# SPORT, MIGRATION, AND GENDER IN THE NEOLIBERAL AGE

Edited by
NIKO BESNIER, DOMENICA GISELLA CALABRÒ,
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This ethnographic collection explores how neoliberalism has permeated the bodies, subjectivities, and gender of youth around the world as global sport industries have expanded their reach into marginal areas, luring young athletes with the dream of pursuing athletic careers in professional leagues of the Global North.

Neoliberalism has reconfigured sport since the 1980s, as sport clubs and federations have become for-profit businesses, in conjunction with television and corporate sponsors. Neoliberal sport has had other important effects, which are rarely the object of attention: as the national economies of the Global South and local economies of marginal areas of the Global North have collapsed under pressure from global capital, many young people dream of pursuing a sport career as an escape from poverty. But this elusive future is often located elsewhere, initially in regional centres, though ultimately in the wealthy centres of the Global North that can support a sport infrastructure. The pursuit of this future has transformed kinship relations, gender relations, and the subjectivities of people. This collection of rich ethnographies from diverse regions of the world, from Ghana to Finland and from China to Fiji, pulls the reader into the lives of men and women in the global sport industries, including aspiring athletes, their families, and the agents, coaches, and academy directors shaping athletes' dreams. It demonstrates that the ideals of neoliberalism spread in surprising ways, intermingling with categories like gender, religion, indigeneity, and kinship. Athletes' migrations provide a novel angle on the global workings of neoliberalism.

This book will be of key interest to scholars in Gender Studies, Anthropology, Sport Studies, and Migration Studies.

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## THE GLOBAL WARRIOR

### Māori, rugby, and diasporic Indigeneity

*Domenica Gisella Calabrò*

We were sitting in a wide semi-deserted park. Shahn's two little boys were having fun on a playground, not far from the premises of the New Zealand provincial rugby club where he played.[1] I was interested in his relationship to rugby and his past experience in Italy. Shahn spoke slowly and deliberately, occasionally falling silent. A poker face accentuated by a long black beard.

A Māori friend we had in common, Mat, had put us in touch. I first met Shahn at a gym where his team was holding an event. He did not speak much and soon after he had to leave. He offered to meet again in a city that was a two-hours' drive away. Two days later, we resumed the interview. He gave a few formal answers until it started raining, and we all moved to the rugby club. The interview stopped once again as his team began to crowd around us for a meeting. They were then playing the New Zealand Mitre 10 Cup, a tournament held over twelve weeks between August and November. Shahn asked me if I had any other questions. Before I could answer, he told me to wait, and disappeared in the meeting room with his kids. Half an hour later, we were back to the bench, and the recorder was on again.

Suddenly, his youngest son fell, bursting into tears. "You will excuse me," he said, calmly standing up. The two-year old looked tinier than he already was, folded around his father's very tall figure. "Do you have any more questions?" he asked once again. I smiled, "No, I think this is fine." I put my recorder into my jacket. The toddler calmed down and went back to his brother. "I'm actually happy you're from Italy," Shahn said staring at an indefinite point. "I really loved my time there," he added, smiling for the first time.

He suddenly started sharing anecdotes from his own time there, including episodes during which he had felt the object of special treatment. He then told me about his family's involvement in gangs and his grandfather expecting him to help his cousins get out of trouble; the help he would have liked to have at school, and his teenage fatherhood; his wife – the smart one of the couple, the one who was

into Māori culture; the rugby game he loved, and the career he had nonetheless not dreamt of, but "aye, I did not have other skills"; his kids, whom he wanted to have a different life and hopefully go to university; his decision to go overseas, which was not an escape from responsibilities, but his desire to be responsible towards himself and his immediate family.

He had then turned 24 and wanted to see if there was still a chance for him in Aotearoa New Zealand. Shyly, he hinted that he hoped to be selected for the upcoming Māori All Blacks tour in November 2016. When his rugby time in New Zealand would be over, maybe within a few years, he hoped to go overseas again – "to France this time, my wife would love it."

Shahn was not selected for the Māori All Blacks. In May 2017, I heard he was packing to move to France. He told me he couldn't wait.

## Mobile athletes, global warriors, and Indigenous men

Many Māori men today follow a career in rugby union to achieve a good life, tracing their trajectories as athletes and as men in a dynamic scenario of global mobility. Historically, Māori men have played a significant role in the illustrious New Zealand rugby (Mulholland 2009; Hokowhitu 2005; Ryan 1993). Their game has also contributed to restoring Māori's "depleted manhood" (Hokowhitu 2005, 90). In Māori settings, rugby has come to be associated with *mana* "spiritual prestige or authority," which makes players responsible towards their communities, and has become a privileged site for men to achieve recognition and leadership (Calabrò 2016). In 1995, the professionalization of international rugby added opportunities for socioeconomic progress. Since then, Māori older generations have been using the game's prestige and prospects to divert their youth away from lifepaths leading to criminality and suicide. Transnational mobility enables young men to showcase their individual and collective *mana* and pursue economic opportunities.

Overseas, Māori athletes become valuable as products of New Zealand rugby and as romanticized warriors. In response to the competitive and lucrative potentials of professional rugby, the All Blacks, New Zealand's national team, have turned their distinctive pre-match *haka*, which recalls the ritual dance that Māori ancestors performed prior to battle, into a highly successful marketing tool that casts contemporary Māori athletic prowess as the incarnation of an Indigenous warrior tradition (Calabrò 2014, 389). The image of the noble warrior nevertheless obscures its own role, in synergy with the rugby game, in naturalizing savagery and physicality as characteristics of Māori men (Hokowhitu 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2008), thus transforming them into hyper-virile and emotionless bodies. When Shahn eventually managed to disclose the emotions and desires secreted in his athletic body, rugby emerged in its bare nature of space where history has tried to relegate Māori men's possibilities for recognition and socioeconomic inclusion, with gang membership looming as alternative destiny.

Some Māori thus view the warrior reference entailed in rugby as a reminder that their people, and men in particular, are still not sovereign over their lives,

but rather inhabit a space of "coloniality" (Borrell 2015; Maldonado-Torres 2007; Mignolo 2007; Quijano 2000), where power differentials and violence outlive colonialism in all domains of life, shaping how descendants of colonial subjects perceive themselves and their possibilities. Others privilege an approach in which the image of the *toa* (warrior) rugby player is an expression of Māori men's worth and agency.

Māori masculinities share the colonial construct of the noble (yet violent) warrior with other Indigenous masculinities (McKegney 2014, 2011; Innes and Anderson 2015; Tengan 2002; Tengan and Markham 2009). Many Indigenous men embrace this image because it provides them with "relief from often untenable social conditions as well as a sense of masculine agency that colonization has rendered difficult to attain in other ways" (McKegney 2011, 258). Moreover, the warrior conjures an effort to withstand cultural, social, and political vulnerability, which characterizes the Indigenous condition as much as struggle does (Alfred and Corntassel 2005). If "invisibility and dehumanization are the primary expressions of the coloniality of being" (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 257), the warrior trope is simultaneously emblematic of the processes subtly controlling the self-image of Indigenous men and of their desires to be recognized as fully human. Within Māori rugby mobility, the warrior specifically evokes the global circulation of discourses and of life projects authenticating rugby flair as a feature of Indigenous Māori masculinities.

Rugby opens the door onto life-changing destinies for Māori men who show endurance and entrepreneurship. In contrast to Māori's collective claims to land, resources, and political recognition, which have been constituted by a neoliberal political economy that both honoured them and constrained their terms (McCormack 2011, 2012; Gershon 2008), Māori athletes' endeavours constitute an individual interaction with neoliberalism based on desires rather than claims. Yet, the international opportunities that rugby affords are also predicated on the athletes' geographical distance from their Indigenous context and the cultural alienation resulting from the commodification of the culture and individualism.

These are the questions I addressed during fieldwork I conducted in 2016–17 in Aotearoa New Zealand and in European locations that have welcomed Māori players and coaches, notably Italy, France, and the Netherlands.[2] As they leave *whenua* (land) and *tangata* (people) and engage with an international rugby industry interested in their warrior potential and charm, athletes experiment with alternative existences, as Shahn did. They rethink their lives, identities, and responsibilities. Still, they may experience new forms of invisibility away from the illustrious New Zealand rugby scene, their people, and the land where they hold special status, while being exoticized by the sport industries and audiences. Family members and Māori who prioritize collective interests may take pride in their achievements and suffer from their absence, idealize their life choices, or contest them.

The phenomenon highlights tensions about Indigeneity as a space defined by local and global strategies of regeneration in the context of histories of dispossession and present realities of structural marginalization. (Gomes 2013; Merlan 2009; de la Cadena and Starn 2007). The difficulties in defining Indigeneity have generated debates about its efficacy as a political and analytical category (Gagné and Salaün

2012; Kuper 2003; Béteille 1998). Meanwhile, its discourses have permeated the existences of those who inhabit its spaces. I thus understand diasporic Indigeneity as the (gendered) emotions, feelings, and desires nurtured within the politicized spaces of coloniality and resistance in which the athletes' existences are embedded (whether by self-identification or for being identified as Māori), which their sporting bodies carry all over the world, as well as the collective aspirations and fears attached to their global movements.

Indigenous groups and their members experience significant anxiety about discourses that challenge their identities and claims, which many internalize, adopting the oppressive lens of authenticity in the way they see each other and themselves (Gagné 2013; Hokowhitu 2015; Harrison, Carlson, and Poata-Smith 2013; Jolly 1992; Maddison 2013; Sissons 2005; Smith 1999). While many social actors and scholars have asserted that Indigenous identities are fluid and multifarious (McIntosh 2005), the notion of authenticity subtly resists by expecting groups and individuals to be resilient, which in the Indigenous discourse has become synonym of resistance (Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen 2016). Māori narratives may actually portray rugby migration as an expression of resilience. The athletes' subjectivities rather disclose resentment towards structural disparities but also Indigenous dynamics, and their attempts at navigating both the ambivalence of rugby and collective expectations to break free from that feeling.

## Voyages of resistance: Cultural continuity and adaptation

> *Ko te kai rapu, ko ia te kite.*
> The person who seeks will find.
> ★
> *Whakaki ki te maungatai ki te whenua: hoki ki te rangitai, ki te pukerunga.*[3]
> If we aim for the mountains, we're just going to hit the plains:
> but if we aim for the sky, we'll hit the peaks.
> ★
> *He iti te kōpara ka rērere i te puhi o te kahikatea.*[4]
> Though the bellbird is small, it can reach the crown of the kahikatea.
> ★
> *E kore au e ngaro, he kākano i ruia mai i Rangiātea.*
> I will never be lost, for I am a seed sown in Rangiātea.[5]

These *whakatauki* (proverbs) exhort individuals to be proactive and take risks to fulfil their potential, in the understanding that they can improve their circumstances and that they will not get lost as long as they remember where they come from. Enacting these values may require voyaging. Māori mythology celebrates Polynesian ancestors whose adventurous pursuits brought knowledge to the collectivity, like the demi-god Māui, who travelled to the afterlife, and the navigator Kupe, who travelled the Pacific and eventually returned home to share what he had learned.

The latter's endeavours inspired the South-bound exodus of some Polynesians in times of struggle.

In their *whakapapa* (genealogy), Māori include the *waka* (canoe) which led their ancestors from Rangiātea to the shores of Aotearoa, and from which different *iwi* (tribes) were formed. In the same fashion, Māori history is replete with travels for sport, war, and other purposes, which have generated *mana,* and diasporic communities have formed in London and Australia. Māori rugby athletes' transnational mobility is thus culturally continuous with the mobility of their distant ancestors, who are frequently described as migratory (Hayes 1991; McCall and Connell 1993). Overseas, Māori rugby athletes easily connecting with Pacific Islander ones uphold the shared kinship.

Top-level Māori rugby players at the end of their careers began moving overseas in the early 2000s to play or take up coaching positions. Since then, an increasing number of athletes at various stages of their careers have been heading to Australia, Europe, North America, Japan and other parts of Asia. Some secondary-school graduates or university students use rugby for an "O.E.," the "overseas experience" that many New Zealanders embark on in their late teens or early twenties. Some move back and forth between Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas locations, while others settle overseas, particularly if they find a partner there. Thanks to their reputation and their skills, some Māori men who are overseas for other reasons become involved in the game as coaches and players.

These diverse patterns of mobility all share one commonality, namely the fact that they uphold a legacy of travels generating *mana*, and an image of Māori as curious, entrepreneurial, and adaptive. Parents of migrant athletes I met in Aotearoa New Zealand described their sons' experiences as enriching for everyone, and most athletes I spoke with said that they were motivated by a desire to discover the world. But this desire conflicts with discourses of authenticity that seek to anchor Indigenous people to the land from which they derive their special status. The movements of the Māori rugby athletes build on the "diasporic predicaments" of Indigenous existences in the Pacific region, and the "'commuting' (exchanging, changing, mitigating) they entail" (Clifford 2001, 474; see also Hau'ofa 1994). The normalization of the athletes' global mobility also positions them as men upholding ancestral values and practices rather than merely losing their culture to neoliberalism, following traditions of open-mindedness.

Defying negative representations, accusations of inauthenticity, and threats of cultural loss, those narratives validate a more contemporary discourse in which Indigenous people "are no longer officially perceived as 'savages.' Instead, they are represented, and represent themselves as resilient and adaptive agents" (Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen 2014, 180). Their lives showcase adaptability, flexibility, and endurance in the face of adversities. They are able to handle multiple and complex relationships with non-Indigenous actors and institutions and with other Indigenous individuals and groups. These skills are similar to those praised in the neoliberal era, in which individuals are responsible for navigating risk and multiple alliances in a world defined by market principles of deregulation and privatization

(Gershon 2011; Gershon and Alexy 2011). Indigenous people have become the poster children of neoliberal subjectivity (Chandler and Reid 2016; Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen 2018). Migrant Māori men then become perfect neoliberal subjects by virtue of their Indigenous status.

The discourse of resilience, however, operates as a form of biopower (Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen 2014, 2016, 2018), trapping Indigenous people in a state in which "life is reduced to the celebration of mere survival … and [which] functions to discipline the indigenous themselves into performing their own resilience" (Chandler and Reid 2018, 262). From this perspective, the narrative that celebrates Māori athletes' migration as a form of sociocultural resistance may contribute to placing Māori men in an eternal present of struggling and coping as they search for a sovereign future. This resembles the effects of the promises that sport in the neoliberal era holds for many hopefuls all over the globe (Besnier, Calabrò, and Guinness, this volume).

Unlike Shahn, most athletes minimize the struggling and the coping by explaining that their careers and the associated migration are motivated by a desire to live their passion (compare Pietikäinen and Ojala, this volume). My interlocutors exhibited a neoliberal understanding of work, which is particularly evident in sport and encourages individuals to pursue what they like and show talent for, so that sacrifices become invisible (Besnier, Calabrò, and Guinness, this volume).

## Behind the scene: Resentment and second chances

The emphasis on *mana* (and the resistance that it implies) deproblematizes a larger social process of relocation or dislocation of hope in the context of national political-socioeconomic dynamics that generate great inequalities (see Goss and Lindquist 2000, 398; Besnier 2011, 36–39). If New Zealand's socioeconomic standards and geopolitical profile situate it in the Global North, numerous negative statistics (unemployment, health problems, substance abuse, etc.) reveal Māori realities as more akin to those of the Global South. Frustration and bitterness often shape Māori lives as opportunities appear so close yet so elusive. While rugby affords some Indigenous men economic productivity and recognition, the New Zealand rugby industry can only offer employment to a few athletes, particularly as they have to compete for contracts with athletes of Pacific Island heritage, who present a formidable competition that also markets itself with its "warrior" qualities (Besnier 2015, 851).

Transnational mobility is often contingent on disappointment. Unlike other athletes, who are encouraged by their communities and work hard to migrate (Besnier, Calabrò, and Guinness, this volume; Guinness and Hecht, this volume; Hann, this volume; Kovač, this volume; Peters, this volume), leaving is a second choice for Māori athletes as they harbour the dream of wearing the prestigious All Blacks jersey and often aspire to be a Māori All Black for its symbolic value. To be eligible for the national teams, an athlete must have a contract with a club in the New Zealand top-level competition.

Sometimes, athletes set aside their dream of becoming an All Black because they prioritize seeking better lives for themselves and their families. For example, in 2016, Quentin, who had worn the Māori All Black jersey, accepted a three-year contract with Oyonnax Rugby, a club in the French Jura mountains, where I met him. Coming from a rugby family, his goal "used to be playing for higher honours in the family," and a six-month experience in Ireland had been the opportunity for him to see the world. His first-born changed his perspective. His wife was tired of changing location every six to eight months while he chased opportunities in different competitions, and with another child was on the way, he thought he "should" seize a "more secure opportunity … that pays better." In other instances, athletes decide to seek overseas contracts because they have been injured or involved in gangs. Overseas contracts potentially offer new beginnings and second chances. Gangs play a peculiar role in the way their direct or indirect presence interferes with opportunities to create different life paths, and resistance may mean athletes distancing themselves from an environment that hurts them.

Moving may also imply accepting to play and coach in countries where rugby occupies a peripheral position. For example, Jay, who played in Germany for five years before returning home in 2016, laughed as he remembered his shock when he met his new teammates, who were "mostly white haired, people who could have been my uncles." Players who played or had played rugby in Italy, Portugal, the Netherlands, Germany, or France joked about the level of rugby they sometimes had to put up with after being trained in New Zealand's very demanding game. Concurrently, they expressed annoyance as Indigenous men who had relied on rugby to claim a degree of visibility.

In the end, migration is not an easy way out either. Mat, a graduate in history, who is involved with his *hapū* (clan) and is an amateur player, contended that overseas rugby clubs, particularly in Europe, often prefer athletes from Pacific Island nations because the latter have the same rights to work and movement as E.U. citizens thanks to the economical agreements between Europe and African, Caribbean, Pacific countries. He lamented that, as citizens of a wealthy country with an advanced rugby industry, Māori athletes may not be given the same opportunities as people from poorer countries and their struggles may go unrecognized.

The Māori athletes are after all raised in a Global North rugby industry. Their powerful passport potentially enables them to easily visit a country and showcase their skills to a club; it makes young men eligible for a working holiday visa in several countries, which many actually use to obtain an overseas rugby experience, and it also enables their *whānau* to visit them. Some of the people I met had attended university and hoped to further or complete their studies in the future. Moving at the end of successful careers, some are already well-travelled and acquainted with the industry. A few use the game to get overseas life and work experience rather than going overseas for life-changing rugby career. The kind of expectations the athletes' families and people place on them also leave more space for them to negotiate their desires.

Mat realized that the primary obstacle was the disproportionate number of Māori boys and men investing themselves in a possible rugby career. Different Māori

approaches to rugby mobility – from the overseas experience to the desire for a life change – actually form a continuum, as Māori boys and men have been using the same medium to reach their sky, as a result of authenticating rugby as an expression of their Indigeneity. In Māori contexts, the feelings associated with rugby opportunities that do not arrive, fail, or do not correspond to the athletes' dreams reveal forms of resentment. A sense of entitlement as Indigenous men, whose opportunities to reclaim their identity and honour their land, people, families, and themselves have been historically circumscribed to rugby and war, coexists with, and sometimes obfuscates, a realistic attitude to the logics of sport competition. Within this context, a rugby space that does not fulfil its promises or only partially fulfils them perpetuates non-recognition, generating a double exclusion.

The Māori athletes' attitude influences their access to opportunities overseas. In 2008, Caleb, a young man I had met in a university Māori language class, announced that he was going to temporarily stop university to seize a rugby opportunity in Australia. He then told me I would notice that most Māori prefer to act as "underdogs." In a similar way, while emphasizing his commitment to a career, Quentin added that "a lot of Māori boys do not like pressure … and to keep working hard."

In fact, not so many passionate and talented Māori players are willing to seek out an overseas opportunity and perform their expected resilience as Indigenous men, Māori men, and neoliberal sportsmen. Contemporary Māori youth are often reluctant to leave their extended family (*whānau*) and friends, even in the context of unhealthy dynamics. They cling to their comfort zones in a broader national context – and world – that they often experience as hostile. As a result, few Māori play in European clubs, in contrast to their visible presence in Aotearoa New Zealand rugby.

For most athletes, the hardest part was actually finding the courage to leave families and friends. For example, Kelly, who had reached top levels in Italy and moved back to New Zealand because of injuries, smiled remembering,

> I just went there and knew nobody … I was really nervous but … sort of … you need to get out of your comfort zone … that's also why I was over there … you need to get out of your comfort zone … and pray for the best, I guess!

A neoliberal context that emphasizes that individuals are authors of their destinies may excite some, but is unbearable for those who have internalized a self-image as small birds, but have "forgotten" they can still reach the crown of the *kahikatea*, and not get lost.

## Loss of human capital

On our first meeting in October 2008, the late Whetu Tipiwai, who was the *kāumatua* (elder, cultural and spiritual manager) of the Māori All Blacks, identified the overseas mobility of Māori athletes as a then-emerging phenomenon that

benefited the athletes but affected Māori as a people (Calabrò 2014, 398–399). In his melancholic words, "we lose them." His use of "we" referred variously to Māori rugby, Māori people, the *iwi* (tribes), and families. In 2016, on a cold evening in Wellington, the cousin of an old friend became annoyed when she learned that I was researching athletes' transnational mobility. A woman in her fifties sporting the chin *moko* (tattoo) traditionally associated with women of *mana*, she contended that rugby was taking away Māori young men as the two world wars had, when Māori men had spontaneously organized an Indigenous battalion to show their loyalty to the country. "Will they come back?" the woman wondered. "And if they come back, will they be changed? What will they bring with them that can benefit us?"

In contrast to other contexts where communities depend on the remittances of migrant athletes for their basic survival (Guinness and Hecht, this volume; Peters, this volume; Besnier, Calabrò, and Guinness, this volume), many Māori see overseas opportunities as depriving the community of the athletes' human capital – their spiritual resources, their energy, their social skills (including the ability to navigate the rugby industry), and their potential leadership. As Shahn's experience illustrates, this capital can include guidance and support for more vulnerable members. In Indigenous terms, it is a loss of resilience – the qualities to positively respond to the struggles inherited from colonial history – at times where Māori are still working on cultural resurgence, social inclusion, and political empowerment. This perceived social and cultural drain extends to the athletes' children and partners.

This sense of loss also comes from an understanding of Māori identity as performative, whereby people of Māori descent construct full Māori identity by regularly enacting *whakawhanaungatanga* (creating the culture of the *whānau*, extended family) and engaging with people *kanohi ki te kanohi* (face-to-face). From a gendered perspective, this mirrors the feeling that Māori men's rugby prowess is not enough to gain recognition. As in the past, "demonstration of skills and prowess in warfare were among a number of ways to determine one's masculinity. However, masculinities were also based on generosity and the stability provided to the *iwi* (tribe) through leadership" (Borrel 2015, 167).

Many athletes do go back to Aotearoa New Zealand or plan to do so, but their return may still not appease collective anxiety and criticism. Some see professional rugby's demands, ethics, and money as corrosive, risking to turn Māori athletes away from Māori rugby (playing for the family, tribal groupings, and Māori people) and from the communities themselves (Calabrò 2016, 239–240). For instance, although Māori Television praised the global Māori rugby camps, some people were wary of overseas athletes commodifying Māori culture and rugby tradition. Beyond rugby, some Māori are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with conventional aspects of Māori culture (first and foremost the language) and disengage from the groups they are affiliated with by descent. When Mat connected me with his friends playing or having played overseas, he warned me that many of them were trying to reconnect with their *whakapapa*. Athletes see themselves as "authentic" Māori for their rugby skills, but often judge themselves as inadequate with respect to conventional definitions of Māoriness. Expecting to be judged by the researcher, a couple of

overseas-based athletes appropriated the derogatory label "plastic Māori," used in both Māori and non-Indigenous contexts (Pearson 2015).

The concerns about the athletes' exodus consider the athletes in terms of *tātou,* the first-person inclusive personal pronoun in Māori, which refers to "we" as a collectivity, and view their mobility in relation to an Indigenous discourse of resistance. Nevertheless, the subjectivities of the athletes I encountered, regardless of the ways they formulated their Māori identity, presented going overseas as individual journeys of growth and learning in contexts (apparently) disconnected from their daily postcolonial dynamics. This divergence speaks to the tensions between Indigenous people as singular subjects and their desires on the one hand and Indigenous people as a collectivity and its needs on the other (Bellier 2011). Hence, the "relational definition of Indigeneity" is not solely determined by the opposition between Indigenous and non-Indigenous subjects (Merlan 2009), including the tensions among Indigenous subjects.

## Becoming men

Justifying his departure, Shahn suggested that he could concretely do nothing to prevent his relatives from getting involved in the gangs, but he could benefit his immediate family. Quentin emphasized how "my parents were not too happy initially," for he was depriving them of their *moko* (grandchildren) and he would no longer play for the honour of the family. Although he could relate to their feelings, "it wasn't selfish," he repeated, "but [I was] putting my kids first." Bruce, whom I met in Bordeaux, has long played and coached in the United Kingdom and France. In 2000, he had played for the All Blacks. Two years later, he decided to leave temporarily, thinking he would not be selected again. His decision generated

> a lot of surprise … my family obviously did not want me to go, but understood why … for me, I was not going to stay there and say "I should have played more tests, I didn't. I could have played more tests, I didn't" … I did not want to be one of those people. For me it was like, I had achieved what I could.

His time in England soon turned into novel challenges and learnings, and a new collection of achievements. Yet, nobody understood his decision not to return on the basis of personal reasons, when he could have had another chance in the All Blacks.

Similarly, Hoani made the Māori All Blacks in 2007, but, one year later, he left for Italy. He was still in Europe, notably France, when we met. When I inquired whether his family had supported his decision, Hoani's voice went quiet "uhm … I think so." His Māori wife added, "well, they did not tell you not to go … they still talk to you!" We all laughed, but then the wife became serious. "No, they were fine. … They knew there was a big opportunity for him to take … so, who were they to stand in the way." Some Māori may indeed read the athletes' choice to go

or stay overseas as egotistical. All athletes still operated within a frame of resistance, individually attempting to create alternative futures to resistance itself.

Athletes eventually disclosed difficulties like the precarity of contracts and benefits, the question of where to go next or whether one should stay, the linguistic barrier in non-English-speaking countries, cultural differences, and possible deceptions. A few players expressed rage and pain, recalling the social malaise they experienced in New Zealand. Mihaere, who briefly went to England as gang issues affected his domestic career, recalled his time away as the occasion to come to terms with his "anger against the white man," as he felt welcomed and respected overseas. While his second experience overseas turned out to be a false promise, he felt equipped to move on spiritually and work-wise, starting a new chapter in New Zealand, where he is now studying at a *whare wānanga* (Māori tertiary institution), and working with *rangatahi* (Māori youth) and as a cultural and spiritual mentor for Māori rugby. In this sense, the athletes' focus on their different lives or their children's multicultural upbringing emphasized the achievement of a life which felt more than surviving, in a context where many could relate to Jay, who, marvelling at his time in Germany, emphasized "growing up here, I thought I wouldn't go anywhere."

Unlike many athletes who seem not to consider the short-lived dimension of athletic careers (Besnier, Calabrò, and Guinness, this volume), the Māori athletes I met projected themselves in the long term. For many, moving to an overseas rugby contract is itself an end-of-career plan. Some overseas-based athletes had shifted into coaching.[6] Three athletes initiated businesses acknowledging the overseas fascination with the *haka* and tapping in their own rugby experience. Drawing on the purpose of the *haka* to bring a team together, Storm, based in the Netherlands, developed a "haka authentic experience" for local companies. Starting in Italy and progressively expanding to other parts of Europe and Asia, the Middle East, and North and South America, Regan and Troy organized rugby camps for youth that incorporate aspects of Māori culture like the *haka, waiata* (songs), ancestral stories, the *pōwhiri,* the Māori welcome ritual to welcome participants and, on match day, their families, and the *hakari*, the closing feast.

Re-enacting *whānaungatanga* and *manaakitanga* (hospitality) in foreign settings, the rugby camps encouraged participating Māori athletes to become more self-aware and appreciative of their culture. It also made them more responsible, leading them to perform the role of *kaitiaki* (guardians) of their culture and history. This guardianship also emerged with other athletes. For instance, Storm formulated the *haka* experience business as a response to the many foreigners "distorting" and "mimicking" it, and to the fact that people who are not Māori are "using it" for their own gain. Other players were protective towards the *haka* when asked by locals to perform it.

Overseas, athletes generated new ways of engaging with their kin. While endeavouring to find their place in the world, some have emphasized their attempts to honour their family's work ethic and in some cases rugby achievements. Many were proud to provide their parents and other family members the opportunity to

see the world. In turn, parents rejoiced in those opportunities. A few athletes had learned the languages of the host countries and yet, they ironically highlighted, they could not speak their own language. This generated the desire to study Māori, but also the feeling that they had the ability to learn it.

In the stories and mobility patterns I came across, multiple desires intertwined to transform into a vital force which encouraged the athletes to leave their (some-times uncomfortable) comfort zones and open themselves to the possibility of new trajectories and relations. All their aspirations could be summarized as an attempt to honour their desire for the world, which is not simply "seeing the world" as mere travellers, but rather existing beyond a state of resilience. As the athletes migrate, or even before when they envisage their migration, their masculine subjectivities recall the notion of *becoming* as conceptualized by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (Parr 2005), which captures the process whereby individuals generate new ways of being as they try to fulfil their desires (Biehl and Locke 2010).[7] From this perspective, the expression "plastic Māori" could lose its derogatory connotation, for "in facing and stretching their limits, people exercise various degrees of plasticity" (Biehl and Locke 2010, 349). Plasticity may still recall adaptability. It nonetheless refers to the capacity to mould into something new, or, in a neurological understanding of the term, to re-wire, in contrast to resilience, a term which hard science coined to define materials' ability to maintain (or return to) their position after stress.

## Invisible journeys towards recognition

On 25 March 2000, the *Phnom Penh Post* announced that Cambodia's rugby national team would travel to Hong Kong for their first international match ever. A Māori expatriate, Hawea, captained the team. Together with other expatriates, he had introduced the game to the region. His cousin shared a copy of the newspaper article and recommended that I talk with him. Hawea enthusiastically told many anecdotes, stressing how the initiative he was part of contributed to introducing the sport in schools and changed many young men's lives. But hardly anybody knew about his achievements because they were not there to see it. When I asked him why he would not share the stories, silence was his answer. In discussions about *mana,* I was often reminded of another *whakatauki*, who told me that the *kumara* (sweet potato) does not say how sweet it is. Yet legendary figures like Kupe and Māui as well as the soldiers from the Māori battalion had seemingly shared what they saw, did, and learned.

Different players were happy with the way they were or had been contributing to rugby in the host countries, sharing their skills as well as their comradery and leadership. This was particularly evident in coaching, as athletes often led teams to success. Some were happy to be sharing parts of their culture, like how to perform a "proper" *haka*. Athletes were open to reciprocating to the people and countries that had given them an opportunity, welcomed them into their worlds, and helped them grow as individuals. But as my questions prompted reflections on Māori rec-ognition of their journeys, the athletes' responses revealed a latent angst about not

being seen. Just as the power of masculinities is contextual in a general way (Besnier, Guinness, Hann, and Kovač 2018), in overseas rugby contexts Māori men may find themselves in a distinct hierarchy in their own country, but their distance from the families, friends and country, whose recognition they have long sought for, reinstates their vulnerability.

The lively discussion with three members of Oyonnax Rugby – Benjamin, Hoani with his wife, and the coach Lipi, who was hosting the gathering – sometimes accompanied by Benjamin's guitar, slid into silence when we touched on issues of *mana* and the recognition of what they were doing in France, until Hoani shared the uncomfortable feeling that people at home did not show much interest in either their achievements or difficulties. He later added that nobody had ever asked him how he felt about his experience, which was the reason why he had not faced his own emotions about recognition.

The athletes' movements demand a re-examination of giving. In describing their engagement with rugby and people overseas, the athletes used the language of reciprocity. Similarly, they framed their relationship with their distant families as a matter of reciprocity in that they endeavoured to respect themselves, strove to create good futures for their offspring, offered their families opportunities to join them, and attempted to provide a positive image of Māori. But silence and distance contributed to misrecognition even overseas.

Quentin was supposed to be part of the group discussion in Oyonnax, but having arrived just before it was over, we eventually had a one-to-one interview. The coach Lipi was still trying to figure out the player who had only recently joined the team and seemed silent and reserved. Lipi saw Quentin's delayed arrival as a sign of self-centredness. But, after overhearing our conversation from the kitchen, he deemed important to tell me he had misread Quentin and now realized that he was in fact focused and responsible.

Māori discourse idealizes its ancient history of voyages, but may forget to create space for the athletes' stories, as had happened in the case of the men who fought in the two world wars. Concurrently, the athletes' silence echoes processes that have historically reduced Māori men to bodies (Hokowhitu 2007), to the extent that they forget how to communicate. Many Māori having internalized negative definitions of themselves, athletes may also fear to come across as *whakaiti* (conceited) or avoid sharing experiences that could confirm negative images. In our conversations, they struggled to share their vulnerability, but more easily brought that to the fore when accused of self-centredness for leaving the family behind or capitalizing on Māori culture.

Eventually, the separations produced by the Māori athletes' transnational mobility potentially trigger ancestral grief as well as collective and individual fears of losing oneself in a sea of non-recognition, which includes both the possibility of not being "seen" and thus being left behind, and of not recognizing what one has or can *become*, as a sociocultural group and an individual.

Overseas, recognition reveals ambiguity as it often borders with processes that maintain Māori out of the human realm. The (resilient) warrior image contributes

to Māori athletes' appeal to the international rugby industry, media, and audiences, which often fetishizes them, as they fetishize Pacific Island rugby men (Besnier 2014; Grainger 2009; Hawkes 2018). However, when the warrior's magical powers become ineffective because of injury or a poor performance, the player is likely to fall into oblivion and be easily replaced, causing further scarring.

A Dutch rugby club manager highlighted the importance of having players like Māori on the squad, "naturally gifted" and better performing than "white New Zealanders," and therefore paying them well, even though they may be a bit lazy. A similar comment reproduced the naturalization and racialization of Māori skills ingrained in colonial discourse, which camouflages itself in the guise of *flair,* with the old corollary of laziness negating the sacrifices that athletes make on and off the field. With overseas recruiters ascribing the warrior rugby athletes' performance to a racialized natural talent, one might wonder if the global rugby industry will lose interest in Māori men, who are increasingly fair-skinned and diversely built.

At the rugby camps in Italy, children were particularly intrigued by the athletes' tattoos, which some longed to touch and others desired on their own bodies. A mature Italian woman affiliated with a club that was hosting a Māori rugby camp referred to the athletes as "gods," but she equally recounted having perceived the first Māori man she ever met as "strange and intimidating," evoking the fear that the warrior provokes. The little knowledge that people overseas have of the athletes' Indigenous condition gave rise to subtle forms of dehumanization.

However, "if you get to know him," the Italian woman added, "he has a kind heart, and if you get to know his culture, then you can understand him." Unaware of the negative stereotypes of which Māori men are the object in New Zealand, she came to see the man as ordinary. Many camp participants, particularly the teenagers, switched from revering the athletes to being fond of the men who, in the course of the camp, encouraged them to take responsibility, respect each other, respect the game, be disciplined, and remember to laugh. Similarly, the camp's participants appreciated having learned stories about the *haka* and Māori myths and history, and I caught many of them sharing what they had learned with their parents, such as correcting them for having got the *hongi* (greeting) wrong by pressing their foreheads rather than their noses, and thus missing out on the exchange of vital force that is central to the *hongi.*

This last scenario contrasts with many situations in New Zealand, where prejudice and fear often prevent non-Indigenous New Zealanders and Māori from connecting with one another, and rob Māori men of self-confidence, whereas – as many Māori remind me whenever I visit New Zealand – foreigners seem to be much more appreciative and respectful of them. Overseas, athletes' political anonymity enabled athletes to forget, if only briefly, the baggage of Indigeneity, which would pop up again when questions elicited old insecurities about their identities, memories revived pain, and whenever they realized that, even though they might remember where they came from, their own people might forget or not recognize them. Overall, the athletes' attempts to create new existential trajectories through

transnational mobility remain situated in the realm of precarious resilience, for the very fact that they still operate within their assigned and embodied identities as athletes, warriors, and Indigenous men.

## The precarity of becoming

Indigenous masculinities are often entangled with references to warriorhood in the presence of an enemy. Neoliberal sport has contributed to this entanglement, as the warrior is full of qualities that the sport industries long for. My ethnography has led me to a notion of warriorhood as it is generated within the contemporary moment: one that is suffused with resilience, where the Indigenous discourse and the neoliberal discourse meet and part. Being resilient has become a new condition to authenticate Indigenous people. While neoliberalism may praise and reinforce Indigenous resilience, it obscures structural inequalities and constructs a field in which warriors are needed. But this process becomes a form of resilience to resilience. More importantly, resilience does not address the resentment which silently intoxicates Indigenous men's perceptions of themselves and their social relations in the context of unsolved inherited trauma.

Rather than warriors, the athletes I encountered came across as navigators trying to reminisce about a time when they were free to fulfil their potential as people, and to remember that their ancestors were able to navigate the Pacific. For them, the rugby industry, its overseas opportunities, neoliberal dynamics, and Indigeneity itself are the new Ocean to navigate. The latter notion "holds the promise of rearticulating and reframing questions of place, space, movement, and belonging" (Byrd and Rothberg 2011, 3). However, its demands may repress individual desires of generating new forms of being and may obscure its corresponding journeys. Moreover, collective narratives and (attempted) performances of resistance may overshadow people's struggles, which include the crystallization of a resilient existence. Eventually, Indigeneity's imperatives and dynamics seem to only allow limited space to face deeper issues of ancestral trauma and healing and thus produce ontological decoloniality.

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in completing this chapter. This is to the loving memory of my father Candeloro, who, despite his illness, encouraged me to stay focused on this research.

## Notes

1 My interlocutors wanted their identity to be disclosed and thus I am not using pseudonyms.
2 In New Zealand, I attended the Auckland region Māori Rugby tournaments held over three weekends in October 2016. I interviewed men who had played or coached overseas, and professional athletes who considered playing overseas. I interacted with parents and other kin of athletes who were or had been overseas. In Europe, I attended three *haka* rugby camps in Italy and one in the Netherlands, which gathered a few players based on the continent; and I visited the French cities of Oyonnax, Albi, and Bordeaux to meet locally based coaches and players. This research draws on doctoral fieldwork I conducted in New Zealand in 2008–09 and 2010, investigating the connection between rugby and Māori identity.
3 This proverb features in the haka composed for the Māori All Blacks (Calabrò 2016, 232).
4 The *kahikatea* is a tree endemic to New Zealand.
5 By *Rangiātea*, Māori refer to a group of islands in the Pacific Ocean from which their ancestors moved to New Zealand, and therefore to their ancient homeland.
6 When I started research in Māori contexts, coaching opportunities in New Zealand were virtually inaccessible beyond Māori rugby, whereas overseas rugby contexts, particularly emerging ones, have long shown an interest in their skills and leadership as warriors of yesteryear.
7 The applicability of Deleuze and Guattari's work to Indigenous contexts is beyond this chapter's scope. However, it could be useful to do so with regards to the analysis of individual desires and the worlds they may produce, particularly as a counterpoint to the tendency in Indigenous Studies to endorse Foucault and his analysis of power.

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