The following is a transcript of a talk given by Ryan Bodman and recorded live at Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa the National Library of New Zealand on 2 June 2021. A question and answer session that followed the talk is also included.

Transcript

Sarah Burgess: Kia ora, ko Sarah Burgess tōku ingoa, he Pou Hītori ki te Manatū Taonga. Hi there, I'm Sarah Burgess, a historian at Manatū Taonga, the Ministry for Culture and Heritage.

Welcome to the New Zealand History podcast channel where you will find talks on Aotearoa New Zealand history, culture and society.

These talks are co-hosted by Manatū Taonga and Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa the National Library of New Zealand and are recorded live at the Library each month.

Before we get into this talk, just a quick warning that this episode does contain a few swear words.

Neill Atkinson: Kia ora koutou, nau mai, haere mai, ko Neill tōku ingoa. Welcome, everyone. I'd like to, I'm particularly pleased to introduce Ryan Bodman to speak today. Because as some of you may remember, we actually had him planned to speak to us last year. In fact, twice. And we were thwarted by COVID on both occasions. So we're really pleased that we've been able to bring him, bring him to Wellington to talk today about the value of social media as a 21st century history research tool.

So over the past five years, and in fact, he informs me maybe a little bit longer than that in fact, Ryan has been researching and writing this history, 'Rugby League: a New Zealand history', which looks at the social and cultural history of this football code in New Zealand. And as part of this project, he has brought a broader collaborative component to his research through the use of social media. And in this talk, he's gonna explore how he's used social media in the development of the book with particular attention on its value to academic historians seeking to engage with people outside the university setting. So please join me in welcoming Ryan to the stage.

[clapping]

Ryan Bodman: Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa. Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou kātoa. Ki te atua, tēnā koe. Ki a Papatūānuku, tēnā koe. Ki ngā tāngata whenua, Ngāti Toa rāua ko Te Atiawa, mauri ora. Ko kaimahi Pākehā te iwi. Nō Tauranga Moana ahau. Ko Ryan Bodman tōku ingoa. Tuhia

ki te rangi, tuhia ki te whenua, tuhia ki te ngākau o ngā tāngata. Ko te mea nui. Ko te aroha. Tihei mauri ora. Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa.

Thank you for coming along to this session of Manatū Taonga's Public History Talks. And thank you to Sarah Burgess and Emma Kelly for inviting me along. Today, I want to speak to you all about the process of researching and writing 'Rugby League: a New Zealand history', which is a book length study of the football code in this country that I began working on back in 2014. Specifically, I want to talk to you about the use of social media as a tool in the development of that project, and to reflect on the value of Facebook and other social media platforms to those of us studying the past from the perspective of the digital age. I'm hoping that some of what I have to say will spark commentary and feedback from some of you. So with that in mind, I'm going to try and wrap this talk up within half an hour so we can have a 20 rather than 10 minute discussion at the end. So with that said, I'll launch straight in.

Like many of us, I have a love/hate relationship with social media. At a time in my life when I'm actively trying to cultivate a greater focus on the present moment, social media can be a real distraction. But as a historian, I have found social media to be a powerful tool in my efforts to promote public engagement with my work. I suspect social media has been used by historians since the platforms became mainstream 10 to 15 years ago. But it was Dr Michael Stevens' Facebook page, 'A World History of Bluff', that first made me aware of the potential value that these platforms could bring to my work as a historian.

Dr Stevens developed his Facebook page in tandem with his own book-length project. And on that project's website, he explains the purpose of the book's social media presence as follows: 'This project has a Facebook page largely to keep people up to date with its progress and findings', writes Stevens. 'However, it would be great if it also generated some discussion about aspects of Bluff's history, as the Bluffy's Facebook group, and the Bluff 2024 urban rejuvenation Facebook page often do.' In line with his hopes for the page, Dr Stevens' posts to the 'World History of Bluff' Facebook account often attract a significant number of engagements. And when I took a closer look at who was engaging with this page, I noticed that Dr Stevens was using his project's social media presence to get his ideas and research before what looked like a broad variety of people. Alongside fellow academic historians, Dr Stevens' posts were reaching and inciting an active response from members of the public with a connection to or interest in Bluff, as well as local and amateur historians whose interests in the deep south overlapped with those of Dr Stevens. And it was this use of Facebook as a tool to cut across the silos that sometimes dominate this landscape of historical inquiry in New Zealand that initially caught my attention.

In my relatively short time as a New Zealand historian, I've noticed that there is a tendency in our field to cast public and academic histories as distinct approaches to the study of the past. I guess I come from the academic side of this ledger. And it's been my experience that in the university context, journal publications and attendance at conferences with fellow academics are viewed to be valuable uses of our time, while little if any value is placed on making intelligent content available and accessible to a wider audience. We could probably spend many hours debating why this is the case. And we probably should. But for the moment, can I just say that I think the current state of play largely reflects structural issues, as employment in the modern university context is often precarious, and any hope of maintaining that employment has come to be increasingly tied to an academic's ability and willingness to meet a set of prescribed outputs. But academic life hasn't always placed so little value on the education of the people.

There's a wonderful passage in the Noam Chomsky reader *Understanding power* in which Chomsky reflects on the tradition of public education that existed at some American and British universities during the interwar period: 'that was one of the big things in the 1930s, for left intellectuals to be involved in,' explained Chomsky, 'good scientists, well-known, important scientists … just felt like it was part of their obligation to the human species to do popular science. So you had very good books being written about physics, and about mathematics, and so on – for instance, there's a book called *Mathematics for the millions*, by Lance Hogben, which is an example of it. He came out of the left. And the point is, those people just felt that this kind of knowledge should be shared by everyone. … If you're privileged enough to, say, know mathematics, and you think you're a part of the general world, obviously you should try to help other people understand it.'

In this passage, Chomsky is speaking to a very different time in a very different place to that which we currently find ourselves. But the things that he touches on, that knowledge is a public good, and that those of us privileged enough to have access to it have a responsibility to make it available to others, strike a chord that lies deep within me. I was originally planning on studying the history of rugby league in New Zealand as a topic for a PhD thesis. But after sharing some of my academic writings with my parents, I began to have second thoughts.

My mum and dad, Garth and Julia Bodman, don't have higher formal qualifications, but they are both intelligent people. Despite this, the academic articles that I had managed to get published during my time at uni were essentially impenetrable to them, as the style expected in those publications places little value on accessibility, and generally assumes that the reader will have a degree of familiarity with the topic under discussion. And this realization, that pieces of work that I had really struggled to create, were of almost no value to some of the people I love the most in this world, really got me thinking, you know? What's the point of writing like this? I didn't go to

university to become part of an exclusive club. I went there to learn. And if the people who raised me can't engage with the stories that I'm trying to uncover, what the fuck is the point of writing? So I abandoned the PhD idea. And I began working on a history of rugby league in my spare time, around the far more important, and far more stressful job of looking after these two.

Sarah: Just a heads up, Ryan is talking about his two kids.

Ryan: [Ryan shows photograph of his children] That's Rosie on the right and Archie on the left, I'm taking a quick food break from the pools.

In line with what I've just told you, when I started on this project in 2014, I set myself the goal of writing a history that is academically credible, but publicly accessible. Whether I've achieved this goal remains to be seen, as the first draft of the text has only recently made it to a publisher. But when I saw how Dr Stevens was using his project's social media account to get his academic research and ideas before a broad variety of people, I knew that Facebook could be a valuable tool in my own work as a historian. So in September 2017 I set up the 'Rugby League: a New Zealand History' Facebook page, describing it as a page to connect with league fans and historians as I research and write the book. And over subsequent years, the page has filled that purpose well, helping me to get my ideas and research before a much larger audience than would have been possible without this technology. And by making some of my research available in this way, the engagements made possible through Facebook have served to both affirm the value of my work and also brought an incredible amount of additional value to the project.

For those of you unfamiliar with Facebook, good on you [laughter]. The platform allows users to engage with material posted to a page in a variety of ways. Facebook users can like, love, dislike or laugh at a post. They can comment on a thread below a post and they can share posts to their personal accounts, or to pages that they administer. And through these different types of engagements, you get a pretty clear idea of how material shared to a page is being received by those engaging with it.

The first post to the page that received significant attention was one I wrote about the involvement of Pacific peoples in the history of rugby league in New Zealand back in late 2017. The post spoke of the post-war Pacific diaspora, which saw many thousands of Pacific peoples migrate from the tropical Pacific to these south Pacific islands in response to sustained labour shortages here. As many of these newcomers made their homes in working class towns and suburbs, some embraced rugby league, and the post spoke specifically to the connection that developed between the game

and members of Tokoroa's Cook Island community who established the Pacific Rugby League Club in that south Waikato town in 1969.

Despite some anxiety as to what right I had to tell the story of these people, the post about the Pacific Rugby League Club and its connection to Tokoroa's Cook Island community was enthusiastically picked up by people associated with the Club. One user whose father's dissertation I had referenced in the post wrote, 'This is awesome, truly is a proud and humbling moment. Thank you for sharing'. Another follower responded, 'Good read, well done Pacific', and then another expressed her pride in the club's proud on-field record, 'There will never be another team like our father's. Chahoo!' [laughter].

In this way, the engagement options available through Facebook mean that the platform can provide a useful gauge on how material shared to a page is received by those engaging with it. I have found this to be particularly useful as a means to assess the value of material that explores the popularity of rugby league in communities that I have little or no connection to. And as well as serving to affirm the value of my research outputs, engagements with my project made possible through social media have also brought an incredible amount of value to the work. As already noted, a key goal in the development of this project is to produce a book that bridges the public/academic divide. And the book's social media presence has supported this goal.

In his book *Limbo: blue-collar roots, white-collar dreams*, the Italian American journalist Alfred Lubrano reflects on some of the defining values of blue-collar working-class Americans. Working class life is not an area of study that has attracted much interest in New Zealand recently, as social class has been an unfashionable tool for understanding these islands for some time now. But much of what Lubrano has to say about America rings true here with the key values he identifies in his work including an emphasis upon family, a deep respect for parents and elders, a strong sense of loyalty and an open and honest manner that is devoid of hidden agenda or subtext. In the local context we'd articulate that last point by suggesting that working class people call a spade a spade, or they say when shit stinks. And in light of rugby league's historic association with working class people, my efforts to write an accessible history have occasionally benefited from this forthright manner.

In 2019 I posted some material to the Facebook page that discussed the history of rugby league in New Zealand in the 1990s. Across that decade there was a significant growth in the size of New Zealand's underclass as the neoliberal economic agenda of the '80s and '90s devastated working class communities all over New Zealand. As a result of the history being covered, some of the issues discussed in the post were quite sensitive. And the text reflected that. And in the comment section

below the post, an active follower of the page offered some feedback. 'Hopefully the book is easier to read than this post', he wrote, 'a working man's game needs a working man's book'. Now, from this comment, it was clear that I'd failed to meet what is the central aim of my entire project [laughter]. So I was initially pretty disheartened after I read that. But, if working on a project for several years teaches you anything it is that setbacks and criticisms provide a space for growth, when we're able to view them in that light. And so I replied, 'Thank you so much for your comment. It's tricky to find a balance as some of this material is very sensitive and requires quite a lot of thought. But I do appreciate the feedback. Was it the use of specific words that prompted your comment, or the thrust of the piece as a whole?' And he replied, 'Just read too academically. But if that's the route you're taking, that's fine'. I went on to explain that that's not the route that I am taking [laughter] and I joke that I'm trying to find some mythical middle ground between public accessibility and academic credibility. And then out of the blue someone else joined the conversation, describing the original post as an awesome read and great summation. 'I grew up in a working-class family', the user explained, 'encouraged by my dad to read all we could'. Now this comment was really affirming to me, because I grew up around working class people who were not formally educated, but who placed a high value on knowledge. So I wrote back, 'Thank you, it is my hope that the book will honour the tradition of working class intellectualism that was once upon a time strong around worksites, like the wharves and the coal mines, so I really appreciate your comment'. But that feedback didn't take away from the earlier comment, which I took on board as I continued to develop the text. And a few months later, after posting additional material to the page, the same Facebook user who had criticized the earlier post offered a complimentary comment, 'Much more enjoyable this time', he wrote, 'nice flow'.

And there's a bizarre connection between league and *Once were warriors*. I've been at Warriors games where people around me will just quote verbatim whole sections of the movie. Yes, fascinating connection.

As well as providing space where I can access feedback on my research outputs, social media has also proven to be a powerful tool to engage with people closely connected to the history that I'm exploring. Of course, oral history interviews are a traditional research tool that allows historians to engage directly with people involved in the topic under discussion. And in my opinion, nothing can beat the experience of sitting down with someone and speaking to them about their lives at length. But oral history is a labour and time intensive approach to the study of the past. As a result, there are limitations to the number of people that you can realistically engage with through this tool of historical inquiry. With social media however, historians can gain access to a very large pool of people. And if the tools are used with respect and humility, they can provide a powerful space to tap

into the vast amount of experiential knowledge that exists amongst the people and communities who are intimately connected to the topics that we are exploring.

One of the most popular posts on the page, the Facebook page to date, explored the popularity of rugby league amongst New Zealand's patched street gangs. The post reached thousands of people, some of whom were gang members, and it was generally well received by them. 'Very interesting read', one user wrote, and another commented, 'What an awesome read, the man Dennis O'Reilly', referring to one of the people referred to in the text. As with the Pacific rugby league example, engagements with this post helped to affirm the value of the material to people closely connected to the stories being told. And as the post's popularity grew, the comments section below the post developed into a significant source of additional information about the topic.

One follower of the page responded, 'Fantastic read', and went on to tell me about the presence of gangs and the league competition around where he lives. And another follower joined in explaining that the Mob even had a second team called the Young Bloods in that area. 'The Black Power members used to play for Turanga Panthers. And now some play for the Falcons', the user went on. 'Most are productive members of society, and some aren't, just like any group.' Several other users offered similar reflections on the presence of gangs in their local competitions. And then an entirely new comment thread popped up when someone drew the connection between the game's popularity amongst gangsters in New Zealand and the sport's presence in prisons. 'What about the formation of the Parry team?', the user wrote. 'Paremoremo Prison inmates played in the Auckland Senior B Comp. That would have been a collective of different gang affiliates united by the game of league.' In response to this comment, several other users responded with additional information about prison rugby league, including personal reflections about playing for or against prison teams. 'Yep, I played for the Paremoremo team a few times,' one user wrote. ‘That was the most well-behaved team in the competition. Teina Pora was hooker before he got out'. And another replied, 'I played for Mount Crawford Prison when they had a team. I think we were under Marist Northern. And then in Rangipo, we played under the Taupo Broncos, but after a couple of minor incidents, the team was withdrawn from the comp. Then the Turangi Dambusters started recruiting inmates from Rangipo to play in their premier team alongside some prison officers'.

As you can imagine the history of rugby league amongst patched street gangs and in New Zealand's prisons are topics with pretty short paper trails. There is the odd newspaper article and news story about prison rugby league. And the sport’s popularity amongst gangsters is mentioned in the handful of books that explore the history of patched gangs in New Zealand. But beyond that, information about these elements of rugby league's history in New Zealand are confined to the memories of those involved, meaning that much of the detail that was posted below the Facebook

post was new information to me. In turn, the information and detail offered by the page's followers in response to the post significantly expanded my understanding of this aspect of the game's social and cultural history in New Zealand. And as the Facebook page slowly developed a following, these sorts of engagements where the audience of the page were enhancing my knowledge of the sport's history became commonplace. Many followers of the page have shared their personal experiences of anti-league prejudice in secondary schools, and one has spoken of the game's informal exclusion from the armed services.

Facebook users have shared photos to the page that speak to the sport's place in New Zealand society and culture. And users have occasionally directed me to additional texts that offer more information about a topic mentioned on the page. And when I have made errors on the page, those mistakes have been brought to my attention. In speaking to the value that social media can bring to the work of 21st century historians, it is not my intention to suggest that these platforms represent a substitute for more traditional research methods. The research base of my book has been constructed with the traditional tools of the historian: primary documents, secondary sources and oral history interviews. But it is my experience that social media can serve to get our research outputs before a very wide variety of people, and the resulting engagements made possible on the platforms can bring an enormous amount of value to our work.

I'll give you another example. The role of women in the history of New Zealand rugby league is a theme that runs through 'Rugby League: a New Zealand history', but again, it is a topic that does not have a great deal written about it. In March 2019, I came across this wonderful photo of a Manurewa Marlins team on another rugby league Facebook page, with a comment suggesting that it was a women's team from New Zealand that toured Australia in 1976. I had come across information regarding the significant growth of women's rugby league in New Zealand in the 1970s, but the first overseas tour by a women's side that I had previously heard about didn't take place until the '90s. So I posted the photo to the Facebook page with the comment, 'Wow, what an amazing photo. If anyone out there knows names of the players, the team's name and details about the Australian tour, I'd love to find out more'. And in response, a user commented below the post identifying his mum as the person with the cat. I then interacted with the user on Facebook, and subsequently via email. And he shared photos of a scrapbook that was put together by his mum, Ngaire Fielding, after the team returned home. And the scrapbook is a treasure trove of information, including all the names of the women involved, article clippings about the tour from local and Australian newspapers, and a couple of extra photos. As you can imagine, I was thrilled to make this connection with Mrs Fielding's son, Rod. The material he shared with me added significant additional information to my project's coverage of the development of the women's game in New Zealand. And

what's more, I have not come across any information about the Manurewa Marlins' tour from any other source, meaning that without Facebook, this part of the game's local history would have passed my project by.

All of the examples that I have spoken to so far highlight the value of the book's social media presence to the project itself. The page has been an invaluable space to place my research outputs before a wider audience that has attracted engagement from academic historians, rugby league historians, and people with a passion and an interest in the game. This audience has brought significant value to the work, both through their engagements with the material shared and their willingness to bring new information and sources to my attention. But it is with some reflections upon the personal value of the page to my experience of working on the book that I would like to conclude this talk today.

For those of you amongst us who are historians, you will know that our job or hobby can be a very isolating one. There is a great deal of time spent by ourselves and often in our heads, reading, writing and thinking and then doing that over and over again. But 'Rugby League: a New Zealand History', the Facebook page, has offered something of a counterpoint to this sense of isolation. I still spend most of my working day alone, lost in the past. But thanks to the Facebook page, I do so in the knowledge that there are people out there who are actively interested in my efforts and supportive of what I am doing. In response to a post published at the end of 2018, an active follower of the page thanked me for my dedication and tenacity and providing something the game needed in this country. And in response to a post published last year, another follower of the page wrote, 'Awesome work, bro, please don't stop'. I have never met these people in person, but I have felt a strong sense of warmth through their engagements with the Facebook page. So much so that on those occasions when the cloud of self-doubt has descended upon me, I have drawn on comments like these to fuel my determination to see this project through to its end.

So, I would like to conclude this talk today by acknowledging all of those people who have engaged with the project's Facebook page over the last few years. In doing so, you have made this project and my experience of working on it so much better in so many ways. I hope that when the book finally comes out, you are able to take pride in the fact that you helped play a hand in its development. Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou e hoa mā. And thank you to those in the audience and to those listening to a recording of this sometime in the future for your attention today.

[clapping]

Neill: Thank you, Ryan. As promised, we have plenty of time for questions and comments and we've got a couple of microphones which we can hand around to people.

Audience member 1: Ryan, ngā mihi nui ki a koe, that was really awesome.

Ryan: Thank you.

Audience member 1: I was interested in how you're engaging with people and I see you've talked a little bit to Rod about this, about the ethics of taking images from online. How are you dealing with it and in, in terms of your publication?

Ryan: There's not a singular approach. I guess you have to have a different approach to the institutions than the individuals but um, a lot of its just relationships, I think, like you establish a connection with people and they understand what you're about. And yeah, they can see that you're driven by something which might align with making them interested in supporting the kaupapa. And I mean, I've just found, I think the, the Facebook page has ticked along. For a while people have seen what it's about, and people are interested in engaging with it to an extent 'cause um … yeah there's nothing formal, just email him and be like, this is all good. And yeah nothing formal, just, it's quite a nice difference from that formality that's expected within middle class circles.

Audience member 1: But I see in terms of publication that you will acknowledge …

Ryan: Oh, for sure. Yeah. Hard. Nah, got to do that. That's, that's one thing I've found, too, that um identifying the people in the photos is real important within that context too, just to sort of acknowledge the massive contribution that they've played to the story being told and to honour them, in that way, so you know, make sure that the people whose collection it comes from and also the people who are in the photo are acknowledged as much as possible.

Audience member 2: Hi, thanks for that. That was fantastic. I probably have a follow-on question from that, because people are commenting and giving you extra information. So are you going to be using that information in the book as well? And how are you kind of framing it?

Ryan: I haven't sort of used it specifically like to reference it. But say the Pacific, the Pacific one out of that post, I went to Tokoroa and did interviews. And there is that space to do that too with the

prison league, I had sort of tied up a few interviews, but it started to feel like it was becoming a different topic entirely the more I went down there, so I wanted to hint at it. But yeah, it's more just given me a more rounded idea of the context like, yeah, how things are being perceived from the community and how they're understood and just affirming what I've been thinking or taking me in new directions. So yeah, partly, it's just filling it out in my head. And partly, it's leading on to new things. Yeah. Additional interviews sorry, or additional research. Yeah.

Audience member 3: Hello, Ryan.

Ryan: Hello.

Audience member 3: Do you have any idea of the numbers of people who've commented on the Facebook, or the contributors who contributed to the Facebook?

Ryan: I wouldn't know how many. There's probably like 20 to 30 active people who are often engaging with it, and then I mean, that one about the gangs just when that really ballooned out beyond anything else I've ever done. So that was, that had just hundreds and hundreds of comments, but um, in a way, I just think it was like, they just like being talked, like talked about like humans. And that was really important to them. When you see how the *Herald* writes about them, it's just a fucking disgrace.

Audience member 4: Hi, Ryan.

Ryan: Hi, Carey. Carey has been a massive contributor to my project too both on social media and off sorry, thanks so much, Carey.

Audience member 4: Oh, that's all right. It's not about me. The question though, I want to ask you, we all go down as historians to the National Library and look through Papers Past, through newspapers and so on. I just wonder under the new norm now, how much you look under the different social media pages, the histories and so on, rather than the old diggings that we go through.

Ryan: I don't really, I don't really explore people's Facebook pages too much, I just 'like' lots of them. And as it comes up, I sort of will delve into it. So that's really important. There is a lot of content on

there. But a lot of it's very curated. So there's still a lot of value to the, just the, the bedrock of historical sources. But no, there's … I mean, social media often when it is curated, it's taken, there's new meaning there too there's the meaning and the content, but there's also the meaning in the storytelling, so, um, I mean, a huge amount of information to wade through. And I've found a lot of gems. But yeah, I'm not sure, how long are, I don't really know how it all works. Is that digital stuff going to be there accessible always? Or is it going to get lost? Or? So I don't? Definitely in the contemporary moment, I find it useful, but how long it's going to be there for future historians I don't know. It all feels very ephemeral, really, and momentary. Sort of like everything now.

Audience member 5: Awesome Ryan.

Ryan: Kia ora whaea.

Audience member 5: How often do you feel that you need to post to keep this active? And what do you see the future of it sort of building on your previous answer? Do you hope to keep this going after your book's finished?

Ryan: No, I'd like to get off Facebook as soon as possible. I only got back on Facebook because of this. At least that's what I tell myself. So, no, I'd like to keep using social media in the future, I feel like it's a tool that I will use for future projects. But in terms of this page, um, I don't have any great plans for it. I, Ross was just saying that there's a program now of placing digital records into institutions. So that would be real cool. But in terms of, yeah, I sort of conceived of this as going alongside the life of the project and finishing once the project's done. Yeah, so I don't think it will, I think it will finish soon. But like I say, I definitely will be using social media again, because it just democratizes the whole process, I feel and I mean, there's been awkward conversations that I've had to have on there, but that's alright, too. Because at the end of the day, it's their stories, and they should be able to hold me to account. So yeah, this will stop soon, but I reckon it will be part of my practice for a while.

Audience member 6: I watched a Herbs documentary recently. The question of the dawn raids just fell out the film, really, it was very much that and the anti-apartheid work. I'm not asking you if, if that's going to be in your book or anything like that. But it's, I mean, the Herbs were a political band, I think as well, quite self-consciously. So, and rugby league doesn't necessarily construct itself in that sort of way. I'm sort of interested in the way things, you know, might drop out the discussions that

you know, you might or might not feel are essential to include, but it could be anything, but for me, obviously, stuff like the dawn raids are very important.

Ryan: Yeah, my next potential project is about Bob Marley's influence and impact on New Zealand and that came out of this, essentially, just constantly seeing him appear on posters and people's houses I visited or on their Facebook feeds or. And it's very much the same world like, City Newton the club down Auckland central was closely connected to the people in the Hawkes at Bastion Point and a lot of the, because there was a maritime connection with the whānau there. And so they, a lot of those guys were 'Leaguies' and a couple of the Herbs played for City Newton. So it's, it's, there were a lot of connections. And I mean, the game was closely connected to working class life in Auckland. And so a lot of those Pasifika Māori responses had a lot of trade union support. So just the relationships were all connected there. And so Will 'Ilolahia who is one of the founders of the Polynesian Panthers, he was involved with league here and in Tonga. So the connections are all there because league's a game for marginalized people because of what rugby union has been, either has or, we've been told it represents in this country. So that, that other game represents, it brings those different people together who felt a sense of alienation from the established order. So they're all, they're all there. There or thereabouts for sure. I mean, same scene, same scene.

Audience member 7: Ryan, it's, it's interesting, you've been giving a talk demonstrating the power of the internet as a historical research tool, yet you're clearly still thinking in terms of traditional book publication. Have you considered the possibility of publishing on the internet? You're probably very keen to have a book, but even to publish supplementary material that may not go in the book, or a summary? So that, because my experience is that you have no idea what people poking around on the internet are after and this is a way of actually making people aware of the work you've done. And even as a useful marketing tool, if you have a summary there, you can point people to your book.

Ryan: Yep. Yeah, there's definitely lots of interesting conversations to be had in that regard with the publisher. But I guess I'm a writer rather than a seller of books. I'd like to speak to the people who know how to do all that stuff, and what that looks like in the contemporary, in the current moment. I mean, there's a lot of scope for like, linking some of the, there's an amazing amount of footage of the game, and you sort of had this footage from back in the day and just the stuff that it captures around Carlaw Park, or around these different places. It's interesting in and of itself, so there's a lot of scope for some online content. But yeah, definitely keen to have that conversation. But like I say I

just finished writing it and need to start turning my attention to that sort of stuff shortly. But thanks for the idea. And the reflections.

Audience member 8: Oh, kia ora Ryan, Andre Whittaker here from Wellington Rugby League.

Ryan: Kia ora Andre.

Audience member 8: Good to see you again. More of a comment and acknowledgment rather than a question. Just firstly, acknowledgments for the work you're doing and the book and, and, you know, subsequently, the, the Facebook development that's brought more people into reflecting on the game, I think. And kind of following on from the last speaker how it's opening a channel for people who may not think about reading research documents or history in a formal manner then say some of the people in the room, but will engage in bite sized pieces of history that interest them specifically, that they can see on Facebook. And I think particularly too as you look at some of, as you have mentioned, some of the history of the people involved of rugby league around trade unions, working class environments, and very much face to face people. And, and as we also know, a lot of those environments in terms of trade unions and working class environments, aren't what they used to be, and not a lot of the connection is happening so great that you're opening a channel that they can reengage. And also perhaps, you know, that's another way that people who may not normally think of this as something they would do, would start looking at formal research and history reading. So just acknowledgement and comments really, good stuff from a broken-nosed rugby league player in the room. Yeah.

Ryan: Hey, that's, that means a huge amount to me, Andre, thank you for that. I mean, that's part of the, the idea really is to, a) move away from the idea that thinking is for certain people, because thinking is for everybody. And engaging with ideas makes life richer. And just whenever I'd say to people at university, 'Why aren't we writing so people can read it?', they'd just be like, 'They're not interested'. I was like, 'Nah, man, like, you just make them feel like idiots, because of the way that you write'. And, yeah, I mean, as soon as I saw the academic value of the topic of rugby league, it was obvious that it could be a vehicle for getting people to think about it. To think more, because they're already engaged in the, in the sport, they're already interested in the sport. So that was an easy in. And then you start talking about things like Māori urbanisation or the diaspora of Pacific peoples, and that's their life story. And so then that starts to interest. So yeah, nah, it's really great that that has sparked that interest because like I say, I mean, I grew up with a granddad, who left

school when he was 14, and he had an insatiable intellectual curiosity. I didn't agree with hardly anything he came up with. But he, yeah, he made me know that learning was for me, as well. And it should be for everyone. We've got an education system that leaves a lot of people feeling like idiots, and it's fucked up. It's unbelievable. But that's the norm. And to me, knowledge is one of the most beautiful things of life. So, it's a privilege to be able to share it and absolutely humbling that, that it's reaching receptive ears. So, thank you for your comment.

Audience member 9: Kia ora Ryan, thanks for your talk and your research. I'm just wondering about the geographic spread of the respondents. So, are you getting quite a good spread across the country, you know, teams from the South Island, Christchurch, the West Coast, Wellington? Sounds like you've gotten into some smaller spots. Has it been a good tool for that?

Ryan: Yes, I guess when you say that, it has, because it does have that immediate reach. There's no geographic limitations to it. I hadn't really thought about that. But yeah there's, I mean, I made a conscious effort of trying to get around to Waitara, Greymouth, Hawke's Bay, because I live in Auckland. And that's where the game has always been most popular. I'm trying to make sure that it's not an Auckland-focused history. And it's been really useful as well for Australia because there's this massive pool of working class New Zealanders in Australia who essentially left here when they deindustrialised the place. And went and got work there. So, there's like they have heaps, sort of particularly Māori rugby league over there is really strong and it's often around. In Sydney it's big, but also like west with the mines and parts of Queensland, like there's a whole other story there of like, a) the increasingly trans-Tasman nature of Māori population, but also the migration of working people when they destroyed the industry here they all, a large number of them went there, like you talk to working class communities, and so many of them will have uncles or cousins or people over there. So that's been a real important connection, and someone wants to have a book launch over there. So that's been all through that. So that's been really useful for that, I guess, spreading beyond New Zealand to Australia too. Which is cool. Yeah, because the story sort of, New Zealand rugby league history becomes an Australasian story later on, really, because the game just becomes entirely reliant on the money of the broadcaster.

Audience member 10: Kia ora, I was wondering if you tried any social media platforms other than Facebook, or if you would try any others in future projects?

Ryan: Yeah, well, I would. I don't, um, Facebook was just the most obvious just because it allows ... I guess the only one I'd think about it in comparison is Twitter. And it's just much shorter space as you can write. And also, I'm a super obsessive dude. So social media and me don't go very well together. So, I try to keep my distance. But yeah, I think it would be, there would be space for another social media platform. But it was the platform that I was familiar with and I got back on to do this project so … yeah, Instagram could be good. I mean, any of you young people into Bob Marley? You have much to say about Bob Marley?

Audience member 11: Kia ora Ryan, Sione here. I don't have Instagram, I'm still on Facebook. But thanks for an awesome presentation.

Ryan: Thank you Sione.

Audience member 11: I just want to touch on one of the things you just mentioned. So you talked about rugby league, of rugby league being a platform for those who are alienated from the established order. Can you unpack that just a little bit more?

Ryan: Yeah I guess that's the sort of one of the broader, probably the central thesis of the book is to say, well, here's this game, which, when it came here, it came with a whole lot of baggage which existed in England, because it had split from rugby union over the issue of player payment in 1895. So it had a clear class dimension in England, when it came here, it very much took that on too, because the way that the rugby union compensated its players was, yeah, it was essentially to under pay or not to compensate them in full with the idea, or at least, the ethos developed in a place where compensation wasn't that important, because everybody had plenty of coin, but once working class people started playing it, that way of approaching the issue of compensation just wasn't fair in their context because they couldn't go and play football and be away from work. And so there was this issue that arose. That's what rugby league was formed over. And so that same thing happened here. In the early 20th century rugby union people at that time were, I mean, they were pretty much just the social and economic establishment, they were all the same people. They all got educated at the same schools, and yeah, so that was, that was their game and they really, when rugby league was formed, they really, really attacked it doggedly and, and so all throughout the 20th century, there's this, the game is confined to these pockets of working class areas, or to say the Kīngitanga in Ngāruawāhia Huntly, who are very, historically very antagonistic towards the Crown, or Irish Catholics in the South Island who embraced rugby league in response to sectarianism

pandered to by rugby union, patched gangs. And because rugby union is just part of New Zealand Inc., right? It's just like the brand of New Zealand now. And rugby league offers something different. It's not necessarily better, but it's way more real. So yeah, I think, I think that's just a long history in this country because rugby union has been, has meant, has been, we've been told it means so much to so many people. And rugby league has ... I mean, it doesn't, it hardly even features in the histories like, like, they're just, even the historians maintain the marginalisation to be honest, it's so deep, they don't even see it. It's yeah, but that's just my contention, that class issues run through the society so deeply that they are not seen because they're just part of the woodwork. And so that's why this project really attracted me because it was like, here's a game which is so clearly based on class, like, nobody can deny it. And that's, yeah, that's just one aspect of it. The alienation, but I think because in the school system, the councils, the people in authority, really had it in for this game. And so it developed that, it developed that identity both without and within where people, they sort of yeah, they use it as a marker of their identity as standing at odds with that game, which essentially, just bullies, just bullies. But that's the state. That's what the state is, I think.

Neill: Well, thanks everyone, for some really interesting questions and comments there. We'd better bring things to a close. So I'd like to thank Ryan again for what was a really fascinating and thought provoking and entertaining talk today. So please join me in thanking Ryan.

[clapping]

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