YOUTH AS A COMMUNITY AT THE ETHNOGRAPHY MUSEUM URBAN PATHWAYS: FIJI. YOUTH. ARTS. CULTURE.

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Based in Fiji's capital Suva, Fiji Museum was established in 1904 with the specific purpose of creating a national cultural facility to both protect and preserve Fiji's cultural heritage. The museum cares for the largest iTaukei/Indigenous Fijian ethnographic collection in the world as well as cultural collections that reflect Fiji's multi-ethnic diversity. However, the museum has struggled to attract local audiences and has in recent years made it its mission to bring its communities into the museum. In this paper, the project's Principal Investigator Karen Jacobs introduces the *Urban Pathways: Fiji. Youth. Arts. Culture.* project which aims to bring youth into the Fiji Museum as one of its broader outcomes.

Supported under the UK Government's Global Challenges Research Fund, *Urban Pathways: Fiji. Youth. Arts. Culture.* is part of the British Academy's Youth Futures programme. Consisting of a range of project partners including the Sainsbury Research Unit, University of East Anglia, and Fiji Museum, the project aims to bring youth communities in Fiji into cultural heritage institutions, while documenting what culture and cultural heritage constitutes for Fiji's urban youth. The project and some of its ongoing activities will be introduced while offering some work-in-progress reflections on the potential role of youth as a community for the ethnographic museum through youth programmes. The fact that youth is a transitional and temporal category, plus the fact that they have long been a minimised group in Fiji, means that youth was not considered to be a straightforward museum community. However, we have learned that youth can engage with the ethnography museum as a diverse 'community of situation' (Gibson and Kindon 2013). These reflections are based on two-weekly online talanoa (Vosa Vakaviti for inclusive dialogue) sessions with, and online forms completed by, fifteen youth participating in the project's work placement programme at three partner institutions over a period of twelve months.

Background

In their attempts to decolonise and encourage social inclusion, ethnographic museums and world cultures museums as well as national museums holding ethnography collections have turned to a multi-vocal approach by drawing on their communities (Bennett 1995; Peers and Brown 2003; Golding and Modest 2013; Crooke 2015). As Fiji's national museum, Fiji Museum was established to care for and preserve Fiji's cultural heritage as well as create a space for the public to engage with the nation's rich and diverse heritage. However, local communities did not visit Fiji Museum in part due to the cost of the entrance fee and the fact that the permanent display remained unchanged over recent decades, but also because the museum is generally considered locally as a storehouse for objects from the past. In recent years, the museum has made several concerted efforts to overcome these obstacles.

Relevant to this paper are two previous research projects during which a community was created, including researchers and museum staff, which formed the basis of the *Urban Pathways* project. *Fijian Art: political power, sacred value, social transformation and collecting since the 18th century* (2011-14)[1] and *Fiji's Artistic Heritage: Impact and Engagement in Fiji* (2016-17)[2] brought together team members from, amongst others, the Sainsbury Research Unit (University of East Anglia), Museum of Archaeology and

Anthropology (University of Cambridge), Fiji Museum and the iTaukei Trust Fund Board.[3] The most tangible outcome of the latter project was the exhibition *Kamunaga: the story of tabua* at the Fiji Museum (2017-20). Curated by staff from Fiji Museum and iTaukei Trust Fund Board, the exhibition was built on a series of collaborative workshops with Sainsbury Research Unit staff and emphasised the significance of the ceremonial gift known as kamunaga, particularly the tabua (presentation sperm whale's tooth), that is offered during important Indigenous Fijian ceremonial occasions. By focusing on the current relevance of a cultural treasure that features in its collection, Fiji Museum was able to bring local communities back into the museum and enabled the public to see things that they know and use in a cultural heritage setting (Jacobs *et al.* in press).

The lessons learned during these projects have been incorporated into the *Urban Pathways* project where the relationships between project partners in themselves and project partners and communities are at the core from the beginning of the project and the aim is to reach urban Fijian youth – Fijian being a term that encompasses all ethnicities in Fiji.

Urban Pathways

Supported under the UK Government's Global Challenges Research Fund, the British Academy's Youth Futures programme was set up in response to the fact that around half of all young people in the world are unemployed or underemployed - and this was before the Covid-19 pandemic. This is particularly an issue for the nine tenths of today's 1.8 billion youth who live in developing countries. A call went out for projects which offered a youth-led perspective on the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Projects needed to be genuinely interdisciplinary and be based on collaborative work that extends beyond the standard research model, and policy thinking based on close understanding of, and working with, young people (https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/youth-futures/).

Our project, (*Re*)*Defining Culture: Engaging urban Fijian youth in sustainable employment opportunities in the cultural heritage sector* (YF\190087), responded to this call by bringing together project partners and scholars in visual and intangible arts, anthropology, education, museum studies and marine science who propose to study a Fijian urban youth perspective on culture through collaborations with urban youth in a range of Fiji's cultural heritage settings. Since the Paris Declaration 'Heritage as a driver of development', it has become clear that cultural heritage can play a key role in in terms of social cohesion, creativity and economic development (ICOMOS 2011). Following this, the role of culture was integrated into the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda for the first time acknowledging that culture is considered to be at the heart of global developmental challenges (https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda).

Fiji's 2017 census logged the nation's population as 884,887, with more than half (494,252) living in urban regions. The median age was recorded as 27.5 years and the average population growth at 0.6%. Statistics indicate that youth represent an important demographic in Fiji, as elsewhere in the Pacific region. In fact, there are growing concerns about the 'youth bulge' in Pacific populations. A youth bulge is believed to be reached when the youth population, people aged between 15-24, exceeds 20% of the total population and this theory has been used to highlight security risks and negative impacts for and by youth (SPC 2015; Kaiku 2018). This theory implies that youth is a problem to be managed and some of the underlying causes of youth problems quoted are 'poverty, education systems focused on white-collar employment skills, stagnating economies that do not provide enough employment opportunities, and rural/urban inequalities' (Curtain & Vakaoti 2011: 5).

For youth living in Fiji's urban centres such as Suva, Lautoka and Nadi on the main island of Viti Levu, access to education is less of a problem, but a lack of focus on culture and cultural heritage in the education system is a growing issue. Urban Fijian youth often do not visit cultural heritage institutions willingly and school trips can be their only form of interaction with natural and cultural heritage in a public setting. As a result, the cultural heritage sector is not necessarily considered a viable employment option by urban youth. Moreover, the tourism sector, the largest employment opportunity in Fiji, predominantly presents a standardised form of iTaukei Fijian culture which is gender, ethnicity and age restrictive. While urban Fijian culture celebrates fluidity and inclusivity, both in the removal of gendered expectations and in the representation of Fiji's multi-ethnic and multifaith communities, urban youth face tensions between tradition and modernity. This project aims to examine the notion of culture from an urban youth perspective and encourage cultural heritage institutions to broaden the versions of culture presented. In doing so, we aim to reach youth who do not consider cultural heritage to be a viable employment sector.

In the UK, the project team consists of Karen Jacobs, Principal Investigator (PI), and Katrina Igglesden, Postdoctoral Research Associate (PDRA), at the Sainsbury Research Unit, University of East Anglia. Both worked on the earlier mentioned AHRC-funded Fiji projects that focused on ethnographic Fijian museum collections. In Fiji, the project's Co-Investigator (Co-I) Frances C. Koya Vaka'uta began the project as Associate Professor and Director of the Oceania Centre for Arts, Culture and Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, but soon moved to her new position as Team Leader - Culture for Development in the Human Rights and Social Development (HRSD) Division at the Pacific Community (SPC). She supports Pacific Island nations with the promotion, preservation, protection and safeguarding of positive expressions of cultural heritage, including Pacific Indigenous knowledge, values, languages, traditions, and creative arts. Sipiriano Nemani is the Director of Fiji Museum. A UNESCO-accredited facilitator in ICH-safeguarding methodologies, he has extensive experience in community resilience training, the development, planning and writing of cultural policy. As Director of VOU Dance Fiji Company, Sachiko Soro aims to deliver traditional storytelling through the media of contemporary dance and music. There are over 100 students in the VOU Dance School and in 2018 VOU started Fiji's first tertiary dance institution The Conservatorium of Dance, designed to provide sustainable employment in performance arts. Kelly Brown is the Curator of the Marine Collection at the Discipline of Marine Studies at the University of South Pacific. His interdisciplinary research interest for this project is in how the natural environment is viewed by urban youth, especially with regard to the culturally important concepts of vu (totems) which are often marine species.[4] The interdisciplinary nature of the team allows for a broad notion of culture, encompassing disciplines such as the social sciences, humanities, marine and environmental science, visual and performance art, and intangible heritage.

The project started in October 2020 with the realisation that the official project title did not have much potential to appeal to youth or create meaningful engagement and impact. *Urban Pathways: Fiji. Youth. Arts. Culture.* therefore became the working title used on the project's website and social media and the topic of the project's logo competition.[5] A means of inspiring and empowering youth to engage with the project, youth aged 15-24 years were encouraged to respond to the theme 'Urban Pathways: Fiji. Youth. Arts. Culture.' The logo competition was an ideal way to generate interest among youth in Fiji and was the first opportunity to understand their views and perceptions of urban youth culture. The entries varied in scope but a wide range of them drew on itaukei (Indigenous Fijian) cultural expressions, such as masi (barkcloth) or icons of Fiji's natural environment such as the coconut tree, frangipani flower and the conch shell – the latter used in the logo to encourage 'the youth to speak out and raise their ideas on ways to make a better Fiji' (Jonathan Tudreu,

logo competition accompanying statement). The logo competition was won by 21-year-old Mereoni Rosi Tora, who lives in Tavakubu, Lautoka. Her entry (Figure one) was accompanied by a statement sharing the meaning behind the design: 'Following the theme *Urban Pathways: Fiji. Youth. Arts. Culture.*, the lady's face represents an urban area and her hair are pathways [coloured blue, brown, green and yellow] to Fiji's rich heritage, art and culture. The four colours present growth, youth, freshness and harmony. The dancers represent the mix of culture and modern lifestyle in the city. The masi symbols represent the oldest form of written art telling stories of ancestors. The coconut tree (land) and fish (sea) represent a source of life, food, culture and income. The canoe represents ancestors' journeys for a better life in Fiji and the need to acknowledge their sacrifices by preserving culture and traditions for the next generation.'.

Youth Work Placement Programme

Although museums aim to attract wide audiences, several scholars have observed that young people do not feel welcome in the museum (McLean, 1999; Mason & McCarthy 2006; Dawson 2014). In addition to the general disconnect between the museum and the interests of young people, youth from low-income and minority groups feel excluded from museums (Mroczkowski *et al.* 2021: 5). As Mason & McCarthy 2006: 22-23) point out: 'It is not simply a case of young people *choosing* not to go to museums, or indeed *correcting* bureaucratic shortcomings in museum programming in relation to youth leisure preferences, but a more complex matter of considering the fit between different cultures—the culture of those who present art and the culture of those who might view it'.

Since these observations, efforts have been made by museums to engage with youth, mostly within the framework of educational agendas (Tzibazi 2013). Museum-based youth programmes that target skill development, cultural or social inclusion and professional learning are another way to support youth engagement with the museum. Youth programmes at museums that offer professional experience, in the form of co-curating an exhibition or as a general internship that provides skill and career development, familiarity with art, culture and/or science, have been proven to have a positive impact on youth (Mroczkowski *et al.* 2021).

In the UK, the British Museum's *Museum Futures* project, sponsored by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, currently offers three cohorts of trainees (27 trainees over three one-year intakes) between the age of 18-24 paid training opportunities in the museum sector with a specific emphasis on including 'people from groups which are currently under-represented in the museum workforce'. The traineeships mainly offer training in digital skills related to museum collections learned at the British Museum or partner museums across the UK (https://www.museumfutures.co.uk/). The British Museum also has a Youth Collective, a group of 18–24-year-olds who work to inspire other young people to engage with the British Museum, both in terms of visiting the museum as in terms of considering the museum sector as a career option. The Youth collective aims to bring a youth perspective to the British Museum and to influence change (<u>https://www.britishmuseum.org/learn/young-people/british-museum-young-peoples-programme</u>).

One of the longest running youth programmes in an ethnographic/anthropology museum is the Native Youth Program at the Museum of Archaeology (MOA) in Vancouver, Canada. It was founded in 1979 by MOA curator Madeline Rowan and Brenda Taylor, a Heiltsuk First Nation woman. A summer employment and training programme for urban Indigenous youth, it offers up to eight urban Indigenous high school students (between 15-18 years old) and two University of British Columbia (UBC) students who act as programme manager and research assistant. The programme's goal is 'to produce young Indigenous leaders, provide meaningful direction and mentoring, enhance employment opportunities for Indigenous youth and promote public understanding of the diversity and richness of Indigenous cultures within the UBC community' (https://moa.ubc.ca/indigenous-access-andengagement/nyp/). Co-organised by MOA and UBC's First Nation House of Learning, the programme has been running for more than 40 years and has supported over 200 Indigenous participants. It has offered young Indigenous people the opportunity to explore their culture and develop skills in the short term as well as building confidence to enter further education and employment opportunities as well as develop leadership among their communities for the longer term. Since the mid-1990s the programme has been advised by MOA's only Indigenous curator, Pam Brown. From 2010 the programme has gradually been revamped to become more relevant to First Nations urban youth by offering community engagement, new media training, the creation of digital content in tandem with the activities, workshops and training on Indigenous cultural heritage such as cedar bark stripping, cooking, painting and weaving (https://moa.ubc.ca/2019/12/marking-a-milestone-forty-years-of-the-native-youthprogram/).

In December 2020, the Urban Pathways team launched a call to invite youth applicants to join the Urban Pathways Youth Work Placement Programme (YWPP), which offered 114 days of paid work experience at the three project partner institutions for the Youth Work Placement Programme based in the urban regions of Suva and Nadi respectively: Fiji Museum, University of the South Pacific (USP; Discipline of Marine Studies) and VOU Dance Fiji. Apart from practical professional training, applicants would become Youth Ambassadors who are invited to hold regular open days and youth forums in order to reach wider audiences and bring them into cultural heritage institutions.

Currently, there are fifteen youth in the Urban Pathways Youth Work Placement Programme at the three partner institutions.[6] The focus of this paper is on Fiji Museum where six youth began their placements in March 2021. The youth have been completely integrated into the museum's work force and have taken up positions as technical interns in conservation, collections management & exhibitions, education, policy & legislation, library & archives, and digital media.

However, in mid-April Fiji was confronted with a serious surge of Covid-19 cases and the country went into lockdown. This forced us to make the difficult decision to continue with the project online, which was made possible by covering internet costs for the participating youth and their mentors. The move to a digital project allowed us to prepare for a new programme of two-weekly Zoom talanoa (Vosa Vakaviti for inclusive dialogue) project sessions where the youth took the lead in discussing current themes and issues related to the project. Under the overarching mentorship of Fiji Museum's Director, the youth are also contributing to the refitting/refurbishment of the museum. They have already devised innovative ways and methods for the museum to engage with their audience and other youth.

Youth as museum community at the ethnographic museum

In her study of a youth programme at science and children's museum, Danielle Linzer emphasised the importance of essentially treating youth as members of the museum's staff, rather than as participants in an after-school programme. This includes providing a financial compensation, giving them independent access and listening to their perspective. Treating young people as valuable and contributing staff members rather than 'a stereotypical teen (troubled, isolated, unwanted)' is essential if a museum youth programme wants to provide positive youth development (Linzer 2014: 246).

However, what the Urban Pathways and other museum youth programmes such as NYP offer, goes beyond work experience and learning the trade. It is a meaningful way of obtaining perspectives from a community that historically has had a fraught, or at least complex, relationship with the museum as an institution. Our aim was not just to offer a specific youth work experience, but to engage and empower youth and to make the museum into a welcoming place for youth; a place where they feel that they belong. A sense of belonging is important for museum communities, especially when these museums hold their cultural heritage. As Wayne Modest writes 'As notions of belonging are often still racialised or culturalized, especially in our current political moment in Europe, we argue that ethnographic and world cultures museums are especially important sites through which to address how belonging matters today' (2019: 16). The lack of youth visiting the museum therefore resonates with the wider debate around specific communities not visiting the museum because they do not feel a connection. As Elizabeth Crooke (2015) points out: 'A museum forges and communicates a sense of belonging - it tells you who fits into the narrative it shares. Equally, by omission, a museum symbolizes those who do not belong. The exclusion of people and their histories from the museum narrative can have an equally significant impact. Even if included, it is the nature of that inclusion that can be telling of the priorities, functions, and desires of the museum and its governance'.

Youth, however, is not a straightforward community, as the notion of youth is such a transitional category in itself. While the defining characteristic is their age, so far during our project we have noticed that age is not the most crucial factor. The United Nations definition of youth is people aged 15-24, but the category of 'youth' is viewed more broadly in Fiji. The non-governmental definition of youth falls between the ages of 18-35 (Curtain & Vakaoti 2011), while governmentally the age range shifts to 15-35 years (Government of Fiji 2012: 3). This additional ten years demonstrates Fijian cultural and community values and speaks to stages of important life-cycles experienced in Fiji, as well as iTaukei (Indigenous Fijian) hierarchical structures. A person's age does not affect their status as a youth; instead, it is their role in society that dictates the categorisation. A person can still be considered a youth if unmarried, living with parents, married but without children, or if not yet in a position of authority. This shows that, as a category, youth is both a stage of 'being' and 'becoming' (France 2008). This view on youth equally explains why youth is a minimised and ignored group (Lee and Craney 2019).

Rather than a community based on age, the youth on the Youth Work Placement Programme became a 'community of situation' (Gibson and Kindon 2013) – a concept that allows fluidity and reflects the way a community was formed through the project's Youth Work Placement Programme. After all, they are a community of diverse people who were grouped together. This diversity appears to have helped in making youth feel comfortable. Relationships with mentors and museum staff also appear to have a significant impact on the youth's sense of purpose and belonging, with some reporting a sense of loss during the lockdown when mentors were not around and independent work was encouraged.

While Fiji Museum might not initially have been considered a place where they belong, the potential of the museum certainly became clear to the youth involved. For all participants of the youth placement programme, their work with cultural heritage has opened their eyes to the importance of intergenerational knowledge exchange. Youth participants have begun to realise the potential of heritage as an educational tool to gain personal cultural knowledge. This realisation has bolstered their confidence to begin reaching out to elders, family and community members. The Covid-19 pandemic has also given them more opportunities to connect with others in urban areas, including using online methods, which has helped them to understand their place in the community as well as in the museum.

Looking forward

The success of the Fiji youth placements in cultural heritage institutions inspired us to set up a similar project for Fiji's UK-based diaspora youth. The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge, which cares for the largest Fijian collections outside of Fiji Museum, kindly agreed to host three online internships during the autumn of 2021. Three youth have been asked to examine the notion of 'culture' from an urban youth perspective by engaging with the museum's collections and encourage cultural heritage institutions to broaden the versions of culture presented within them. The online project focuses on the personal development of the interns who are asked to explore areas of the collections that relate to their lived experience of 'culture' and explore what it means to them by (for example) interviewing elders and community members. At the end of the internship, participants will present a 'finished product' such as written, artistic, creative and engaging works.

While this youth group is not based in Fiji, our growing understandings of urban youth culture in Fiji has taught us that diasporic youth are included in the notion of urban youth culture and that the Fiji-based youth placements crave the opportunity to share with Fiji youth elsewhere. The outputs created by the UK-based participants will be shared online and with the Fiji-based youth in work placements. For the project team it will be interesting to learn the youth perspective on cultural heritage institutions from Fiji youth based in diaspora.

Interestingly, museum youth programmes are as transitional an experience as youth is a transitional community. So far, the youth participating in the Fiji youth placements have been mentored as well as listened to in an 'intermediate' space that bridges the worlds of adults and youth (Noam & Tillinger 2004). However, this in-betweenness does not take away from the strength of the community formed during the youth placement programme. Youth programmes at ethnography museums can contribute to positive youth development by offering skill and career development in a safe space, where youth can equally contemplate the importance of their identity and culture. So far, youth have expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to develop, grow and be mentored, and to feel valued and listened to. As a project team, we look forward to gaining more in-depth perspectives, but for now we have seen that the ethnography museum is a place where youth can and should engage. As more museums collaboratively and constructively welcome youth into their community, this is becoming a reality.

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Notes

1. Publications include Herle and Carreau (2013), Hooper (2016), Jacobs (2019); exhibitions include 'Chiefs and Governors: Art & Power in Fiji (2013-14, Cambridge), 'Art and the Body: Exploring the role of clothing in Fiji' (2014, Fiji Museum), 'Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific' (2016-17, Norwich; 2019-21, Los Angeles) and a range of exhibition packages (see: http://www.fijianart.sru.uea.ac.uk/exhibitions.php).

2. Both projects were generously funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC): the project team for the Fijian Art project (2011-14, AH/1003622/1) consisted of Steven Hooper (SRU,

PI), Anita Herle (MAA, Co-I), Karen Jacobs (SRU, Co-I), Lucie Carreau (MAA, PDRA), Andy Mills (SRU, PDRA) and Katrina Igglesden (PhD candidate). Funded under the AHRC Follow-on-Funding Scheme, the project team for the *Fiji's Artistic Heritage* project (2016-17, AH/P006116/1) consisted of Steven Hooper, Karen Jacobs and Katrina Igglesden at the SRU.

3. iTaukei Trust Fund Board is a Fiji-based government institution that fosters Indigenous Fijians (iTaukei) and Rotumans' economic, social, and cultural, community and political development (https://itaukeitrustfund.com.fj/).

4. For more information on the project team, see <u>https://fijiyouthculture.wordpress.com/team/</u>.
5. Project's social media: <u>https://fijiyouthculture.wordpress.com/about/</u>;

https://www.facebook.com/fijiyouthculture; www.instagram.com/urbanpathways.fijiyouth/

6. The youth involved in the Youth Work Placement in Fiji are [some names are pseudonyms or alternative identifiers]: Cabrini Chan, Ala-Cassandra, Peter Hughes, Abraham Waqairoba, Zelda Rafai, Johny, Mr Pene, Israel, Inise Kuruwale, Shahil Kumar, Anjini, Kina, Gabriella Ho, Makare Sorby and one who prefers to remain anonymous.

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