

# Non-Professional Fijian Rugby Players' Cultural Transitioning into New Zealand

## Jugadores no profesionales de rugby procedentes de las islas Fiyi: su transición cultural en Nueva Zelanda

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**Abstract.** There is growing research interest in athlete mobility as a consequence of globalization and the personal, cultural and contextual adjustments required in transitioning from one culture to another (see, Ryba, Haapanen, Mosek & Kwok, 2012). While this work has provided valuable knowledge about the challenges facing professional athletes transitioning from one culture to another it pays little attention to the experiences of non-professional and non-elite athletes. To redress this oversight this article presents the findings of a study on the experiences of Fijian non-elite rugby players who had moved to New Zealand as adolescents to pursue opportunities in rugby.

**Keywords:** Rugby; Fiji; New Zealand; cultural transitioning.

**Resumen.** Debido la globalización y de los necesarios procesos de adaptación personal, cultural y contextual que conlleva la transición de una cultura a otra, hemos asistido recientemente a un creciente interés en la investigación sobre la movilidad de los deportistas (ver Ryba, Haapanen, Mosek & Kwok, 2012). Aunque, por una parte, estos estudios han proporcionado un valioso conocimiento de los retos que han de afrontar los deportistas profesionales en su transición de una cultura a otra, por otra, se ha prestado poca atención a la experiencia de los deportistas que no profesionales y/o que no son de élite. Para compensar este vacío, el presente artículo se centra en los resultados de un estudio de las experiencias de jugadores de rugby que no eran de élite, provenientes de las islas Fiyi, que, siendo adolescentes, se trasladaron a Nueva Zelanda a la búsqueda de sus sueños en el rugby.

**Palabras clave.** Rugby; islas Fiyi; Nueva Zelanda; transición cultural.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Research on the cultural and contextual adjustments required by professional athletes transitioning within the global, transnational sport industry (see, Agergaard & Ryba, 2014) makes a valuable contribution to knowledge about elite level athletes but has overlooked the experiences of non-elite, non-professional, athletes (Ryba, Stambulova & Ronkainen, 2016). In this article we redress this oversight by reporting on the findings of a study conducted on the experiences of four Fijian rugby players who moved to New Zealand as adolescents and young men to pursue opportunities for rugby with a focus on their cultural challenges and adjustments.

### **1. PACIFIC ISLAND MIGRATION TO NEW ZEALAND**

Although the participants in this study were all from Fiji viewing them as Pacific Islanders is helpful for understanding the broader issues involved in cultural transitioning into New Zealand culture and society by locating the movement of Fijian rugby players within patterns of Pacific Islander (Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia) migration to New Zealand and other countries. New Zealand is a popular destination for Pacific Island migration with Auckland having the largest urban concentration of Pacific Island people outside of the Pacific Islands (Auckland Council). Migration of Pacific Islanders to New Zealand escalated in the 1960's and 1970's in response to labour shortages within expanding secondary industries, which saw immigrants arrive from Samoa, Tonga and Fiji through work permits, quota schemes and family reunification policies (Lee, 2009). At the same time, peoples of the Cook Islands, Tokelau and Niue had unrestricted rights of entry and settlement into the country as New Zealand citizens (Bedford, 1994). A market-driven economy and changes to New Zealand immigration laws (which included the introduction of a points system) in the 1980's and 1990's created problems in securing unskilled and semi-skilled work that saw many Pacific Islanders who were New Zealand citizens relocate to Australia through the Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement between Australia and New Zealand (Bedford, 1994; Lee, 2009). Significant increases in Indo-Fijian immigrants to New Zealand were encouraged by the military coups of 1987, (Bedford, 1989), 2000 and 2006 in Fiji.

## **2. PACIFIC ISLANDER RUGBY MIGRATION**

Rugby Union's embrace of professionalism in 1995 created a new form of labour migration by presenting professional playing opportunities for Pacific Islanders in New Zealand and Australia (Horton, 2012). More recently, this has expanded to provide opportunities for Pacific Islanders to play in Europe and Japan (Horton, 2012). Seventeen percent of the rugby playing population in New Zealand is from the Pacific Islands with fifty percent of the provincial rugby playing population identifying as Pacific Islanders (Horton, 2012) with approximately 500 Fijian players are on professional playing contracts outside Fiji (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2014).

## **3. RUGBY IN FIJI AND NEW ZEALAND**

Rugby Union is the national sport of New Zealand and Fiji where it provides international recognition (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2012) and holds a "special place in the national psyche" (Cattermole, 2008, p. 99). It is also the key point of difference between the Indigenous i-Taukei Fijians and Indo-Fijians that promotes shared identity and a sense of belonging for i-Taukei Fijians (Kamemasu & Molnar, 2012). The term i-Taukei refers to the Indigenous people of the Fijian islands who comprise approximately sixty percent of the population, speak Fijian and share a common history and culture. In the traditional rugby game of 15-a-side, Fiji stands 8<sup>th</sup> internationally with New Zealand ranked number one in the World and the current World Cup title-holder (World.Rugby, 2019). Fiji qualifies as a tier one nation in 15s but it is best known for its dominance in Rugby Sevens with the Fiji Rugby 7s Men's Team winning the nation's first ever Olympic and gold medal at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games ("Rio 2016 rugby 7 men", 2016).

In New Zealand, Pacific Island players have a strong presence in rugby union with indigenous i-Taukei Fijian players highly valued in Super Rugby (southern hemisphere international, professional competition) and the ITM (New Zealand provincial competition). They are also prominent in Australian rugby and increasingly in demand in Japan and Europe. Indeed, growth in the number of Pacific Island players at the most elite levels of rugby is transforming global rugby (Horton, 2012) with this rugby migration attracting increasing research interest (Dewey 2014; Kanemasu & Molnar 2012, 2014; Mumm & O'Connor, 2014).

The transnational athlete migration that so many Fijian rugby players are now experiencing is a product of globalization (Chiba & Jackson, 2006) and has accelerated since professionalization in 1995 (Horton, 2012). Unlike players in the other strong rugby nations in the southern hemisphere, such as Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Argentina, Pacific Island players are not able to play professional rugby at home due to a lack of professional leagues in their countries. This forces them to play professionally offshore in New Zealand and Australia, and in countries in the northern hemisphere such as France and Japan (see, Martinez-Delcayrou, 2018, Scheider & Presterudstuen, 2014).

Migrating professional Fijian rugby players typically face a range of significant economic, demographic and socio-cultural challenges to the *vaka I taukei* (Fijian way of life) for elite and non-elite players (Scheider & Presterudstuen, 2014). In Australasia, sub-elite Fijian players can develop their careers outside Fiji through educational scholarships, contracts arranged through family, friends or other social networks and recruitment by official talent agents working for both professional and community organisations (Kanemasu & Molnar 2012, Mumm & O'Connor 2014). Even if successful in gaining an offer to play at professional or semi-professional levels Fijian players face significant challenges in adapting to foreign ways of playing and training and with adapting to cultural differences in day-to-day life, as is the case globally across a wide range of sports (Light, Evans & Lavalllee, 2019; Ryba et al. 2012; Ryba et al. 2016).

The problems that Pacific Island rugby players face in New Zealand include racism. For example, the 2015-2016 period saw highly publicized accounts of inappropriate player behaviour and misconduct in rugby that included instances of racial discrimination against, and sideline abuse of, Fijian rugby union players (As of July 28, 2015 Stuff listed on its website: "Fijian player racially abused by fan at Canterbury club final"). In response to significant pressure from prominent human rights and women's groups, New Zealand Rugby (NZR) underwent a lengthy independent review to investigate the processes, conduct and culture of the organization. The review identified how organizational values and systems in New Zealand needed to reflect and encompass the cultural diversity of this community

### ***Fijian Rugby and Culture***

Successful rugby players are looked up to as role models in Fiji with securing contracts to play overseas seen as achieving the ultimate 'rugby dream' (Kanesmasu & Molnar 2012). Belonging to the prestigious group of

Fijian international rugby players (irrespective of level) enhances individual self-esteem and pride among Fijians but while making a name for the individual is important for them, it is just as important for them to make a name for Fiji due to the strong connection between self, culture and national identity for Fijians (Carpenter, 2001). This reflects the communal patterns that dominate life in Fiji that are challenged by the individualism of Western societies such as New Zealand, Australia and France (Schieder & Presterudstuen, 2014) but the significant Pacific Island communities in Australia and New Zealand tend to provide more support during transitioning than Japan and European countries such as France do (see, Bresnier, 2012; Horton, 2012; Martinez-Delayrou, 2018).

#### **4. TRANSITION THEORY**

A body of work on athlete cultural transitioning developed from Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981). draws upon a number of transition models that outline the different types of transitions and challenges individuals typically face. Schlossberg developed transition theory as a way of understanding what is involved in major transitions within people's lives and was later applied to athlete cultural transitioning (see, Ryba *et al.* 2016). It provides an effective means of understanding and explaining the challenges involved in making this significant transition at an individual level for each of the four Fijian participants in this study.

A transition generally results from one or a combination of events which leads to a change in assumptions about oneself and the world that requires a corresponding change in behaviour and relationships (Anderson, Goodman & Schlossberg 2011). Transition theory has been applied to athlete transitioning from a psychological perspective with Ryba and colleagues' work (Ryba *et al.* 2016) identifying the social adaptive processes that athletes must overcome when transitioning. In this article we work with the definition of a transition as an event, or non-event (an expected transition that never eventuates), that significantly changes relationships, routines and assumptions and roles (see Light *et al.* 2019). Transitions are related to the developmental context in which they take place to include transitions inherent in sporting contexts and those related to their development at psychological, psychosocial, academic, and/or vocational levels (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). This includes learning how to transition into a different culture of sport and life outside, around and beyond sport.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

We used narrative inquiry (NI) research design to understand human experiences by recounting it through the telling of stories. NI frames and tells of an individual's past and present life experiences by developing knowledge and understanding from the telling of stories (Chilisa, 2012). This methodology provided insight into the experiences of the participants in transitioning from Fijian to New Zealand culture with storytelling culturally appropriate when conducting research with indigenous peoples (Light & Evans, 2018; Smith, 1999)

The first author conducted a single one-on-one life story style interview (Atkinson, 2007) with each of the participants in which she asked them to tell their story of coming to New Zealand and of adapting to sport and life in New Zealand. The telling and re-telling of oral histories is commonplace in Fijian culture, which made it a more suitable research methodology than most others and one that encouraged attentive listening, striving for understanding and an open mind for the researcher (Light & Evans, 2018).

### *The Site*

The study was conducted in the province of Canterbury in New Zealand where Fijians are a minority group with only 2.5% of the population identifying as Pacific Islanders. The dominant group in the South Island of New Zealand are of European descent and makes up 87% of the population ('2013 Census Quick Stats', 2013) but in Christchurch metropolitan rugby Pacific Islanders comprise 10% of the registered junior and senior club players and it is from this group that the participants were drawn. The central research question was: What are the experiences of male Fijian rugby players who moved from Fiji to Canterbury to play rugby as adolescents?

### *The Participants*

The study reported on in this article involved four participants who were male Indigenous Fijian amateur club rugby players born in Fiji, had moved to New Zealand, and had lived in Canterbury for at least six months. Maciu, Siti, Ilisea, and Apenisa (all pseudonyms) were 2017 registered players, representing clubs competing in the Christchurch Metropolitan Competition (Division 1) run by the Canterbury Rugby Football Union (CRFU). Two were engaged on semi-professional contracts and two were amateurs. They were aged between 21-35 years at the time of the study with varying rugby experience reflecting the different stages of their rugby

careers. While each participant originated from a different part of Fiji (both rural and urban backgrounds) all had, or were undertaking, formal school, trade or tertiary qualifications. Snowball sampling was used, which involved a participant being identified by using a trusted contact for the first author within the Canterbury Fijian Community.

*Maciu* was 21 years old and from the one of the small outer islands of Fiji. He completed the majority of his schooling in Suva (capital of Fiji) where he began playing rugby in U10 grade. While playing 1<sup>st</sup> XV rugby he was selected for the Fiji national schoolboy team and, while playing in a tournament in New Zealand, was offered a rugby scholarship to a prestigious boy's school. At 29 years of age *Ilisea* had made rapid progress in rugby after only taking up the game at the age of seventeen. Originally from the Western Division of Fiji he relocated to Suva to be part of the Fiji Rugby development program and later, the high-performance program. A national Fiji rep for both 15's and 7's, *Ilisea* moved to New Zealand in his early twenties after accepting an offer to play semi-professional rugby.

*Siti* was 21 years old and was brought up in the village in a major city of the Western Division of Fiji where he first learnt to play rugby. He migrated to New Zealand with his family prior to starting secondary school where he found rugby very different to his experience back home. At 35 years of age *Apensia* was at the end of his amateur, playing career. From the Western Division of Fiji, he grew up and was educated in Suva and played 1<sup>st</sup> XV rugby for a school with a strong rugby history in Fiji. He came to New Zealand after being awarded a scholarship for secondary school from Fiji.

### ***Ethics Approval***

Ethics approval was gained from the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee and a cultural advisor from the Fijian Community guided cultural appropriateness throughout the research. Participant information and consent forms were bilingual documents (in English and Fijian). Players were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time and consent was obtained from the rugby clubs involved.

### ***Data generation***

The first author conducted single individual, life story type interviews ranging in duration of thirty five to sixty minutes with each of the players that were digitally recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Each interview

began by asking, ‘where in Fiji are you from?’ This was followed by asking the participant to tell his story of moving to New Zealand from Fiji and of living in New Zealand.

Two participants maintained a continuous narrative during the interview, prompted only by being asked to, ‘tell me more about that’ or ‘when did that happen?’ The other two were encouraged with a series of unstructured questions such as: ‘what were your experiences of rugby in Fiji?’, ‘how did you come to live in Christchurch?’ and ‘what has been your experience of rugby in Canterbury?’ Follow-up conversations were held with two participants to further explore a particular response, clarify meaning and/or check for accuracy of interpretation.

### ***Data Analysis***

The transcripts were read and re-read to commence the process of interpretation and classification and to begin to get a ‘feel’ for the participants (Light & Evans, 2018). We began with open or initial coding to identify ideas and possible themes that we clustered into a number of closed codes that we developed. We then used them to develop themes from the data due to distinctive characteristics, meanings and relationships. These became the coding categories to match relevant data with three major themes produced through this process. The three major challenges that the participants had to meet in transitioning from Fiji to New Zealand are presented in order of importance from least important to the most important, which were: (1) The differences between Fijian and New Zealand rugby, (2) The demands of having dual goals and (3) Cultural transitioning, which are presented below.

## **6. FINDINGS**

### ***Differences between Fijian and New Zealand rugby***

Ilisea first moved to New Zealand to play rugby after the disappointment of not being selected to represent Fiji in an international event. He was then invited to join Canterbury to play Sevens and played for a Christchurch club in what is now called the Mitre 10 Cup, which is a professional nation-wide provincial competition. Apensia arrived in Christchurch after missing out on a rugby scholarship to a prestigious boy’s school in Auckland. On a (Fiji) government sponsored education scholarship he remained hopeful of advancing in rugby and was attracted to

Christchurch due to the fame of the Canterbury Crusaders and the standard of club rugby in Christchurch.

I was aiming high, especially coming to Canterbury where it's got a rich rugby history when you're talking about the Crusaders, All Black players, and I thought it was probably one the best places to develop a rugby career.

Siti first migrated to the North Island with his family and then moved to Christchurch on his own to undertake tertiary studies. Maciu also came to Christchurch as a teenager and was offered a scholarship to attend a private boys' school in Christchurch after being spotted by Canterbury Crusaders talent scouts while on international duty for Fiji at a schoolboy tournament in New Zealand.

The participants all felt that their rugby transition from Fiji to New Zealand was relatively easy. The challenges of adapting to different coaches, teammates, game plans and competition levels were minimal but adjusting to regimes of fitness and strength training and being held accountable to measured standards was more difficult for them. This resonates with the findings of a recent study on Australian Indigenous athletes' journeys into The Australian Football League and the National Rugby League that identifies the same challenges of adapting to highly structured regimes of fitness training and measurement in professional sport (Light & Evans, 2018; Light, Evans & Lavallee, 2019). Maciu and Ilisea drew on their experiences of playing international age group and elite rugby for Fiji prior to their arrival in New Zealand to meet these challenges but Apensia and Siti struggled to adapt to what they saw as being highly structured and technical approaches to rugby:

...if you watch the Crusaders you'll see the similarities to how they play (club rugby) down here, the teams that win the most are the ones that are more technical, like kick when they have to kick, pass when they have to pass, they don't always have to run it. (Siti).

Maciu was happy with his progress over two seasons of senior rugby in Christchurch. He said he enjoyed having clear clarification of his positional role, the technical focus and the challenge of excelling in a region full of quality forwards and front rowers. An unexpected call-up to play for the Crusaders in a warm-up game and subsequent inclusion in other Canterbury

Development Squads provided further motivation or him to continue what he saw as a successful pathway in a team culture that he enjoyed. He also valued the commitment to player wellbeing in Canterbury:

...everyone is really welcoming, and you just sort of blend in and there's a few other Fijian and Island boys here as well in Canterbury. CRFU - they look after you pretty good. They make sure you have the right training program, you're doing well at school, that everything outside of rugby is good, they're really well connected with the club.

Fijian rugby players demonstrate a high level of confidence in their abilities to perform overseas, even when moving into nations with high playing levels and large player bases (Carpenter 2001). Maicu's goal of becoming one of the few Fijian front rowers to make it to the top was a source of motivation for him that had been reinforced by his father (also a front-rower) from an early age. Ilisea believed he was well prepared to make the transition into semi-professional rugby following his rapid improvement over the space of 2-3 years. His brothers were important role models for him, helping to further his rugby career through important teachings, including the need to maintain a positive attitude and learn from those around him. Strong family values and a favourable upbringing (with time spent living overseas in a Western society) were all factors that accounted for his successful rugby and cultural transitioning into New Zealand.

My brothers taught me, just don't think about what anyone says, don't think about external factors coming in, put your head down and listen to the coaches and I did that. It impressed them (coaches) more than it did me and at times being selected into a few teams it took me by surprise because to me there were other players that were 10 times better than me but I think that my upbringing from home and my brothers, that helped me climb the ladder pretty fast and achieve a lot of things.

The junior to senior progression is the period when athletes are most likely to undergo transition difficulties (Stambulova 2017), which was the case in this study with Siti outlining the challenges of stepping-up from 1<sup>st</sup> XV schoolboy (high school) rugby to premier metro club rugby as being "tough". By-passing the colts' grade (under 21), Siti was challenged by older, bigger and fitter opponents but learned to overcome these challenges through "more fitness, more conditioning and more gym." He believed many Fijian players opted out of the Christchurch Metro Competition,

because of the commitment needed to conditioning and training. He said they found it too hard to maintain their focus and enthusiasm because it was at odds with the culture of rugby in Fiji:

...you hardly see any Fijians in Christchurch Metro, there's way more playing in the country, it's easier and there's less training. If you play Metro, if you don't turn up (for training) you don't play, it's like that. Country rugby, they're flexible, if you turn up or don't turn up, you're still going to play from the bench or start

### ***The Demands of Having Dual Goals***

Research identifies the problems that a sole focus on a professional athletic career can have for athletes (Stambulova & Ryba 2014) such as injury-caused non-selection and the constraints of age requiring athletes to develop a 'plan B' for transitioning out of sport. For many professional athletes (and those on a professional pathway) this requires a dual focus that typically involves study, work or vocational training on top of the demands of being an athlete. For others it may be needed to pay for living costs while in the process of forging a playing career, which may or may-not lead to professional opportunities.

When faced with three different playing offers overseas the opportunity to combine education and rugby by undertaking a tertiary degree in Canterbury was the major reason for Maciu deciding to come to Canterbury instead of going to Auckland or France. Renowned for the ability to develop outstanding forwards, Canterbury was also home to a number of All Blacks (members of the national team of New Zealand), one of who was a significant role model for him:

I was happy to come to come to Canterbury. It was a good place for me to play rugby, especially being a front rower and because they offered not only rugby but education as well... that's what I was looking at. The Auckland club just offered for me to come up there and play club rugby and work. France was just a fulltime rugby player.

The challenge of combining a sporting career with studies or work created stress and worry for the participants as Ryba *et al.* (2004) suggest is common for athletes undergoing cultural transitioning. The demands of working or studying while committed to rugby were highlighted during

Siti's introduction to high school rugby. In this school there were high expectations of academic and rugby achievement but this was foreign to him and provides an example of the challenges commonly facing transitioning athletes (see, Agergaard and Ryba, 2014; Ryba et al., 2016) The different approach to rugby alone was a challenge for him because he had to adapt what he described as his 'chilled' approach to rugby and "just turning up and playing" developed in Fiji, to the increased hours dedicated to rugby training and the more structured and detailed approach to training. His newly acquired skill of time management set him apart from other "Islanders", but something that he said his 'Kiwi' friends saw as common sense.

1<sup>st</sup> XV rugby that's pretty intense, you do training every day of the week and then you have to balance it with study... most of my mates they had good grades and they played rugby so I was trying to do what they did but it was difficult.

Dewey (2016) argues that the prospect of professional rugby careers and achieving the rugby dream has generated an, 'all or none' approach to education and rugby advancement in Fiji. Faced with making this choice between education and rugby, many players (and their families) prefer the focus to be solely on rugby achievement at the cost of education (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2014). This creates the situation where, leaving school without any formal qualifications, players often find themselves unemployed and continue to spend their time playing rugby. A portion of these players leave Fiji on work visas to play semi-professional or amateur rugby in New Zealand but because rugby is not a full-time occupation for them, they must rely on full-time jobs to earn a living.

When players sign up for this type of arrangement in Christchurch it is highly likely that this is their first attempt to take on the responsibilities of commitment to rugby and full or part time work and/or study as a challenge they struggle to deal with. Unpractised in the skill of managing two such demanding roles, Ilisea describes the burden of work, training and playing using his Fijian team-mate as an example. Performing well at the beginning of the season, his form soon dropped after failing to adjust to the daily routine of working which detracted from the main goal of developing a rugby career.

...he wasn't really coping from working from 8 in the morning until 4.30 (pm) and then he'd have to finish work, go to the gym or go to training and

play on Saturday as well, it took its toll, it affected him on the rugby field. (Ilisea)

Foregoing formal education or other qualifications to focus only on developing a professional rugby career carries with it many threats to success such as being cut from a squad or suffering serious injury. Indeed, injury has a major impact on the success and longevity of an athlete's career with the consequences greater when players are based overseas and reliant on staying healthy to achieve these goals (Ryba *et al.*, 2016). Carson and Remco (2008) highlighted the psychological and emotional stressors that occur during the injury itself, throughout the rehabilitation process, and on return to play. In this study, three of the participants experienced a serious injury, or injuries, that required surgery and a lengthy recovery process, which kept them out of the game for months at a time. Maciu and Ilisea said that during these rugby lows they felt 'down' and 'frustrated' but this was alleviated somewhat by good medical support and follow-up from their clubs. For Maciu, effective emotional support and care helped him recover well but this was in contrast to Apensia's experience following hom rupturing an ACL (Anterior Cruciate Ligament).

Owing to being unsure about the New Zealand Health System and anxious about his tertiary educational scholarship (from Fiji), Apensia delayed re-constructive surgery for more than a year and continued to play the following season but with a 'loose knee', he was demoted to social grade rugby. Eventually he had surgery, but, unable to pay for physiotherapy and with no rehabilitation program in place he did not return to premier club rugby until some years later. As a young, developing player, he was jolted by the seriousness of the injury and feared losing his scholarship because he was unable to attend classes:

I actually thought I'd lost the bottom part of my leg because I couldn't feel anything and to be honest, I felt really scared because I thought they were going to send me back home because I couldn't go to school. (Apensia)

### ***Cultural Transitioning***

Despite the comparative ease of adapting to the rugby playing and training environment the four participants found making sense of New Zealand culture much more demanding, as a case of them experiencing a "mismatch between their own mode of being" (Ryba, 2016, p. 8) and their new cultural environment. Ilisea experienced cultural isolation and

loneliness outside rugby. In the beginning, he kept to himself and concentrated on rugby but connecting with the local Fijian community helped him feel more settled and relaxed, despite him struggling with being separated from his family in Fiji.

...it was quite tough being here on my own and away from family. For months I'd be calling home 3 or 4 times a day, even at work, at smokos (morning break), I'd call my wife and talk to her.

Maciu also experienced isolation in a private boy's school in Christchurch where the majority of students were New Zealand Europeans and the process of learning was very different to what he had been used to:

...it was a whole new experience, I remember being the only brown guy around school, walking around, having to wear the blazer, shoes every day, using the laptop every day, short tests and assignments, education was way more intense than back home.

A lack of local knowledge and cultural insight is a factor contributing toward transnational athlete transitions ending in a crisis (Stambulova, 2017) and it contributed to the stress felt by the four participants. The problems associated with alcohol misuse in rugby (see Cockburn and Atkinson, 2017) are intensified during times of stress or at the end of the playing season (Sonderflund, 2013). Siti described how players (especially those having just arrived from Fiji) can be vulnerable to peer pressure and make unwise decisions over behaviours that detract from their rugby: "they listen to their mate, they go out drinking, they do this and that and before you know it they're on a plane back to Fiji."

Ilisea suggests that a lack of money and preference for kava (an indigenous drink with relaxant properties) operated as protective factors against the high consumption of alcohol among Fijians and the problems it can create. In the New Zealand rugby environment alcohol is more readily available than in Fiji with drinking part of game day tradition in New Zealand rugby but Ilisea suggests the cultural differences in post-match socialising between New Zealanders and Fijians and the dangers of excessive alcohol consumption for Fijians:

Back at home, after a rugby game, we sit around and have kava and because we're not all employed it's hard to go and buy drinks, whereas here,

the club supplies all the booze after the game. It's a case of managing how much we (Fijians) drink and also adapting to the way of living here. (Ilisea)

The team bonding that the participants felt drinking kava developed and the active promotion of 'island culture' was the reason why Apenisa's club drank kava after the game. He explained that, while it was normal for his club (with larger numbers of Fijians and Pacific Islanders) it was not common practice in the more traditional clubs: '...at Souths we normally have kava in the dressing rooms and in the clubrooms. Clubs like Huntley and Technical - you hardly see kava and they're so used to their systems anyway.' (all club names are pseudonyms)

### ***Cultural Identity and 'the Fijian Way'***

Rugby is regarded as a key marker of Fijian identity (Kanemasu & Molnar 2013). Although Fijians are strongly identified with rugby union (15s) across the globe it is rugby sevens that defines Fijian players and elicits the strongest form of cultural identity and sense of group distinctiveness. When the participants spoke of sevens rugby it was expressed in cultural terms with ownership of a particular style and way of playing seen as, "The Fijian Way."

Just as Fijians have a signature brand of sevens, they also have a distinctive way of playing Touch Rugby (practice game in which tackling is replaced with tagging). In regular touch the team in possession maintains the ball for six touches before the ball is handed over, unless there is an infringement. 'Fijian Touch' or 'One Touch' allows for just one touch before a change of possession occurs, which creates a very different game. Aimed at limiting stoppages and maximising phases of play, Fijian Touch promotes and demands freedom, creativity and risk taking, which are hallmarks of Fijian play. For the four participants it created the most fun and was most enjoyed when played with only Fijian players. Apenisa distinguishes between regular Touch and Fijian Touch in the following way:

When I play touch, I prefer not the Kiwi (Touch), not the real Touch, but the Fijian Touch when you throw the ball left, right and centre. I always love that kind of touch, like how we play 7s.

The link between One Touch and Fijian culture was so strong that playing it provided escape from the stress of living in a foreign culture by taking them back to their roots and culture they knew and were comfortable

with. It provided a way of dealing with many of the challenges involved in transitioning from Fiji into the culture of New Zealand and New Zealand rugby. Playing One Touch rugby provided a valuable coping mechanism for all four participants with the appeal of Fijian Touch so strong that it often distracted Siti from his tertiary studies. Even with assignments due he could not resist the temptation of playing One Touch. For example, Ilisea would often take a 'drive around' to find a game touch as a way of relaxing and unwinding. As young Fijians living away from home, Fijian Touch had powerful therapeutic benefits for the four participants, as Apensia explains: '...if someone is struggling there's touch, a chat, a laugh - just like back home'.

## **7. DISCUSSION**

The participants' stories suggest little real difficulty for them in adjusting to the more structured approach to rugby in Christchurch with the semi-professional players in particular drawing on playing experience to assist in this adjustment. For them, further indicators of a successful transition were positive rugby experiences such as feeling well looked after, achieving team honours and being selected in representative teams and wider training squads. The demands of having to study or work as well as commit to rugby gave them a high transition load but they were able to meet these as well. Combined with work and study, rugby created a high transitional load but one that they dealt with reasonably successfully through the interplay of situation, self, social support and strategies for coping (Schlossberg, 1981).

The biggest challenge the participants faced was adapting to living in a vastly different culture with a significant contrast between the collective nature of Fijian life and the stress on the individual in New Zealand that is typical of Western countries. Research on cultural adaptation draws upon a number of transition models that identify different types of transitions individuals face but with all transitions related to the developmental context in which they occur. Two participants were 21 at the time of the study, had begun playing rugby as children in Fiji and moved to New Zealand before or during secondary school. One was 35 and the other was 29 but both had come to New Zealand in their early twenties. This provides a spread of developmental contexts related to their development as rugby players, but they all had to adapt to significant cultural challenges from their teenage years or early

twenties and all saw the biggest challenge being that of adapting to the culture of life outside and around rugby.

This study confirms the importance of the challenges related to psychological, psychosocial, academic, and/or vocational development and the stress they can create during athlete transitioning suggested by some of the literature (see, Light & Evans, 2018; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Learning how to transition into a vastly different culture presented the biggest challenge and critical to the participants' development as rugby players and their wellbeing. The ways in which they dealt with the challenge of living in a foreign culture, such as having social support, reflect the findings of other studies in this area. This included drinking kava as a cultural ritual, but the role that playing the Fijian game, One-Touch rugby is distinctive. Playing One Touch acted as a coping mechanism that connected them with their culture and enhanced their social networks with fellow Fijians but not just through verbal interaction or dialogue. The connections with Fijian culture included the embodied culture of communicating through movement and the non-verbal conversations of playing a distinctively Fijian form of rugby. It did more than provide an escape from the stresses involved in living in the foreign culture of New Zealand by allowing them to be lost in the flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) of the game and experience the sense of freedom and relationships associated with their culture. These engagements with the 'Fijian way' (*vaka i tauke i*) were central to their coping with living in a different culture, regardless of how long they had lived in New Zealand.

Confirming ethnic identity through Fijian 'One Touch' and rugby sevens was a significant finding in this study as part of the revision of identity and their place in the world identified among Fijian rugby players migrating to Japan (Schieder & Presterudstuen, 2014). It may have been emphasized due to the timing of the study, with interviews conducted in the off-season for 15's but in-season for Fijian touch and sevens.

While we recognize the limitations of being able to generalize from the small-scale, study this study provide useful insight into the stresses involved in adapting to a new culture for non-elite and non-professional rugby players. Within the context of concern with suicide rates among Pacific Islander adolescent males, the findings of this study also encourage consideration of the important role that sport can play in contributing toward wellbeing among young Pacific Island men by helping them cope with the stresses of adapting to a new culture.

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