The Nation’s Treasure House: A Colonial History of the Fiji Museum 1904-70

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ABSTRACT

Museums such as the Fiji Museum can provide discourse on cultural identities in the Pacific Islands. This article describes the historical evolution of the Fiji Museum during the colonial period of 1904 to 1970. The museum, as a socio-cultural institution and an extension of colonialism, was transplanted into Fiji during the era of British rule and retained the colonial outlook within this period. The challenges and successes to create a museum are highlighted in an effort to collect, conserve, research, preserve and promote Fiji’s heritage.

Key words: Fiji Museum, cultural identities, indigenous Fijian
THE NATION’S TREASURE HOUSE: A COLONIAL HISTORY OF THE FIJI MUSEUM 1904-70

This paper provides a history of the Fiji Museum during Fiji’s colonial period and argues that the establishment of this institution was an extension of a colonisationist enterprise. The formation of a museum helped to entrench a cultural practice of the British Empire in a Pacific space. The paper also examines ways in which the Fiji Museum from its inception facilitated the transmission of culture and a formation of cultural identity in Fiji. The collections of the Fiji Museum are a critical repository of national culture and changing cultural identities over time. By examining its acquisitions, it is asserted that from a colonial perspective, the indigenous Fijian identity and tangible heritage (material culture) were represented as the cultural identity of Fiji despite being located in a region where intangible heritage is integral to Pacific Islanders’ identities.

The cultural identity of Fiji is rooted in the concept of indigenous and ethnicity. Historically, “Fiji has a large Indian population with a cultural identity extremely different from that of Fijians. Divisions also exist within both the Fijian and the Indian communities.” (Hau’ofa, 2008, 50). However, defining a Pacific Islander regional identity in itself is complex and raises issues of belonging.

In Fiji, about half the citizen population is of non-indigenous origin and they are not considered or called Fijians. The term Fijian is reserved for the indigenous population which still considers the rest as ‘vulagi’ or guests, even though their ancestors might have immigrated to Fiji a century ago. Fijians are Pacific Islanders, what of the rest? (ibid)

Epeli Hau’ofa considers the other side of the coin by asking whether or not Indo-Fijians see themselves as Pacific Islanders. He states:

Given the mutual misunderstandings and suspicions between . . . indigenous Fijians and to some extent most other indigenous Pacific Islanders on the one hand and Indo-Fijians on the other, what proportion of the latter considers themselves Pacific Islanders? (ibid)

He makes this query because “the view held by some people in the region is that only indigenous populations are Pacific Islanders.”(ibid)

These questions of belonging and whose cultural identity is related to the country of Fiji, become visible with the development of a museum in Fiji. The museum is one of the three institutions of power that had profoundly shaped the way in which the State imagined its dominion. (Anderson, 1991, 163-64) The museum, as an extension of empire, functioned as an entity which allowed the State, in this case Britain, to appear as the guardian of tradition. Further, this power was enhanced by reproducing symbols of tradition. Therefore, it would only be ‘natural’ that “museums and collections that had their origins in the colonisationist era... were founded and assembled in line with the prevailing motivations that governed collecting in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries - scientific curiosity, administrative control of populations, potential for economic exploitation, and antiquarianism.” (Cummins, Farmer and Russell, 2013, pp. 3).
Consequently, “the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British model of the museum was transported and applied, not merely to the West Indies but to Canada, Australia and New Zealand and the Pacific Islands; to Asia, and African territories ...throughout the British Empire” Cummins (2013, pp. 11). Therefore, like its counterparts within the British Empire, the Fiji Museum established in the early twentieth century, was an imported ‘invented’ cultural expression and institution.

THE EARLY YEARS, 1904–1954

The Fiji Museum in 1904 was first conceptualised when in that year, William (later Sir William) Allardyce presented to the Suva Town Board some part of his collection of Fijian material, gathered during his term of service as an administrative officer. The collection was exhibited at the Town Hall, previously known as Queen Victoria Hall. The birth of this museum was a result of a gift. Its origins also set a tone for the receipt of many more gifts which allowed the museum’s collections to further develop.

On May 23, 1908, the Fijian Society was inaugurated, with Colman C. Wall as its founder and an active player in it for the remainder of his life (Derrick, 1959, pp. 153–156). Wall served as curator and was a member of the committee of the Society, part of the time as honorary secretary and, for the last few months of his life, as treasurer (Transactions of the Fijian Society, 1923, pp. 1-25). He primarily researched the history of Fiji, before its Cession to Great Britain in 1874 (ibid). The Fijian Society was formed with declared objectives: to promote and conserve interest in historical, literary, scientific and kindred matters in any way relating to Fiji and other islands of the Pacific; to assist in the formation and care of a museum; to acquire books, records and so forth relating thereto, which were to be in the possession of the trustees; and to publish from time to time, a journal containing a record of the proceedings of the Society (Transactions of the Fijian Society, 1915, pp. 1-36). This declaration of a purpose issued by the Fijian Society clearly indicates that the Society was conceived as a learned society. Similar to other learned societies, it was committed to the promotion of a discipline, matters relating to Fiji and other Pacific islands.
Further, its efforts to promote this discipline should therefore be seen as continuing involvement in intellectual creation. The Society was committed to ensuring that it was a pinnacle of historical research in the Pacific islands and that its journal should be the voice of authority on the historical experience of Fiji and surrounding islands in the Pacific.

One of the Fijian Society’s primary goals was to assist “in the formation and care of a museum” (Transactions of the Fijian Society, 1913.). They were also “. . . endeavouring to collect useful information about the past and early history of Fiji . . . fast passing into oblivion.” (ibid) The annual subscription for members was “half-a-guinea,” payable in advance. However, this fee was not applicable to all members. Rule 7b states: “Native Fijians, who contribute papers to the Society, may be elected as members of the Society without paying ordinary subscription” (Transactions of the Fijian Society, 1915, pp. 1-36). This special rule outlined who the Fijian Society determined was native and this outreach prioritised the ‘native’ that is, the indigenous Fijian. It was an effort to make the Society more inclusive and to reach out to indigenous Fijians, who could not have been joining the Society in substantial numbers. The extension of free membership was, in addition to an encouragement to research their culture, a move to garner more interest among the local populace. This would have been a better option than simply having a Society that researched, gave lectures and collected artefacts for a museum in the name of the people of Fiji but without any involvement in the process of the people themselves. This move to become more inclusive of the indigenous Fijians also hinted at the class and racial divide in its membership. It also begs the question as to why other ethnic groups were not extended the same courtesy of a fee waiver. Perhaps this was because their membership was not seen as vital to the objectives of the Fijian Society. For instance, in the case of Indo-Fijians, their presence was quite visible. In 1879, the British introduced the system of Indian labour indenture, also referred to as the Girmit. The term refers to the vernacular Fiji-Hindi version of the word “agreement” for indentureship in Fiji. “Between 1879 and 1916, some 60,537 Indians arrived in Fiji as indentured labourers” Ahmed (1979: xxix). By 1907, there were 30,920 Indians, living in Fiji. Of them, 11,689 were indentured labourers. Furthermore, of the 40,286 Indians in Fiji, 27 per cent were born in the colony, until by 1946 the Indians were the majority of Fiji’s population. (Lal 2009: 92)

This colonial model of a museum focusing on the cultural identity of the ‘native Fijian’ arguably could have been influenced by colonial administrators themselves. The first elected patron of the Fijian Society was His Excellency Sir Everard Ferdinand im Thurn, who served as Governor of Fiji from 1904 to 1910. It may not be coincidental that within the same year of Sir Everard’s arrival, a museum was established in Fiji and that he was its first patron. Sir Everard’s museum expertise was honed by his time spent in British Guiana, also a former West Indies colony and may very well have influenced the course of the Fiji Museum’s development. Sir Everard (1852-1932) was a botanist, explorer, anthropologist and Colonial Governor. In 1877, he was appointed Curator of the Museum of the Royal Agricultural and Commercial Society of British Guiana, a former British West Indies colony. He also spent two and a half years ‘wandering among the Indians.’ In 1882, he founded ‘Timerhri’ the literary and scientific journal of the Royal Agricultural and Commercial Society. He was the author of Among the Indians of ‘Guiana published in 1883 which disclosed extensive and intimate knowledge that Sir Everard had attained of the habits and customs of the aboriginal Indians of Guiana. In 1904, he was appointed Governor of Fiji and
High Commissioner of the Western Pacific, retiring six years later (Aspinall 1933:36-37). Sir Everard’s British Guiana model may have influenced the directions of the Fijian Society.

Members of the Society recommended to Sir Everard that trustees should be appointed. This request was approved and a special grant of £200 for funds was made available to enable the trustees to acquire collections. The first Board included several distinguished men, pillars of the white society: President, Hon. William Sutherland; Vice Presidents: Messrs G. J. Marks, S. L. Lazarus, Humphrey Berkeley; Treasurer: Mr. William. Good; and Rev. R. M. Legale filled the Secretary’s post. Other members of the committee were the Hon. Dr. Geo. Fox; Messrs. John Bayley; E.G.O. Beddoes; G.A.F.W. Beauclerc, C.C. Wall and Rev. A. J. Small. At this early stage, there were twenty-three members and the exhibits were still in the custody of the Suva Town Board (Transactions of the Fijian Society, 1925). At the outset, it is clear that what was to become the Fiji Museum was brought into fruition by a collaborative effort between private individuals and the government. This is a characteristic and part of the identity of the Fiji Museum model; and it has been played out during its history in the colonial era.

In 1910, the government approved an annual grant of £25, which allowed the trustees to appoint a part-time caretaker (Derrick, 1959, pp. 154–56). The membership of the Fijian Society more than doubled to close to 60 members on the roll by December 31, 1910 (Transactions of the Fijian Society, 1927). This was testament to the growing interest, primarily among white colonial subjects, in the Society and its aims. The government’s awareness of the necessity for an organisation such as this seems also to have increased, since the annual grant rose to £100 in the following year. The Fijian Society spent a great deal of its early years acquiring collections and artefacts. At this stage, Bishop Vidal and Sir Everard presented collections of marine shells and ethnological specimens, respectively. In 1910, Sir Everard’s term of service ended and he left Fiji.

Subsequently, in 1911, another British colonial administrator, Sir Francis Henry May, K.C.M.G., became the patron. Sir Francis too eventually left Fiji, to assume the post of Governor of Hong Kong from 1912 to 1919. During 1911, an honorary membership roll was created. These honorary members represented the British Crown and were colonial servants. This first honour roll included another former Governor of Fiji, His Excellency, the Hon. W.M. Allardyce, C.M.G., who acted briefly in this capacity between 1901 and 1902; Louis Becke, Esq.; Sir Everard im Thurn; and Sir Francis May. (Transactions of the Fijian Society, 1911).

The Society produced transactions of its proceedings in the form of journals, which contained articles from lectures read at meetings. Between 1908 and 1911, the Society was quite active, holding 45 meetings and hearing 58 papers about Fiji (ibid). A brief survey of these journals’ content demonstrates that at such an early stage, there was a variety of articles ranging across such subject matter as some early wrecks in Fiji’s waters; fire walking, the French in Fiji and dances such as the Meke ni Yau (the kava dance),1 sacred stones of Rotuma; Fijian superstition; and the Highland tribes of Ra. (Transactions of the Fijian Society, 1914, 1918, 1922, 1924). The variety of articles demonstrates a high output during the Society’s early years.
FIJIAN SOCIETY DURING THE WORLD WAR ONE ERA

The Fijian Society continued in its quest to acquire the cultural material of Fiji. In 1914, the Government and Fijian Society members combined funds and for £190 purchased the curios of Mr. J.W. Philpott and a number of model South Sea Island canoes were bought from a Mr. Mahaffy. (Fiji Museum Report, 1914). This was quite a substantial sum. These collections must have been regarded as of tremendous value to have been acquired at this cost. Obtaining them shows as well that colonial subjects resident in Fiji, such as the aforementioned, were accumulating artefacts in Fiji to the point where they were extensive enough to be donated or purchased. It is likely that the cultural significance and meaning to the indigenous Fijian community may not have been fully appreciated. Regardless, they did provide a source of cultural material for the museum. Throughout the First World War, the Fijian Society carried on its work. In 1916, a catalogue was produced. The collections were expanding and exhibits housed in the upper story of the Town Hall were in cramped conditions to the point where there was not even “room for proper display of the curios we already have. Many of them have to be stored away in cupboards.” Due to a lack of space, the steering oars and other parts of the great double canoes of the eighteenth century were displayed on the balcony (Derrick, 1959, pp. 154-156). The collections, at the time, were worth no less than £2000.

Derrick asserts that during the Fijian Society’s formative years, Wall and members of the Society ensured that material was gathered when it was still available, and that private collections made before the turn of the century were retained in the Colony, instead of being sent to museums overseas. At the time, items that were retained by the Fijians were regarded as heirlooms and not for sale or disposal (Derrick, 1959, pp. 154–56). The early years of the Fijian Society were crucial to the preservation and promotion of the history and culture of Fiji, in an institutional way, particularly concerning retaining specimens from the valuable tangible heritage of the Fiji Islands. The Society’s efforts, though, literally almost went up in smoke. In 1919, a fire at the Town Hall damaged the collection and some exhibits were wholly or partly destroyed. This fire contributed to the beginning of the shifting of the collections across Fiji. The Veivueti House for Fijian people visiting Suva, though not well suited for a museum’s purposes, became its second location. Although it was thought to be too far out of town, the museum remained there for nearly ten years.
Nevertheless, the Fijian Society kept on adding to its collections despite that substantial loss. In 1920, a Mrs. L. Brown donated 72 specimens of material from the Solomon Islands. These, with part of a collection of 260 specimens acquired from a Captain Douglas in the following year, formed the foundation of the collection of Solomon Islands artefacts (Derrick, 1959, pp. 154–156).

The First World War, though, was not without impact on the membership numbers of the Fijian Society. Prior to the war’s outbreak, membership had been climbing, reaching seventy-one persons in 1912. During the first two years of the war, 1914 and 1915, numbers dropped sharply to 43 in both years. However, post–World War I, the membership increased by more than one-third once again, climbing to 87 between 1923 and 1924, even exceeding pre-war figures.4

THE FIJIAN SOCIETY: A WHITE MALE–DOMINANT SPACE

In writing a history of the Fiji Museum, issues of race, class and gender come to the fore. The Fijian Society was a white male dominated organisation although there were a few male indigenous Fijians and white female members. According to the 1915 membership list, two of the 43 members were indigenous Fijians. Both held chiefly status, Ratu Deve Toganivalu and Ratu Pita Emosi Tatawaqa. Three female members were listed in the same year, “Mrs. Forster”, Miss I. Rennie and Mrs. E.G.O. Beddoes, the wife of Mr. E.G.O. Beddoes who served as treasurer during that year. A similar trend manifests itself a few years later. Of the 79 members in 1922, seven were women. Mrs. Beddoes was still a member and there were six new women on the list: Mrs. L. Mayne Anderson; Mrs. Beatrice Farquahar; Mrs. Dora Andrews; Miss Deila E.
Upon analysing the Fijian Society’s membership lists, throughout the years, neither women nor indigenous Fijians served as officers or were honorary members of this organisation. It could be suggested that the main population of Fiji did not share the Fijian Society’s enthusiasm for a museum in Fiji or feel that it was a pressing need. Hence, this was a contributory factor as to why there were not more non-European descent members especially indigenous Fijians, including those who were not of chiefly origin. Further, it is likely that because of the gendered relations of this era, it would not be an adherence to the status quo to have white women wielding the power as officers or patrons in an organisation dominated by white males.

Nonetheless, the contributions of both the indigenous Fijians and women to the Fijian Society are noted since both conducted research on Fiji. For example, Ratu Tatawaqa upon his death is described as “a member of longstanding who wrote some very interesting papers on old Fijian matters” (Transactions of the Fijian Society for 1919). In 1912 and 1913, he penned two articles respectively entitled, “Charlie Savage” and “Tabua.” Meanwhile, Ratu Toganivalu produced five articles between 1912 and 1924 on topics such as “Turtle Fishing,” and “Fiji and the Fijians.” There was just one paper written by a woman. Mrs. Agnes K. Goode of Adelaide, South Australia wrote “Fiji of Today,” which was read on September 20, 1921 (Author Index to the Transactions of the Fijian Society 1908-26). Despite the contributions and presence of a few indigenous Fijians and women, for the most part the Fijian Society was another white male preserve during the colonial era.

Thus, over the life span of the Fijian Society, many members were middle to upper class colonial whites. They were individuals often born in Fiji, persons who were part of the colonial administration and expatriates in various private sector roles. The organisation was typically patronised by the highest member of the colonial administration, namely Governors such as Sir Everard, and Sir Cecil Rodwell. The upper echelon of society included members of the clergy ranging from the Bishop of Polynesia and several other Reverends to businessmen honoured by the Crown, such as the Hon. John Maynard Hedstrom. The membership lists reveal this tendency. For instance, in 1915, there were two clergymen who were members, Rev. A. J. Small, who was president five times and Rev. Thomas Fox (Transactions of the Fijian Society, 1915, pp. 8-16). There were three doctors, Dr. George Fox, Dr. T. R. St. Johnson and Dr. P. Harper and a Professor Baker, joined the organisation. Seven years later, the same membership typology manifests itself. The patron, in 1922, was H.E. Sir Cecil Rodwell who, in 1918, became the Governor. The honorary member list was extended in 1921 to include Baron Anatole Von Hügel and Colman C. Wall.

The men of the cloth continued to join the Fijian Society. Rev. Small was still a member, and six others had joined him: Rev. R. L. McDonald; Revd. Wm. Brown; “Rev…Dadds”; Rev. C.O. Lelean; Lt. Colonel, the Rev. W. Maitland Woods, O.B.E; Rev. R. H. Green (Transactions of the Fijian Society, 1922, pp. 1-25). These men of faith as members of the Society are of significance. From the nineteenth century, missionaries came to Fiji. However, with the Cession to Britain, Christianity became more entrenched in Fiji. The Reverends mentioned previously were likely
Methodist as Methodism was and still is the predominant Christian religion in Fiji.

The racial, class, gendered hierarchy and structure of the Society are relevant to a discussion on a historical development of the Fiji Museum. The membership lists revealed that a small elite group would make the decisions concerning what objects were suitable for the emerging collections. It was this elite group that also exhibited what it considered to be the important examples of the cultural heritage of Fiji. In so doing, this select group determined what knowledge would be transmitted to a visiting public. All in all, the Fijian Society was still primarily a predominately white male space.

1929 ORDINANCE: MUSEUM LEGISLATION PASSED

Though the Fijian Society was a white male preserve, it was the year 1929 that marked a major turning point in the development of a museum in Fiji. The interest of P. A. McElwaine, KC., the then Attorney General contributed to the establishment of the 1929 Ordinance, which allowed for a constituting the Fiji Museum on a permanent basis. (Derrick, 1959, pp. 154–156). The Fiji Museum was governed by the Fiji Museum Act first passed as Ordinance No. 22 on November 18, 1929. This Act outlines that its Board is to consist of five members, that is, three Government officials appointed by the Governor, one non-official appointed by the Governor and one appointed by the Municipal Council of Suva. The Act outlines the establishment and constitution of a Board of Trustees of the Fiji Museum, lays down the powers and duties of the Board, and vests in the Board objects given to, acquired for or transferred to the museum.5

With legislation governing the museum on the statute books, the Fiji Museum underwent further expansion. In 1930, the entire upper floor of the Carnegie Library, Suva was made available to the museum at the annual rent of £100. The Fiji Museum remained there for the next twenty-four years, except at one stage when the Carnegie building was required for military purposes during the Second World War. (Derrick, 1959, pp. 154–156).

Figure 3: The Carnegie Library, the third location of the Fiji Museum. Source: Fiji Museum.
Despite being in existence for quite some time, quickly after the 1929 Ordinance facilitated a museum in Fiji. It was on 27 September, 1931, that the museum was formally opened by Governor, Sir A. G. Murchison Fletcher, KCMG, CBE. George T. Barker had become the museum’s curator. Between 1930 and 31, Barker and Mr. George Kingsley Roth, a colonial officer in Fiji between 1928 and 1957 who was on secondment from the government, reorganised the museum. (Derrick, 1953.) Under Barker, the museum continued to acquire by gift or purchase, other collections to the point where there was no space and the premises were badly overcrowded at the Carnegie Library (Derrick, 1959, pp. 1–27).

1938, THE ORIGINS OF THE FIJI SOCIETY

The Fijian Society’s successor, the Fiji Society of Science and Industry was formed in 1938. The name was changed to the Fiji Society at the end of 1947. It was registered as an incorporated trust in 1962. Among its objectives was the promotion of the advancement, study and acquisition of scientific and industrial knowledge in any way relating to Fiji or other islands of the Pacific; the procurement of publications, books, records and the like relating to Fiji or the Pacific Islands and the publication at regular intervals of a record of the proceedings and transactions of the Society. The Fiji Society operated continuously for over forty years. Similar to the Fijian Society, the Fiji Society published its transactions and proceedings. It issued its first volume of Transactions to cover the years 1938 and 1939. Likewise, articles were published on a range of subjects.

A sample of the subjects and topics covered is provided here:

Agriculture: cocoa development, sugarcane improvement, tobacco industry;

Anthropology and Ethnology: Rotuma, the Solomon Islands, house buildings, Fiji chiefly customs, Fiji music and dance;

Archaeology: archaeology in Fiji;

Communications: Radio in Fiji;

Education: Fiji Society; Forestry; Geology; Pacific Industry and Economics; Linguistics; Marine Sciences; Medical and Public Health; Meteorology; Nature Conservation; Ornithology; Philately; Tourism; Zoology were other areas that were covered. (Smith, 1977, pp. 1–27)

Though a sample of the research priorities and interests is given here, the list is significant for what it includes and excludes. Based on the categories provided, it shows how certain subjects were defined and focused on. The agriculture section for instance focuses on crops imported into Fiji but not on local farming and produce such as dalo, a staple of Fijian diet. While in anthropology and ethnology section, no research was undertaken into other resident ethnic groups such as Fijians of Indian descent.
1940: PRESERVATION OF OBJECTS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND PALAEONTOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

During the Second World War, new legislation governing the operations of the Fiji Museum was passed. The Fiji Museum was able to enforce Chapter 264 Laws of Fiji (1940) Preservation of Objects of Archaeological and Palaeontological Significance. Under this legislation, the term “monument” is defined broadly as any object of archaeological or palaeontological interest, and is any area of land in which any object is believed to exist; and can be declared under Section 6 in the Gazette to be a monument (Laws of Fiji, 1985, pp. 3-11). It defines this “as any structure, erection, memorial, cave, rock, rock drawing, painting, sculpture, fossil remains of man, animals or any object of plant remains thereof, which is or are of archaeological, anthropological, ethnological, prehistory or historic interest” (ibid). It includes the site on which the subject of object of archaeological or palaeontological interest was discovered or exists. (ibid)

If any person discovers an object of archaeological or palaeontological interest in the course of operations permitted by a permit issued under Section 3, they must give notice to the Board without delay. The same applies for persons who do not have a permit. They must give notice indicating the precise site and the circumstances of the discovery to the Board, and deliver such object to the Board. (ibid). There is a $200 fine, imprisonment for six months or both, and a fine and imprisonment for failure to comply with subsection one or two (ibid). The legislation also outlines that no monument or object of archaeological or palaeontological interest may be removed from Fiji unless such removal has been authorised by a permit by the Board. (ibid)

A similar fine as stated above applies to any person who “injures, defaces or imperils a monument of any object of archaeological or palaeontological interest and any owner or occupier who contravenes the outlined sections and subsections.” Arguably, the monetary fine is not substantial and would not be a deterrent to large companies undertaking a project in an area of palaeontological or archaeologist interest.

Though the legislation was in existence from 1940 to 1969, only one site, Wasavulu was registered as a monument. Circumstances such as these manifested themselves because of the legislation being outdated to the needs of Fiji since it was developed in colonial times and with a Eurocentric focus set in place over the traditional indigenous Fijian system. Hence, some ideas put forward in the Act were not particularly applicable to the rural sectors of Fiji. The lack of sites registered, too, could be an indication that the legislation or administration was not as effective as it could have been. One major flaw was that the legislation is primarily concerned with prehistoric sites or objects of archaeological interest, it does not specifically mention historic sites, such as those created after the time of contact, or maritime sites such as shipwrecks. No allowances were made for sites under immediate threat. Its scope did not facilitate the implementation and maintenance of a site register nor make provisions for the protection of archaeological sites other than prehistoric ones. There existed a range of historic and maritime sites protected by some legislation such as the National Trust for Fiji Act and the Marine Act in Fiji but not in all cases (Burke, 1995).
FIJI MUSEUM AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Despite legislation to protect artefacts that would be unearthed across the lands of Fiji, objects already held by the Museum remained unshielded from destruction. For the best part of four years, World War II was raging in the Pacific and fears within Fiji of a possible attack were a reality. Under Proclamation No. 1 dated 8 January 1942, His Excellency, the Governor called out the Fiji Defence Force for service. Later that same month, newspapers reported that there were eleven Japanese ships off New Guinea; more air raids were reported over that country and Japanese forces landed in the Solomon Islands (Fiji Times and Herald 1942). The Second World War was literally on Fiji. The Suva Town Board under the chair of Roth was ensuring that air raid shelters were being built. In January 1942, 3900 linear feet (¾ miles) of tunnels had been constructed by the Town Board and the Marks Lane Shelter was complete (Fiji Times and Herald 1942). As a result of a threat of air raids by the Japanese, in 1942, some 1588 museum exhibits were packed into 86 cases or packages and evacuated. Despite the congestion and the lack of items, service men of the allied forces, (most likely Americans and New Zealanders) visited the museum at the library. At first, the evacuated exhibits were stored in a tunnel under Ratu Cakobau Road, below the British High Commissioner’s residence (Derrick, 1959, pp. 154–55).

However, tunnels were not suitable places to store cultural material. When the tunnel was reopened after twelve months, the contents were badly affected by mould and damp. Valuable books and other perishable material were damaged or destroyed (ibid). Hence, a lack of effective conservation practices led to the demise of a great deal of Fiji’s tangible heritage held by the museum. It is debatable whether this was an unpardonable dereliction of duty through ignorance and neglect or the exigencies of the fear of [unexpected] attack during the Second World War. Nonetheless, the exhibits were exhumed, aired, dried, repacked and transported to Ra. There, in the west, reputedly the ‘dry side’ of the main island, they were stored in an inner room of the District Officer’s house at Vaileka. At this fourth location, they remained until March 1944, when the threat of air raids had passed (ibid).

Figure 4: The fourth location where the artefacts were stored. Arrow points to the tunnel. Source: Fiji Museum.
A lack of space at the Carnegie Library and the competition for this scarce resource remained a pervasive problem for the museum. On March 14, 1944 a letter was sent to the Suva Town Board requesting the removal from the museum’s premises of bookings and fittings belonging to the Carnegie Library. Concerns were expressed about books being infected with borers and posing a threat to the exhibits, and the need for additional space for the returning exhibits to be displayed.8

Georgius Wright remained the curator until June 1947, the year of his death. For six years, this position remained unfilled and a caretaker maintained the museum (Derrick, 1953, n.p.). Without a dedicated curator, the museum was in some disarray. Items received between 1947 and 1953 were not registered and recorded since there was no one to do so. Further, many early books and periodicals that were damaged by the damp while stored in a tunnel during 1942 to 1944 “fell to pieces in the hand” (Derrick, 1953, n.p.).

The collections of the museum, however, were spared from serious damage from the hurricane of January 28, 1952 that devastated most of Fiji. Leaving a death toll of twenty-three and 1000 casualties, the hurricane was regarded as “the worst disaster of its kind in Fiji’s modern history.”(Fiji Times and Herald, 1952). The Suva Wharf was wrecked, the entire Fijian village at Tamavua near Suva was flattened and three Namosi villages in the mountainous interior of Viti Levu were devastated by landslides; (Fiji Times and Herald, 1952). Against that background of devastation, the Fiji Museum was spared, with just two of the Solomon Island canoes and carved figures suffering some damage. They were repaired by a Solomon Island craftsman using tools and techniques of that country to maintain authenticity. Reinforcements for windows were installed, and the original staircase was replaced for the Royal Visit. The temporary wooden staircase built by the Suva Council during World War II was taken down (Derrick, 1954).

A PLAN FOR A NEW HEADQUARTERS

In September 1952, Ronald Albert Derrick was appointed curator, effective July 1, 1953. 9 He served in this capacity until 1963. In 1953, in spite of the unsuitability of the museum’s location, visitor numbers remained steady, with indigenous and Indo-Fijians among them. Until September, the number of visitors was in excess of 1400, with an average of nearly 50 a day. In 1953, The Fiji Times reports, “a pleasing feature . . . is the numbers of Fijian and Indian people who show interest in the collections. Fijians are, indeed, in the majority.” The article further stated that Indian people mainly came with their families and schoolchildren with their teachers (Fiji Times and Herald, 4 September 1953). This indicated that there was to some an extent an interest being garnered in the wider community, predominately between the two largest ethnic groups indigenous and Indo-Fijians. The museum for Indians also became a family activity. There was an educational value seen by the school system as schools brought their students to the museum to learn about the history of Fiji.

In March 1952, the Suva Town Board requested the Trustees of the museum to vacate the Carnegie Library because it was needed for municipal purposes. Instead of seeking another temporary location, the Trustees asked the Government to consider providing funds for the erection of a suitable building to house the museum and suggested the area of the Botanical Gardens.10 This need was canvassed as far back as June 1914, when the Governor granted the
committee of the Fiji Society an interview at which “the question of a more suitable Museum Building was discussed,” at an estimated cost of £5650. The deputation expressed hope that the Governor might find it possible to arrange for the erection of a suitable building and suggested an extension might be made to the Carnegie Library (Derrick 1953, n.p.).

While not having that addition to the Library, the museum remained there virtually four decades later, until in 1953, when the necessity of a building principally for the museum was finally realised. In 1953, the government set aside £15 000 to build a museum (Fiji Times and Herald, 4 September 1953). Prior to the museum’s final move, as a result of the earthquake and tidal wave of September 14, 1953, which left three persons killed, several dozen injured and some property damaged but not of a “spectacular” nature, the Fiji Museum’s home, the Carnegie Building suffered some damage, a severe horizontal crack appearing along the west wall, but the damage was not structurally serious: (Fiji Times, 15 April 2007) “A few plate and glass slides in the cases were broken, exhibits displayed on them being tumbled in confusion, certain exhibits hung on walls thrown down.”(Derrick 1953, n.p.). This may very well have been a contributory factor to the museum attaining a building. By January of the same year, the Board of Trustees was arranging “to erect a new museum building in the Botanical Gardens on a site already agreed upon.” The building was constructed by Narain Construction Company Limited and completed in 1954. (Derrick 1959, pp. 156).

The museum began to expand its educational programmes by the curator offering classes linked to lessons in school so that children could see and handle the objects (ibid). For the entire year, attendance during 1953 reached 25 153. Of them, 4156 were Europeans, 8508 were Fijians, 7201 were Indians and 5288 were classified as Others. Of the 4156 Europeans, 1102 came from the tourist cruise ships during January: (Derrick 1954, n.p.). Hence, the tourism industry, particularly cruise tourism, was crucial to the museum’s finances. The Cession display held during October 5 to 19 attracted some 6044 people. Of these, 2578 were senior pupils of schools, 1804 were Europeans, 1708 were Fijians and 1165 were Indians: (Derrick 1953, n.p.). The average attendance for the remaining months stood at 1666. These 1953 figures are significant because they show that local attendance to the museum was higher than international visitors. More importantly, the indigenous Fijians to whom most of the displays were geared were becoming more interested in what the Fiji Museum had to offer and were coming in their numbers. Interestingly enough, though the Indian populace was not the target audience of the museum based on its collections, yet they continued to visit the museum. Their interest is recorded in that figure of 7201 Indian visitors.

THURSTON GARDENS, FIJI MUSEUM’S HOME: THE 1955 TO 1970 ERA

The Fiji Museum’s permanent headquarters is located at Thurston Gardens, the city of Suva’s botanical gardens below Government House. It was officially opened on January 20, 1955 by Governor, Sir Ronald Garvey. Among those gathered to witness this historic occasion were officials and their spouses such as the Colonial Secretary, Mr. A. F. R. Stoddart, the Secretary for Fijian Affairs; Mr. G. K. Roth and Mrs. Roth; the Registrar of Cooperative Societies, Mr. A. C. Reid and Mrs. Reid; the Director of Education, Mr. W.W. Lewis-Jones and Mrs. Lewis-
Jones; the Mayor of Suva, Mr. A. D. Leys, with the ‘Mayoress;’ Mr. and Mrs. R. A. Derrick; the Commissioner of Police, Mr. Laws; and Mr. Sethi Narain of Narain Construction Co. Ltd. This selected group of officials represented the who is who of the society of Fiji. The new headquarters, which was built at a total cost of £17 500, was a single building 136 feet in length and 39 feet wide.( Fiji Times and Herald, 1955). It housed the displays, reserve collection, and provided office space for the curator and his assistant.

**Figure 5:** Sir Ronald Garvey delivering the address at the opening of the Fiji Museum’s new headquarters in 1955. At far left and seated is R.A. Derrick, curator of the museum. **Source:** Fiji Museum.

**Figure 6:** The first visitors to the new Fiji Museum in 1955. **Source:** Fiji Museum.
According to Stuart Hall, “not only, in Said’s ‘Orientalist’ sense, were we constructed as different and other within the categories of knowledge of the West by those regimes. They had the power to make us see and experience *ourselves* as ‘Other’” Hall (1990: pp. 225-226). Under colonial regimes, countries such as Fiji and its museum presented local heritage from a colonial perspective because the west as the dominant power not only named the colonised as ‘Other’, but the colonised internalised this naming and accepted it as normal. It is through examining these permanent exhibits, which are the public face of museums, that is, the objects, labels, photographs that for the most part change very little, and are as yet unchallenged as more-or-less permanent representations of the heritage and identities of these countries that a museum communicates to its visiting public that can facilitate some comprehension of the internalising of the Other by the colonised.

We can glean an understanding of the content of the permanent collection of the Fiji Museum at Thurston Gardens. *The Fiji Times* reporting on “The Museum’s New Exhibits on Display” at its official opening in 1955 offers an idea of what the Fiji Museum’s exhibits were back then. “There are numerous examples of early documents, paintings, photographs and publications on exhibition; as well as models of *bures* complete with cleverly modelled figures domestically arranged on mats, also actual examples of many types of boats, etc., spears, war clubs and axes . . .” (ibid). The newspaper also highlights pottery exhibits, including early examples of pitchers, ewers and domestic vessels in clay. The *yaqona* (kava) bowls and *tabua* (whale’s teeth) which “as local folk know, still play an important part in Fijian ceremonials and are presented on many formal occasions. The *tabua* has an attached ornamental cord plaited from coconut fibre.” (ibid). In one case was the “original document showing the signatures of twelve high chiefs under an “Oath of Allegiance” to the then Kingdom of Fiji, prior to the islands being ceded to Britain. These chiefs were officers of the Military Forces of those times and the date concerned is September 30, 1873.” The newspaper also records that there was a native cord six miles long made from the husks of coconut, which was presented to Sir Arthur Gordon in 1877 and
kept for many years in Government House but in recent years was donated to the museum by one of the former Governors. The collections also included colourful birds, specimens of water snakes, reptiles, fish and crabs, shells and coral and “examples of many native handicraft, such as crayfish nets made from the 1000 purpose coconut fibre” (ibid).

Derrick states that the principal collection related to the material culture of the Fijian people, “one of the most complete in existence.” These included collections related to Melanesian cultures, namely those of the Solomon Islands’ collection, which was of a “high standard,” the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu), in addition to parts of New Guinea. The Gilbert and Ellice Islands (now Kiribati and Tuvalu) were represented, mainly because of their earlier administrative association with Fiji through the Western Pacific High Commission. Polynesia was touched on to a small extent. Other collections included: Coral and Marine Shells; Birds, reptilia and crustaceans of Fiji; the Belcher paintings of Fiji Birds; the Belcher paintings of Fiji Orchids; historical documents; early family records and letters; a photographic collection; a reference library and relics of the H.M.S. Bounty, including the ship’s rudder, which was placed in the custody of the Trustees by H.M. Admiralty (Derrick, 1957).

More information as to the range of the museum’s exhibits at Thurston Gardens can be obtained from H.S. Evans, who states that the new museum “houses ethnographical specimens collected by various people, including government officials, which have been acquired since about 1880 by the Fijian Government.” According to him, the Fijian collections were “the most important.” Highlighting them, he notes that they include model canoes, wooden objects of all kinds, basketry, bark cloth, personal ornaments and clothing, musical instruments, fishing equipment, a good collection of pottery and a small collection of stone tools of Melanesian–Polynesian types from different parts of the group.” Further, like Derrick, he mentioned that there are also small collections from the Solomon Islands, New Hebrides, and the Gilbert and Ellice Islands (Evans, 1957, p. 25).

A further glimpse into the Fiji Museum’s exhibits prior to the 1960s can be gleaned from Roth who states that the Fiji Museum had seagoing double canoes of which “none survives today . . . one of such paddles measures no less than 31 feet 9 inches long,” Fijian earthenware vessels, an exhibit illustrating the various stages in the manufacture of bark cloth, the seals used by the Cakobau Government of 1871 and the rudder of the Bounty brought from Pitcairn Island, which signified a record of the passage of Captain Bligh through the archipelago” (Roth). This outline of the collections of the Fiji Museum underscores the fact that it sought to conserve and promote the tangible heritage of the indigenous Fijians and to some extent other Pacific Islanders. This concentration on material culture was a bias of the museum, which was modelled on Western concepts of museums. This power to marginalise the cultural material of other ethnic groups, primarily those of Asian descent, who resided in Fiji from the nineteenth century, meant that their culture was not preserved or promoted at an institutional level. Therefore, the cultural identity of Fiji that was preserved and presented was that of the indigenous Fijians. It can be argued that the museum’s practice and unwritten policy reflected the wider society’s outlook during that era and begs the question of whose heritage and culture was identifiable as Fijian and who was considered to be Fijian by the society and the museum as a microcosm of that society.
During 1955, “perhaps the most important acquisition made during the past twenty years,” the Royce Collection, came to the Fiji Museum. Collected by the Rev. J.S.H. Royce, a Wesleyan missionary in Fiji from 1856 to 1862, who was stationed at both Kadavu and Rewa, were the “clubs and accompanying articles (which were) far better than anything we had in the museum.” (Derrick, 1955). Two years later, the museum recorded its highest ever number of visitors. The total attendance between October and December 1957 was extraordinarily high with some 11,009 visitors, of them, 1,500 visitors were from overseas. That the Cession Day exhibit was free of cost contributed to this development. An advertisement in The Fiji Times and Herald October 12, 1957, “Fiji Museum Cession Display,” advertises that, “a display of documents, photographs and relics relating to the Cession is now on view at the Fiji Museum, and will remain open until Friday, October 18 . . . The museum will be open all day on Monday, October 14 . . . Admission and Catalogue Free” (Fiji Times and Herald, 1957). The advertising worked, because for the Cession Day exhibition alone, 1,758 people visited the museum (Derrick, 1958). The number of visitors to the museum remained steady into the 1960s. Acquisitions by the museum continued with the arrival in October 1959 of the late Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna’s decorations and medals presented to the Trustees by his widow (Derrick 1959:, n.p.). In October 1963 a collection of Fijian clubs and “a most valuable item an ivory breastplate . . . cut from whale teeth unlike any other in our collection and is of considerable value was donated by Miss A. A. L. Woods of Blenheim, New Zealand”(Derrick 1953). Between January and March 1957, there were more than seventy acquisitions. These included the Sir Alport Barker Estate, which consisted of thirty-six items comprising of Solomon Islands’ material (bows and arrows etc.) and Fiji material (tanoa, spears etc.) (Derrick 1957). That year, the largest purchase was a camakua type single outrigger canoe, which had been lying on the Nasese waterfront. It was made at Muana-i-cake, Fulaga, in the Lau group. The canoe was featured in the ceremonial welcome to the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh in February, 1963 (Fiji Museum Annual Report, 1963).

Another valuable cultural object was obtained during this period. In January 1958, the museum was presented with a steering oar of the double canoe “Sila Tolu,” its twin located at the British Museum, London. “As far as our present knowledge goes, no other museum in the world has an example of these great oars. The Fiji Museum now has six.” (Derrick 1958). In March 1958, the Fiji Museum’s acquisitions expanded to include the Lyth Collection, consisting of forty-one items collected circa 1836 to 1839 and 1839 to 1856, respectively in Fiji. The cultural material included clothing of masi worn by leading high chiefs of the period and some of the finest decorated bark cloth (masi kesa) (Derrick 1958). By the mid-twentieth century, behind the doors of the Fiji Museum was a vast wealth of centuries old cultural material of indigenous Fijian heritage.

From the 1950s onwards, the museum became even more renowned for its research. The work of curators/directors such as R.A. Derrick, Bruce Palmer and Fergus Clunie and, other scholars whose articles were published by the Fiji Museum, helped to establish the Fiji Museum as a small centre of academic excellence. This tone was set previously by the leaders of the museum such as George Barker, who between 1908 and 1926 produced nineteen articles and Colman Wall who wrote fourteen within the same period. (Author Index to the Transactions of the Fijian Society, 1908-26). In surveying briefly some of the contributions of the aforementioned men to
the literature on Fiji’s history, society and culture, we may note that Barker’s articles included “Bligh’s Second Voyage” in 1926. Wall for example penned “Cakobau’s Flag,” which was read in 1910. In addition to the brief article on the “History of the Fiji Museum,” Derrick produced the “History of Fiji.” Palmer wrote on the “Prehistoric sites of Taveuni,” and Clunie produced a large collection of papers on ornithological research and books such as the *Birds of the Fiji Bush*. Bruce Palmer, a New Zealander, was known for his research into Fiji’s archaeology and material culture, in 1964 emphasises the museum’s role in becoming a storehouse of knowledge as well as one of material objects: (Palmer, 1969, p. 51). Despite this output over the years, Hunt, who became the director after Palmer highlights the challenge of a lack of funds, which restricted the research and publishing programmes. (Hunt, 1975, pp. 28–31).

Though research and publication was pivotal, prior to 1963, Charles Hunt asserts that, the “museum served as a store for the remnants of a neglected culture and as a centre for the presentation of esoteric lectures to an erudite minority. Most of the population was not involved except as objects of contemplation.” (Hunt, 1975, pp. 28–31). Hunt’s writing highlights some of the key battles in Fiji’s colonial society, that of, issues of race and class. Hence, although the Fiji Museum was centred on the lives of indigenous Fijians, it was not widely visited by this group as seen in Table 1. The evidence shows at least in 1955, that the majority of the visitors to the museum were of European descent, with indigenous Fijians and Indians, second and third respectively. For the indigenous Fijians, artefacts that were collected and displayed at the Fiji Museum were objects used in daily life or that their ancestors had used. For them, their essential culture was in their minds and their hearts, not anything embalmed in a museum. To their way of thinking, what need to travel to a museum to view the material culture that they already know and to some extent are moving away from? It is interesting to note as well that though the Fiji Museum did not tell the story of the significance of Indians to Fiji’s history and society, members of the Indians community visited the museum, outnumbering Fijians in the month of July.

**Table 1: Attendance Figures at the Fiji Museum from June to October 1955**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Europeans</th>
<th>Fijians</th>
<th>Indians</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>1146</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>1906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>689</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>1693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>751</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>1651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>607</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>1378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>1165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Guido Carlo Pigliaso argues that, in Oceania, concepts such as heritage and ownership of property have different connotations from those in the industrialised world. According to Pigliaso, Pacific Island legislators have recognised that Western definitions of cultural heritage and property have a different meaning in the Pacific. Hence, it is important that the cultural context be acknowledged in non-Western countries (Pigliaso, 2011, p. 326). As a Western concept, a museum traditionally focuses on visual impact and the written word is the privileged expression
and learning. In some parts of the Pacific, one of the most important aspects of learning such as cultural knowledge, concerns relationships between people through which that knowledge is transmitted. The significance of looking at objects and labels to learn about culture and history for some indigenous Pacific Islanders may not be useful because traditionally it is not their way of doing things. With that in mind, could it be truly said that the museum was established for the people of Fiji whose tradition imparts the value of having relationships and connections with each other and the community? In these initial stages of the Fiji Museum’s development, there was no effort to bridge the divide between Western and Pacific Island perceptions of culture and traditions to enhance more involvement of all people of Fiji.

Additionally, the geography of Fiji and the location of the museum could be said to be a contributory factor to the museum’s state of affairs. The Fiji Museum is located on the biggest island, Viti Levu, and on the south-eastern corner, in Suva. The Suva–Lautoka highway was not completely sealed until 1983, therefore, to travel to the museum would require a substantial amount of time, particularly in the early years when transportation and roads were not as developed as they have become in contemporary times. In the olden days, Suva was not very highly populated and little by indigenous Fijians. Thus, journeying to Suva from neighbouring villages or even from the western provinces of Lautoka or Nadi, (or from the sister island Vanua Levu or the old capital Levuka, which in the past were accessible only by boat) with the primary intention of visiting the Fiji Museum was highly unlikely to be a priority for the indigenous Fijians. Yet, the knowledge and of cultural transmission, which privileged for the most part the indigenous Fijians, remained unchallenged at the museum as the re/presentation of the cultural identity of Fiji.
CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to provide a historical evolution of the Fiji Museum from its commencement in 1904 to 1970, the year of Fiji’s Independence. The examination of the Fiji Museum’s development during the colonial era has highlighted its progression from the Fijian Society in 1908, to the Fiji Society in 1938 to the Fiji Museum, the legislation governing the Fiji Museum enacted in 1929 and 1940. It is argued that in its formative years, the Fiji Museum, developed as a repository for the collection of cultural material of Fiji with emphasis on its role as a resource for research scholars and was associated with the white minority. Its emphasis lay on the development of collections for the scientific and research benefit of academic elite. The early Fiji Museum was identifiable as a white male space, which focused on the cultural heritage and identities of indigenous Fijians for the most part. Thus, the education and knowledge that guided the founders and influenced policies was class, race and gender biased. This was reflected in the collections obtained during the museum’s formative years. Despite moving to several locations over its history, the Fiji Museum finally found a permanent headquarters, in 1955, at Thurston Gardens. There, it continued to attract visitors of all races while expanding its collection of the tangible heritage of Fiji and some other Pacific Islands. Though it still functioned as a symbol of empire and was part of the colonial legacy of Fiji, it is within the period of the 1960s, that the Fiji Museum recognised that as a cultural institution within a multi-ethnic society, it should represent all racial groups within its space and that it needed to evolve. The Fiji Museum sought to represent, interpret, and sometimes assess Fiji in its past. In its early years, this institution depicts a narrative of the complexities of race, class, gender and cultural identities in the Fiji Islands as issues of whose heritage is being represented in the development of a museum that contributed to the concept of who is identified as Fijian during this pre-independence period.

END NOTES

1 Kava or in Fijian, yaqona is a mildly narcotic drink infused from the pounded or dried roots of the Piper methysticum, a species of pepper plant. It is a ritual drink in many Pacific islands.
2 Chairman of the Committee for the management of the Fiji Museum, the Honourable the Colonial Secretary Accommodation for curios, June 15, 1914 (Suva: Fiji Museum), n.p.
3 Ibid
4 Figures compiled from the membership lists of the Fijian Society reports from 1908 to 1927.
5 “The Ordinances of the Colony of Fiji passed in the 19th and 20th years of the Reign of His Majesty King George, the Fifth 1929. By Authority J.J. Mc Hugh, Government Printer,” (Suva: Government Printery, 1930, p. 66-69).
6 This building still serves as the Suva City Library.
7 Ibid.
8 Letter from Secretary to the Board of Trustees to the Chairman of the Suva Town Board, March 14, 1944.
9 Letter from the Chairman of the Board of Trustees to the Colonial Secretary, Suva, July 25, 1955.
10 Letter from the Board of Trustees, Fiji Museum to the Colonial Secretary, Suva, March 27, 1952.
11 Letter from the Hon. Secretary of the Board of Trustees of the Museum to the Town Clerk, January 12, 1953.
12 Ibid.
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