

Fiji Islander trans-border mobility in the Pacific: The case of Fiji and Japan

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DOI: 10.23791/561322

Abstract: This article is concerned with Fiji Islanders in Japan. Its objective is to introduce a to date little explored case of Pacific Islander trans-border mobility within the Pacific region. After providing a general overview of the topic, it discusses two of the main reasons why Fiji Islanders spend shorter durations or migrate for (in)definite periods to Japan in more detail: education and professional sport. Although the paper focuses on Fiji and Japan, the discussion points at two structural undercurrents that characterize Pacific Islander mobility more generally and aims to appeal to a broader audience interested in Pacific Studies.

Keywords: Fiji, Japan, Pacific Rim, mobility, migration

[Submitted as Scientific Paper: 05 May 2021, acceptance of the revised manuscript: 21 August 2021]



Figure 1: Reception for the Kanagawa-based honorary consul of the Republic of Fiji to Japan in Yokohama, 2012.



Figure 2: Japan-based Fiji Islanders gather for the 2012 Tokyo Sevens international rugby tournament.

Introduction

Trans-border mobility is constitutive to the lives of many contemporary Pacific Islanders (e.g. Keck & Schieder 2015; Lee & Francis 2009; Rensel & Howard 2012; Taylor & Lee 2017) and Fiji is no exception. Once a British crown colony between 1874 and 1970, Fiji has witnessed the influx of large numbers of South Asian indentured labourers and passenger migrants during its early colonial history as well as other immigrants mainly from East Asia and Oceania. Since the 1970s, however, Fiji has turned from an immigration to an emigration country (Lal 2003). Large numbers of Indo-Fijians (the descendants of South Asian immigrants) and other Fiji Islanders have left Fiji following the ethnonationalist political developments which unfolded after Fiji gained independence and led to several political coups and constitutional crises since the mid-1980s (Lal 2006; Fraenkel et al. 2009). At the same time, Fiji Islanders have been involved in different types of educational and labour mobility, occasionally leading to permanent emigration (IOM 2020; Mohanty 2006).

While Fiji Islander mobility is global in its reach, as the presence of migrants from Fiji in countries as diverse as France, India, Japan, the United States of America and the United Kingdom testifies, a recent study conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) shows that by mid-2019, the absolute majority of the estimated total of 222,000 Fiji-born people living abroad were located in four Pacific Rim countries: Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the US (IOM 2020:xvi; cf. Voigt-Graf 2007). The same study claims that emigration from Fiji has doubled since 1990 and that in 2019 Fiji had one of the highest mobility rates of Pacific Island countries with an estimated emigrant population of 25 per cent in comparison to its resident population (IOM 2020:24).¹ Despite these numbers, it is interesting to note that in the field of migration studies, Fiji has attracted far less attention to date compared to other countries in Oceania that are characterized by large-scale mobility such as Samoa and Tonga. Moreover, while a handful of scholars have explored migration patterns and routes between Fiji and

the aforementioned English-speaking countries in the Pacific Rim or within the Pacific Islands, little is known about Fiji Islanders and, by extension, other Pacific Islander migrant populations in those parts of Asia that are



Figure 3: An advertisement for an Osaka-based food bar owned by a migrant from Fiji, 2012.



Source: Dominik Schieder.

Figure 4: A meeting of the Fiji Community in Tokyo, 2013.

located in or bordering the Pacific (but see Besnier 2012; 'Esau 2007).²

This article aims to contribute to Pacific Islander mobility studies. It mainly builds on fieldwork, which I conducted on Fiji Islander life worlds and community patterns in Japan in 2012-13 (Schieder 2015) but also takes into consideration more recent developments.³ The article follows two particular aims. Firstly, it provides general information on trans-border mobility between Fiji and Japan, also contextually referring to other nodes of the Fiji diaspora. Secondly, it engages in more detail with two of the main reasons why Fiji Islanders move for short periods, temporarily migrate or even settle down in Japan: education and professional sport (here: rugby). While these facets of Fiji Islander mobility will be discussed in separate sections, they occasionally overlap to various, at times considerable degrees in individual cases and should be understood as heuristics lenses rather than categories that can be neatly separated.

Before I proceed, a note on terminology is warranted: Fiji is a multi-ethnic society and mainly constituted by

indigenous Fijians (henceforth: Fijians) and Indo-Fijians. In 2007, they made up 94.3 per cent of the total population (56.8 per cent Fijians and 37.5 per cent Indo-Fijians) with the remaining being mainly of Chinese, European, Rotuman, other Pacific Islander and mixed-ethnic origin (Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics 2008).⁴ While to this day, the majority of Fiji's emigrants remain Indo-Fijians, the number of Fijians leaving the country for longer periods or indefinitely is growing (Voigt-Graf 2008). In this article, I employ the term 'Fiji Islanders' to refer to persons from Fiji (i.e. born in Fiji, raised in Fiji, self-identifying as from Fiji etc.) regardless of their ethnic backgrounds but will specify if I am referring to certain Fiji Islanders in the discussion. For example, while Fiji Islanders are engaged in educational mobility, the absolute majority of rugby players from Fiji in Japan are indigenous Fijians

Fiji Islanders in Japan

Given that Fiji and Japan have not shared colonial connections, it was only after Fiji gained independence

from the British Empire in 1970, that bilateral relations were established and cross-border mobility put into motion. Japan was one of the first countries to endorse Fiji as an independent state in 1970 and has been placing a particular focus on health, environmental issues, climate change and education as part of its official development assistance (ODA) to Fiji (as well as other Pacific Island countries) (MOFA 2016). Existing interconnections are also increasingly shaped by a growing Japanese interest in regional geopolitics triggered by China's rising influence in Oceania (Envall 2020; Tarte 2005, 2018). Japan has been a trading partner for Fiji (and other Pacific Island states) for decades. Although its economic interests in island Oceania is marginal on a global scale, they play some role in these small countries' economies. Japan has been importing food (especially fish, crustaceans and molluscs), as well as manufactured goods (especially wood and cork products) from Fiji whereas Japanese exports to Fiji are mainly made up by machinery and transport equipment as well as mineral fuels (Pacific Islands Centre 2020).

In addition, tourist mobility between Japan and Fiji has been an important link between the two countries prior to the current global COVID-19 pandemic in terms of its benefits to Fiji's local tourism industry (*ibid.*).

The first nine Fiji Islanders in Japan were statistically recorded for 1974. They arrived in the country as part of diplomatic missions and for educational purposes; the later have been playing a prominent role in fostering mobility between Fiji and Japan ever since.⁵ Data offered by the Japanese government shows that numbers increased only slowly in the consecutive decades but more rapidly in recent years. Yet, they remain low in comparison to other Pacific destinations such as Australia and New Zealand, never comprising more than a few hundred individuals. This is due to the specific reasons that allow foreigners more generally to enter (and remain in) Japan according to the country's strict immigration policies (Douglass & Roberts 2003; Healy et al. 2016; Liu-Farrer 2020).

In 2019, 287 Fiji Islanders were statistically recorded in Japan (excluding diplomats and persons on holiday or business trips). More than fifty percent of them were located in the Kantō area, which contains Tokyo and six of its neighbouring prefectures. Moreover, smaller clusters existed in a few other prefectures such as Aichi, Fukuoka and Osaka. Very small numbers were spread throughout other parts of Japan. The sex ratio has remained stable for several years with approximately 30 per cent female to 70 per cent male in similar fashion to the age distribution with the majority of Japan-based Fiji Islanders being between 20 to 29 as well as 30 to 39 years old (i.e. 29 per cent and 36 per cent of the total). As will become evident below, there is a clear correlation between the age structure of the migrant group and two of the main reasons for the presence of Fiji Islanders in Japan: education and professional rugby. Moreover, there is indication of a slowly growing second generation of Japan-based persons of Fiji Islander descent, many of whom are the children of Fiji Islander-Japanese couples and hold Japanese citizenship. Marriages between Fiji Islanders and Japanese or other nationals had been common

at the time of my research in 2012–13 and mainly concerned Fijian and Indo-Fijian men married to Japanese or other Asian women. Concurrently, chain migration played only a very marginal role at that time. Most of the Fiji Islanders I have worked with hailed from urban areas or had lived in towns for longer periods of their lives before leaving Fiji. Almost all of them had transnational connections to relatives in Australia, the U.S. and other countries and a few arrived in Japan via the diaspora. While no official statistical data on the ethnic composition of the migrant group exists, a survey I conducted during my fieldwork revealed that it broadly resembled Fiji's population structure at that time (cf. Schieder 2015:174–177).

Comparing the 2019 figures with statistical data concerning the period during which I conducted fieldwork in Japan reveals that the group of Japan-based Fiji Islanders has been increasing steadily in the last years (from 181 in 2012 to 287 in 2019). This development is particularly related to a growing number of student visa holders and persons on a so called 'engineer/specialist in humanities/international services' visa; the later connotes a broad category that lumps together various employment sectors and is applicable to foreigners who have secured work contracts in the country, such as English language instructors employed with private companies.⁶ At the same time, the number of Fiji Islanders holding 'instructor' visas, which qualify them to teach at governmental institutions such as primary and high schools, has remained relatively stable. In conclusion, it is fair to argue that education in its various forms remains one of the most significant reasons for the presence of Fiji Islanders in Japan.⁷

Education: students, trainees and teachers

Education-related mobility between Fiji and Japan has to be evaluated against the backdrop of international relations between the two countries as well as, albeit to a lesser degree, in respect to Fiji Islanders seeking employment opportunities abroad in the (private) educational sector. Statistical data offered by the Japanese government for 2019 reveals that 74 out of the total of 287 registered Fiji

Islanders in Japan in that year held 'student', 'trainee' or 'instructor' visas with students (60) making up by far the largest group (Immigration Services Agency of Japan 2021a). In addition, and based on previous research experiences, it is fair to assume that a significant number amongst those 40 Fiji Islanders holding an 'engineer/specialist in humanities/international services' visa have also been engaged in educational work.

As part of its ODA initiatives, Japan not only sends material aid, aid workers and volunteers to the Pacific Islands. From the outset of bilateral relations between the two countries Japan has also been regularly inviting Fiji Islanders to obtain degrees and training at Japanese universities in areas such as agriculture, environmental conservation, management, pedagogy and science education. There are different opportunities for Fiji Islanders who wish to pursue education in Japan. For example, they can apply for the Japanese government's prestigious *Monbukagakusho* scholarship, which derives its name from the governmental institution in charge of the program (i.e. the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, MEXT) and is open to nationals of various countries. Another venue to explore is MEXT's scholarship for 'teaching training students', which allows teachers from Fiji to enhance their skills in Japan. In light of more recent developments, Fiji (and other Pacific) Islanders have also been able to join the Pacific Leaders' Educational Assistance for Development of State (Pacific-LEADS) program to secure degrees in fields such as public management, policy analysis and international development at Japanese universities.⁸ Other scholarships are offered by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) as part of its Kizuna program (which focuses on development issues related to mining) and the newly established SDGs Global Leadership program. More generally, JICA plays an instrumental role in implementing and administering Japan's ODA in Fiji and beyond. With the exception of the *Monbukagakusho* scholarship, the educational programs open to Fiji Islanders particularly target civil and public servants who are commonly nominated and/or approved by Fiji's govern-



Figure 5: Two Fijian teachers preparing kava at the 2012 Fiji Independence Day celebrations in Yokohama.

ment. In that light, most scholarships available concern graduate (M.A.) or postgraduate (Ph.D.) education and students are expected to return to Fiji upon graduation and to resume their ministerial or teaching jobs.⁹

In addition, a limited number of scholarship opportunities, for example for undergraduate students, are offered by private Japanese corporations at irregular intervals (e.g. EFT 2019). Finally, some Japanese universities have been offering scholarships to male Fiji Islander students with the prime reason to boost their rugby teams. As I will show in the next section, there is a growing development in this area. Therefore, student mobility in the context of Fiji, its diaspora and Japan also has to be evaluated against the backdrop of what young Fiji Islanders (especially Fijian men) offer to Japanese educational institutions in terms of their sporting abilities.

Education related mobility between Fiji and Japan does not only concern students but also teachers from Fiji and Fiji Islanders previously unrelated to this profession who take up English teaching jobs in Japan. These Fiji Islanders form part of a broader move-

ment of Pacific Islander professionals who seek greener pastures abroad in terms of employment opportunities for a number of interrelated reasons and who, in terms of professional teachers, have become “mobile knowledge workers in the global labour market” (Iredale et al. 2015:98).

Teacher mobility within the Pacific Islands and the Pacific Rim has been documented for some time (e.g. Iredale et al. 2015; Rokoduru 2006; Voigt-Graf 2003) without, however, paying much attention to potential Asian destination countries. In the case of Japan, there are various channels Fiji Islanders can pursue to gain access to teaching-related opportunities (cf. Schieder 2015:175-176). Some Fiji Islander who have a background in professional teaching have been engaged with the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET) since 2011. JET, which is officially co-coordinated by different Japanese ministries and local government institutions has been officially implemented in 1987 and aims at fostering “mutual understanding between the people of Japan and the people of other nations” (JET 2021a). The program targets interna-

tional exchange on a community level and draws on teachers from countries such as Fiji where English is a ‘native’ language and the professional level of education prospective teachers undergo is high (cf. Iredale et al. 2015; Rokoduru 2006:174). For this purpose, JET allows foreign nationals to be temporarily deployed to Japanese schools and other government organisations, where they are responsible for assisting Japanese teachers in enhancing foreign language proficiency as well as inter-cultural awareness and sensitivity among Japanese pupils and students. Apart from Assistant Language Teachers (ALT) which make up more than 90 percent of JET activities, positions are available in the fields of international relations and sports activity coordination. In 2019, JET included more than 5,700 participants from 57 countries, including one ALT and two Sports Exchange Advisors from Fiji (JET 2021b). Currently, there is also a small number of Fiji Islanders contracted to Japanese boards of education and governmental schools (mainly on a primary and secondary level) where they are working as ALTs. These are islanders who have opted to



Figure 6: A Rotuman corporate rugby player, 2012.

remain for indefinite periods in Japan and can draw on extensive teaching experiences, which they acquired before moving to Japan.

Apart from Fiji Islanders working in state-run schools, Japan has attracted individuals from Fiji with or without a background in teaching who seek employment in the private educational sector. Most often, they take up jobs as English teachers with one of countless private language schools and companies which mainly operate in metropolitan areas such as Tokyo and Osaka. Sometimes they work as freelance teachers. Another migration channel related to education which I identified while doing research in Japan, concerned a few teachers from Fiji formerly employed with Free Bird Institute Ltd. (FBI). FBI is a private Japanese company founded in 2004, which successfully operates English-language schools in two Fijian towns (Nadi and Lautoka). To promote their business, the company highlights Fiji's former status as a British colony, the friendliness of its people (commonly highlighted also for touristic purposes) which students can experience, for example on 'home

stays', and the low cost of FBI's programs in comparison to similar language schools in countries such as the UK. FBI has been particularly popular in Japan and other East Asian countries and was able to attract more than 1,000 students annually prior to the current COVID-19 pandemic (FBI 2021). In the past, the two FBI schools in Fiji were also meeting hubs for Japanese students and their future partners who opted to emigrate to Japan, where they found employment in the teaching sector. While I am not aware of similar cases in more recent years, FBI nevertheless continues to influence trans-border mobility in the present case as it has expanded its portfolio to include an employment agency more recently with the aim to cater for Japanese companies interested in contracting Fiji Islanders (see endnote 7). In addition to education and at times overlapping with it, professional sport in the form of rugby is one of the most significant factors for the presence of Fiji Islanders in Japan.

Professional sport: rugby¹⁰

One of the striking features of rugby in its current professional state

is the inclusion of large numbers of Pacific Islanders in domestic competitions and national teams in various parts around the globe (e.g. Horton 2012). Among Pacific Islanders engaged in the rugby industry, Fijians and, to a far lesser extent, Rotumans and Fiji Islanders of mixed ethnic descent feature prominently. In this context, Japan has been a destination for athletes from Fiji and the Fiji diaspora (e.g. Australia and New Zealand) as well as other Pacific Islanders for several decades (Besnier 2012; Sakata 2004; Schieder 2014).¹¹

The appearance of Fiji Islanders in the Japanese rugby world has to be evaluated against the backdrop of the history and structure of domestic rugby in Japan, i.e. corporate and university rugby. A survey I conducted in early 2021 has revealed that for the Top League season, i.e. the prime domestic rugby competition in Japan, the 16 participating teams featured a total of twelve Fijians, one Rotuman and a further three athletes of part-Fijian descent. The nine best second-tier teams that also participate in the current make-up of the Top League, fielded another nine Fijians, making



Source: Dominik Schieder.

Figure 7: A Fijian rugby player representing Japan internationally, 2014.

it 25 athletes of (part-)Fiji Islander descent in total. Fijians also represent Japanese university rugby teams. While numbers are difficult to establish due to fluctuation and the lack of concrete figures, several students of Fijian origin are currently active in that field and two of them even represented the winner of the prestigious Japan University Rugby Championship in 2021.¹²

The majority of Japan-based athletes of Fiji Islander origin compete with local and other foreign players in ‘corporate rugby’, a system unique to the country. Teams such as Toshiba Brave Lupus or Panasonic Wild Knights are not only sponsored but also owned by these globally renowned corporations. The same holds true for the teams of smaller and less known companies such as Hino Motors Ltd. or the Kintetsu Corporation. Japanese rugby teams have a unique heritage. While current Top League sides and even some lower tier teams field professional players who are contracted as full-time athletes, corporate rugby began as an amateur endeavour and has partially remained so ever since. In its beginnings, employees such as office and factory workers (Japanese

and foreigners alike) devoted parts of their working life and free time to their company’s rugby team. While corporate rugby has been gradually moving towards more professionalism, a strong corporate ethos remains intrinsic to Japanese rugby and some teams still contain amateurs (Light et al. 2008; Sakata 2004).¹³ At the same time, corporate rugby remains closely linked to university rugby, as many of the best players who wish to pursue the sport beyond their studies make up the bulk of company teams to this day. In that sense, Japanese universities have been serving as entry points for Pacific Islanders to corporate rugby and, eventually, as is evident in some cases, a career as a national (Japanese) representative (Besnier 2012; Light et al. 2008; Schieder 2014).

Although less significant than baseball, sumo wrestling or soccer (Maguire & Nakayama 2006), rugby has gained much popularity in Japan in the lead up to the 2019 men’s Rugby World Cup which was hosted in the country. This development is closely linked to the outstanding performances of Japan’s national male fifteen-a-side team, the ‘Brave Blossoms’ during

and in the aftermath of the tournament. More generally, Japan has slowly turned into one of the top ten rugby playing nations worldwide. This success has been fuelled by the systematic inclusion of foreign-born players into the ‘Brave Blossoms’ from the 1990s onwards, starting with Tongans and Fijians and expanding to Australians, New Zealanders and South Africans. Currently, there are one Fijian and one athlete of part-Fijian descent in the ‘Brave Blossoms’ 2021 wider training squad (JRFU 2021a). Significantly, the Japan Rugby Football Union (JRFU) aims to replicate the international success of the ‘Brave Blossoms’ in sevens rugby. Given Fiji’s success in this fast-paced and shortened variation of the rugby union code with seven instead of fifteen players per team (e.g. winning two consecutive Olympic gold medals in 2016 and 2021), and the inclusion of numerous Fijians in national sevens squads all around the globe, it is perhaps unsurprising that Fijians have been a common sight in Japan’s sevens teams for some time. For example, the 2020 men’s sevens development squad featured five Fijians among the 29 prospective athletes

and an additional wider training group of eleven players included another four Fijians, making it nearly a quarter of the total (JRFU 2020).¹⁴

A few years ago, I proposed the existence of four ideal types of Fiji Islander athletes in Japan (Schieder 2014:260-262), which remains a useful heuristic tool to judge more contemporary developments. A first category consists of Fijian provincial and amateur players who have been scouted in Fiji, some of whom eventually have been representing Japan on an international level. While this type of athlete was the most common one in the early days of foreign player recruitment in Japan, for example due to their willingness to accept lower wages than many other foreigners, the recruitment of amateur players in the islands has become of little significance in more recent years for Top League and lower tier teams. A second category contains Fiji Islander athletes who have received rugby education abroad or were exposed to professional rugby outside Fiji before they arrived in Japan while maintaining Fiji as their home. Among these are younger men who wish to use Japan as a stepping stone for more prestigious contracts, for example in New Zealand, France or England, as well as athletes who were contracted for a limited number of years in other countries before moving to Japan. However, like their amateur counterparts, this type of athletes has become less prominent in Japan in more recent years. Rather, the Japanese rugby world has seen the growing significance of two other types of athletes of Fiji Islander origin. Consequently, a third category refers to Fiji Islanders who left Fiji at an early stage or were born in the diaspora. Athletes of these type come from a variety of backgrounds. For example, some attend high schools and universities in Australia and New Zealand and were recruited by corporate teams afterwards. Others were born or raised in these popular destinations of Fiji Islander emigrants and were active in 'Super Rugby' (i.e. one of the prime rugby competitions in the world) before coming to Japan. What all of these athletes have in common is that they benefitted from structured approaches to professional sporting careers before arriving in Japan. The fourth category, which also appears to

grow steadily in recent years, concerns young Fijian men who are admitted to Japanese universities all around the country, especially via scholarships. These Fijians not only represent their educational institutions in domestic competitions such as the Japan University Rugby Championship, but many are also later contracted by corporate teams and some included in Japanese national teams.

In conclusion, there is a trend that more and more Fiji Islanders, especially Fijians, enter university and corporate rugby via diasporic locations; a trend which is clearly linked to the ongoing professionalization of the sport in Japan. Moreover, there is a visible development in more recent years towards a growing number of Fijian 'rugby students' to remain in Japan after graduation. These young men eventually join corporate teams and some are invited for trials conducted by the JRFU. While the JRFU recruits Fiji Islanders on a potentially higher level than has been done in the past, it remains to be seen what role these young Fijians will play in Japanese rugby in the future to come.

Conclusion

Building on an introduction of trans-border mobility between Fiji and Japan, also taking into consideration other diasporic nodes, this article has presented two of the main reasons why a growing number of Fiji Islanders spend (in)definite periods of their lives in Japan. While education and professional sport in most cases lead to stays for shorter and intermediate periods, they might also foster (more) permanent settlement. This is evident in respect to students and rugby players who got married to Japanese men and women in the past or university graduates who took up employment in Japan and opted to remain in the country.

More generally, in some cases education, professional sport and other factors that trigger mobility become intertwined. For example, one Fijian man who currently lives in Japan, is a professional athlete and represents the Japanese national rugby sevens team, arrived in the country due to his marriage to a former Japanese JICA volunteer. Initially, he was employed as a road maintenance worker and played rugby on an amateur level in his area of

residency when he was scouted by the JRFU. Another Fijian man arrived in Japan as the spouse of a Fijian woman who worked as an English language instructor but secured a short-term contract with a lower tier corporate rugby team. At the same time, marriage migration potentially introduces Japan-based Fiji Islanders to jobs in the Japanese educational sector. This does not only apply to cases related to former Free Bird Institute Ltd. teachers as discussed above. For instance, a few Japan-based Fiji Islanders, who met their Japanese spouses while they were holidaying in Fiji, found employment as English instructors in private language schools or commenced work as freelance English instructors after they moved to Japan.¹⁵

These examples raise awareness of the complexities of mobility trajectories and reveal that mobility categories such as the ones outlined in this article are not exclusive but potentially overlap in regard to the lived experiences of mobile persons (e.g. Brettell 2003; Carter 2011). In this sense, the material presented in this contribution serves the purpose of providing an overview of the structural framework of Fiji Islander mobility between Fiji, other diasporic nodes and Japan. The individual life worlds that materialize within this context warrant further and more detailed exploration elsewhere.

Endnotes

¹ In comparison, Fiji's total population in 2017 was 884,887 (Fiji Bureau of Statistics 2018).

² See Keck & Schieder 2015 for a slightly dated literature review.

³ This article builds on twelve months of fieldwork conducted predominantly in Tokyo and the Kantō area in 2012 and 2013 as well as a brief follow-up visit to Tokyo in late 2015. It also draws on written (re-)sources such as statistical data and newspaper articles in regard to more recent developments.

⁴ A short and useful overview of the ethnic composition of Fiji's population is offered by Naidu (2013:8-18). Note that no statistical material on 'ethnicity' has been released by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics in reference to the 2017 Census.

⁵ All statistical data used in this section has been provided by the



Source: Fuyuko Mochizuki.

Figure 8: A meeting of the Fiji Community in Tokyo, 2013.

Immigration Services Agency of Japan (2021a). Although no reliable data exists for previous years, the presence of Fiji Islanders in Japan prior to 1974 cannot be ruled out.

⁶⁾ The Immigration Services Agency of Japan defines this visa category as applicable to “(c)ontracted positions with public or private organizations which utilize technology or specialized knowledge in fields related to physics, engineering, natural science, law, economy, and sociology; or those which require an understanding of or sensitivity to foreign cultures” (2021b).

⁷⁾ In addition to education and professional sport, Fiji Islanders have engaged in other work-related activities in Japan. They include missionaries, car mechanics, entrepreneurs, salary (wo)men and care workers. Moreover, a few years ago the operator of Tokyo’s Narita International Airport initiated an overseas recruitment scheme and has, since 2018, hired nine Fiji Islanders. Their recruitment was facilitated by Free Bird Institute Ltd., a Japanese company I also refer to in this article’s section on education-related mobility.

⁸⁾ The Pacific-LEADS program was initiated in 2015 as part of the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM) initiative. This forum was created by Japan in 1997 which hosts sum-

mit-level meetings with various countries from Oceania (incl. Australia and New Zealand) every three years (JICA 2021; MOFA 2021).

⁹⁾ Monbukagakusho scholarship holders on the other hand do not necessarily fall under these restrictions. In 2012-13 I met several former students who opted to remain in the country for family and/or professional reasons after their graduation.

¹⁰⁾ Throughout, I focus on rugby union and do not include rugby league, i.e. the second prominent rugby code, given that it is rugby union that fosters mobility between Fiji, its diaspora and Japan.

¹¹⁾ For example, Sakata (2004:51) found that in the 2002 Top League competition, 38 percent of foreign players originated from Fiji, Samoa and Tonga. Given that athletes from Australia and New Zealand constituted another 59 percent of the total and that a number of athletes of Pacific Island descent based in Japan at that time held passports of these countries, the actual number of Pacific Islanders playing in Japan’s best domestic competition around the turn of the century must be evaluated even higher.

¹²⁾ While further research is needed to establish accurate numbers, I could establish that at least nine Japanese

university teams, some of which belong to the best in the country, included Fiji Islanders in the last three years.

¹³⁾ At the time of writing, corporate rugby faces major changes. Earlier in 2021, the JRFU announced the start of a restructured and fully professional three-tier rugby competition in January 2022 in favour of its current corporate make-up. The JRFU aims to elevate the level of Japanese rugby and to bring it in line with domestic competitions in countries such as Australia and New Zealand (JRFU 2021b).

¹⁴⁾ Similar developments are visible with regard to the women’s national sevens side. For example, the team that competed in the Tokyo Olympics included one player of Fijian-Japanese descent who was born in Japan. Until very recently another Fiji-born athlete also featured for Japan’s national fifteens team.

¹⁵⁾ While the (visa) category ‘spouse’ has remained relatively stable, it is interesting to note that the number of permanent residents of Fiji Islander origin in Japan has increased from 28 in 2012 to 59 in 2019. While it can be assumed that many permanent residents are spouses of Japanese men and women, further research is required to validate this hypothesis.

Acknowledgements

Fieldwork in 2012-13 was undertaken as a Japan Society for the Promotion of Science Postdoctoral Fellow [grant number PE11043] at Hitosubashi University, Tokyo. I am grateful to Naoki Kasuga for his guidance and generosity as well as Yoshiko Ashiwa, Norio Niwa and other colleagues in Japan. Amelia Bonea and my research assistant Fuyuko Mochizuki were instrumental to my project's success. I also thank two anonymous reviewers and Nils Rottgardt for their critical comments. Most importantly, I am indebted to my interlocutors' kindness and support.

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