of Gallaher—privileges the particular (middle) class, white-settler values and imperialist ties that those amateur rugby tourists embodied (see Falcous, 2007; Haynes, 1996). As Hokowhitu (2005) reveals, it also asserts a narrative of sporting origination that marginalizes early Māori involvement and achievement—thereby elevating the Pākehā role in patronizing and defining the national game. Furthermore, Gallaher’s fate on the battlefields of France in the First World War affirm national rituals that liturgize fallen soldiers—and are widely read as the actions of an exemplary patriot-citizen, making the ultimate sacrifice in the national (in fact imperial) cause.<sup>8</sup>

The inauguration of the Gallaher Cup in 2000 is also revealing in the timing and in its selective historical evocations. The backdrop is the on-going revision of the structure, ethos, and meaning of New Zealand rugby in the face of its incorporation within a global media-corporate nexus that gathered pace during the 1990s. Gallaher, then, is exhumed as a conduit to a radically differing game and context some hundred years prior. Through this, the mythologization of the 1905 tour as “nation-defining” comes alive in the present and erases alternatives. Furthermore, historical evocations of male heroism, conquest, sacrifice, and valor, all within the context of nationally defining “struggle” obscure the reorganization of contemporary rugby to consolidate capital accumulation in and through the game. In this way, it *both* re-entrenches the centrality of male rugby within nationalist narratives, and aligns with the priorities of sport spectacle as a means of capitalist

accumulation. Thus, cultural and political economies intersect to evoke a selective history and identity politics.

How such historical evocations take effect in concrete ways was revealed in the hosting of a Gallaher Cup game in the city of Dunedin in 2009. Ensclosed within tourist strategizing and place marketing, the event was promoted around a series of caricatured and piecemeal historical readings. For instance, the promotional banners hoisted around the city worked under the tag lines: “French Fries,” “French Connection,” “French Dressing,” “French Cooking,” and “French Flair,” whilst promotional materials boasted “no one does French Flair quite like Dunedin” (presumably the French themselves may disagree!). Such *faux* cosmopolitanism and caricatures constitute a pastiche that informs the mythscape. The trope of heroic masculinity dominated—Gallaher, for example, adorned the “French connection” banners. Furthermore, the image of former All Black “Buck” Shelford was exhibited with the moniker “French dressing,” alluding to the oft-cited suturing of his torn scrotum *during* a half-time break in a particularly brutal test match against the French in 1986. Within such contexts, then, the Gallaher Cup is a marketing tool, a site at which cultural caricature, hyper-masculinity, and wartime sacrifice provide the discursive backdrop of Dunedin’s place marketing with rugby spectacle at its heart.

Finally, a 2010 Sky television trailer to promote “Rebel Sports Super 14” rugby features explicit historical allusions that further demonstrate the selective re-historicizing processes we are asserting are “at play.” The minute-long spot features a soundtrack of cheering fans and an inspirational score. It depicts the current day (male) stars of the game, digitally implanted within spaces (crowds, stadia), and performances of the past. Employing vintage film footage, the trailer evokes the passion and emotions of a romantic, simpler version of the game from years gone by: young children of yesteryear are seen seeking autographs of present-day stars, whilst euphoric try-scoring and trophy-hoisting moments are interspersed with the fast-paced action and muscular physiques of today’s professional athletes. Players of today are inserted into the playing spaces of the past, cutting across both the defensive lines of their opponents and the chronological divides they animate. Thus, the trailer melds the present and past quite literally, as current stars are shown competing against “heroes” of the past. Specifically, the games’ contemporary stars, and flags and the insignia of current day “franchises,” are featured in color against black and white backdrops of passionate crowds and famously celebrated rugby spaces. Thus, the trailer reinforces historical assertions of rugby’s pre-eminence as “the nation’s passion” and, most specifically, locates the contemporary rugby industry within that historical lineage.

Two telling scenes are illustrative of the historical sleight of hand at play. Firstly, in one scene history is physically re-written as a digitally remastered scoreboard that features two team names—Crusaders and Blues—against the grainy black and white backdrop of a fervent crowd (the precise era is uncertain). Through this digital play with both time and space, the ad seeks to transpose contemporary players and their teams (or more accurately franchises) onto a history of altogether different loyalties and identities. Specifically, rugby was radically transformed in line with media-corporate priorities during the 1990s, its playing structures, ethos, and presentation radically revamped. Up to that point, the game had been provincially, not corporately, organized; amateur not

professional; national not transnational, and played in provincial not corporate emblazoned colors.

Thus, the two teams in question are recent creations of a media-driven, globalizing rugby industry that has overwritten the historical identities and rivalries that produced the very crowds that are seen in the ad to be now cheering the contemporary franchises. The historical image of the game, then, is quite literally future-fitted for the contemporary selling of the game—and a direct link is asserted between the historical resonance of rugby, and the identities and passions it has historically stimulated and the contemporary selling of the corporatized game, which operate to a markedly different series of logics (commercial, social, moral). It is noticeable that the historical crowds (mainly dressed in trilby hats and overcoats) in several further sepia-tinted scenes are adorned with computer-generated flags of contemporary rugby “brands”: the Hurricanes, Crusaders, Blues, Highlanders, and Chiefs. Thus direct linkages are created between the corporatized present and the romanticized past in a way that suggest a seamless and “natural” linkage. Yet it is not merely economic imperatives that are served in these re-imaginings. Problematic histories of varying hues are also erased, and selective mythscapes entrenched in the trailer, which locates rugby in euphoric, celebratory, unifying terms.

For example, in a second telling scene a (contemporary) young woman is shown in color within a sea of black and white faces of a historical crowd that is animated and excitable. She is dressed in adidas apparel and has a painted face—the archetypal new rugby consumer: apparently passionate, photogenic, consumptive of apparel, and representing a “diverse” demography. She too is animated and apparently enjoying the very same game as the historical crowd (in black and white) that surround her are. However, this new rugby consumer sits awkwardly amongst the male-dominated historical crowd into which she has—through hyper-real digitization—been transplanted into yesteryear’s male-dominated space. Thus, the trailer inserts the contemporary female supporter/consumer within the historically male-dominated rugby crowd, asserting rugby as a female-friendly and inclusive space. Yet, as Thompson (1988) captures, rugby, and spectating at live games especially, has historically been a key bastion in perpetuating a culture of male dominance—hostile to women who threaten a closely guarded homosociability and male privilege.<sup>9</sup> The sleight of hand romanticizes and sanitizes rugby’s exclusionary past.

In a similar vein, although less explicitly addressed in the trailer, a certain erasure of rugby as a key site privileging Pākehā-defined nationalism is achieved as the faces of the contemporary Māori and Polynesian stars of the game are transposed onto the pitches and stadia of the past. In this vision, the exclusion of Māori from national teams touring apartheid South Africa, the crude racialized stereotyping to which Māori and Polynesian players have been subject, and exclusion from the administrative levels of the game are glossed over in favor of the assertion of the contemporary multiculturalisms of on-field demographics as arising unproblematically from the past.

Significantly, and a key part of our argument, is that the Super Rugby trailer—as well as re-imagining history in line with contemporary accumulation needs—*also* relies on both the erasure of contested rugby histories and reassertion of a mythical inclusivity. That is, it reinforces rugby as the nation’s passion—with the attendant assertions of its

role as an inclusive social idyll. In this regard rugby has been a significant domain in the establishment and perpetuation of hegemonic relations in first colonial, and then post-colonial *Aotearoa*/New Zealand. Thus, the cultural politics are not merely one of selling contemporary rugby brands, but also of (re)entrenching rugby as a site of cultural power (albeit contested) in specific ways.

### **Conclusion: the Janus face of the (sporting) nation**

In this paper we have sought to explore Andrews' (1999, 2006) critique of the capacity for the sporting past to be "appropriated by the avaricious dictates of oligopolistic transnational conglomerates" (p.74). He argues that sport is an important, albeit contested, site whereby power relations come to life in and through the historical representations that pervade the commercially driven sporting fields of the present. What we have observed is a *pastiche* of historical evocations that privilege the actions and experiences of dominant groups and also construct the sporting past as benign, out of which the present emerges seamlessly and unproblematically. The emphasis on individual accomplishments—most obviously the liturgization of Charles, Hadlee, Gallaher—in selective sporting codes most obviously emphasizes the capacity of the commercial *pastiche* of the present to re-entrench the apparently unproblematic centrality of "great (*Pākehā*) men" to the nation's defining narratives and "character." This national character, inferred to all, is one which elevates and romanticizes *Pākehā* settler masculinities. The result is to entrench a historicism that offers selective, decontextualized "snapshots." These "secure" mythologies fuel a deeply entrenched fictive cultural history. As Avril Bell (1996a) affirms, such "assertions of cultural identity are also linked to political claims and material struggles" (p.146). Such images then are neither benign nor innocuous in their evocations. They also eradicate the historical struggles surrounding sport: the exclusions, imperial loyalties, brutish masculinities, racisms, and misogyny, falsely rendering sport as politically and socially inert. In other words, we might surmise that such commercialized sport history frames the present and does so by re-appropriating the past. Interestingly, in *Aotearoa*/New Zealand this has meant turning back to "simpler," foundational times—back to embodiments of sporting heroism borne of the 20th-century colonial social welfare state. In these unsettled times—times when in Fukuyama's estimation the local will dissolve into a singular cultural economy—the New Zealand market state is, through the sporting mythscape, re-imagined along old lines of *Pakeha* industry, colonial virtue, and national cohesiveness. In short, the *global has come to (re-)constitute the local*—a very calculated and politically oriented local, a neocolonial local.

As such, and in light of the empirical examples that we discuss, it seems that the selectivity with which histories of the sporting nation are "remembered" are not determined *solely* by economic imperatives. Rather, these sporting histories produce, and are productive of, *both* a cultural and political economy. If anything, sport history when put to use in the conjunctural context we laid out above assuages tensions of the economic. What we argue is that the debate should extend beyond observing the conscious articulation of corporate brands to national sporting symbolism. Alternatively, we suggest that what is needed—and particularly so in the context of New Zealand—is an understanding of representations of the sporting past as they transect both the neoliberal *and* de/

re-colonizing present. Such an orientation also helps to overcome the tendency to romanticize “the local” as merely recipient (indeed “victim”) of apparently all-powerful, avaricious global capital.

What we learn through the *redux* of a sportsman-soldier’s sacrifice evoked in the Gallaher Cup, cereal box [sporting] nationalism, or historical revisionism in the promotion of the contemporary rugby industry is that remembering (and forgetting) can selectively reconstitute the local, linking historical events while separating others, privileging select individuals and narratives and marginalizing others. As we have argued, such collective historical sporting rememberings *smooth over* contradictions of both (capitalist) indeterminacy and (colonial) origination. These narratives of the sporting nation produce a collective accord of *false continuum*—in which the white-settler colonial mystifications of the past are projected onto the globally interconnected present, and thus are positioned as a *guaranteed* element of the future.

In closing, we return to Andrews’ (1999) argument that late capitalism’s “random cannibalization of the sporting past” has produced a culture of the “present tense that has propagated a ‘historical amnesia’ among the consuming populace” (p.78). While we concede this is perhaps a dominant function of the neoliberalized past, we would suggest this is rather too deterministic. As Bell argues, “the mythscape should not be mistaken for a reified construct . . . for it is grounded in institutions and shaped by ever-present and evolving power relations” (p.76). Whilst the nation’s sporting mythscape is often mobilized to bolster the capital- and (post-)colony-based power relations of the present (and future)—and is inseparable from the (post-)colonial and neoliberal power-knowledges from which they were hatched—they *can* be contoured. The marketization of sport, then, brings not an end to difference but rather a reconstitution of power. The past is brought back to life (1) as commodity and (2) as cultural politic working with the rhythms of capital.

Yet, we can return to Jameson—which was Andrews’ (1999) departure point—and his calls to “always historicise” (1981). This appeal to *always* locate something as a product of contested and power-laden historical development offers direction to critical sports scholars to situate sporting figures, moments, events of the past, and their contemporary “rememberings” within broader historically contingent articulations that gave rise to them. Such work makes them intelligible in a critical sense and provides the rejoinder to the commercial pastiche that predominates. Indeed, governing myths, Bell extends, “co-exist with and [are] constantly contested by subaltern myths, which are capable of generating their own traditions and stories, as likely to be concerned with past oppression and suffering at the hands of a dominant groups as by tales of national glory” (p.74). Bell’s caveats here provide antidote to seeing corporate renditions as all powerful and pervasive. Here we might point to examples of the contestation of corporate-inspired re-imaginings of the sporting nation, such as those we noted above in relation to rugby. There are also more explicit examples of alternatives to the sanitized corporate histories. For example, in 2009 the *New Zealand Herald* (Auckland) (22 April 2009) highlighted calls for Māori rugby players denied selection for tours to apartheid-era South Africa. Such appeals, which reemerged at the centenary of Māori rugby (*NZ Herald*, 7 April 2010), highlight the capacity for alternative voices and narratives of the past to surface and problematize sanitized corporate renditions of the All Blacks as a nationally unifying

symbol. Furthermore, the 2007 reinvoation of an “All Golds” representative team by the New Zealand rugby league (NZRL) brought to the surface the fact that professional rugby league emerged as the product of rebellion and an explicit rejection of bourgeois values. These counter-narratives, however, are fleeting and have enjoyed nowhere near the presence that corporate promotional armature affords. Whilst the renditions of the sporting past we have identified primarily entrench a selective version of the nation’s (sporting) “governing” myths, clearly there is the capacity for people to engage and interpret these representations in a variety of ways, as well as to present alternatives. We hope that critical sports scholars can contribute to these alternative narratives by both problematizing contemporary constructions of the past, as well as revealing the subaltern histories of sport that are often excluded from corporate renditions.

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### Notes

1. Pākehā is a Māori term referring to white European settlers. Its literal meaning is “other.” As an exemplar of contested post-colonial cultural politics, it exists as a contested term in New Zealand; many white Europeans reject the term claiming it is derogatory (see Bell, 1996a, for further discussion).
2. Following a makeover of private sector labor laws in 1987, the Labour Party passed a series of acts in the late 1980s that brought the legal regime governing public-sector labor relations and economic activity into conformity with those private sector laws. These laws “expanded opportunities for enterprise bargaining at the expense of central wage determination,” and in turn, the “State Service Commission evolved from a neutral supervisor of public sector work conditions into management’s bargaining agent” (Schwartz, 1994: 540). These reforms resulted in a gross 29% reduction of public-sector employment; like *every* state-based transformation of its time, this resulted in dramatic increases in unemployment across almost every other private industrial field (see Harvey, 2005).
3. This economic philosophy was popularized in the mid-20th century by prominent Western Economists, such as Ludwig von Mises (1949/2007) and Milton Friedman (1962/2002), and was later adopted and morphed into the New Zealand context by Roger Douglas (1993), Douglas and Callen (1987), and Richard Kerr (1997).
4. Britain’s entry in 1973 into the European Economic Community is regarded as a key moment in this dissolution (see King, 2003).
5. Despite Labour losing its stronghold on the New Zealand parliament in the late 1990s, the neoliberal foundations of the domestic economy established through Rogernomics were succeeded by the fundamentally identical policies of National’s Minister of Finance, Ruth Richardson (often derided through the portmanteau “Ruthanasia”).
6. An indigenous “natives” team, for example, preceded them in 1888.
7. Gallaher’s memory was first commemorated by the Auckland rugby union in 1922 in the form of the Gallaher Shield, awarded to the champion club in the province. Following this, in 1924 the touring New Zealand side visited his grave in Belgium. Thus, Gallaher being memorialized in 2000 was not new. It is the reprise of interest and renewed liturgization of Gallaher that we see as of significance. In addition, the 2000 memorialization placed the emphasis on a national remembrance rather than an explicitly provincial one.

8. The emphasis of such national rituals is on those soldiers who fell during imperial wars, such as the Boer War and the First and Second World Wars. There is a virtual erasure in popular cultural remembrance of losses of “New Zealanders” during struggles between Māori and Pākehā in what have variously been termed the Māori Wars, New Zealand Wars, and Land Wars between 1843 and 1872. A Māori name for the conflict is “Te Riri Pākehā” (the settler’s anger).
9. Thompson notes specifically how women have historically provided food and childcare, and laundered clothing while their male partners pursued their involvement in rugby. Thus rugby has been a site entrenching male privilege in leisure time.

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