

Institution: University of East Anglia		
Unit of Assessment: 32 – Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory		
Title of case study: Fiji In and Out of the Museum: international engagement with Fijian collections transforms curatorial and artistic practice		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: Between 2009 and 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Dr Karen Jacobs	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Senior Lecturer in the Arts of the Pacific	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2009 to present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: Between August 2013 and July 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact <p>Dr Karen Jacobs' research, publications, and exhibitions on Fijian art, textiles, and dress have reinvigorated, stimulated, and enhanced museological knowledge across institutions in the UK, USA, and Fiji. Her work has highlighted Fijian (female) agency in Fijian history and has had lasting impacts in two main areas:</p> <p>Jacobs' research on historic Fijian textiles and dress traditions, and her detailed 'exhibition packages' (3.4) empowered UK and Fijian curators to stage new exhibitions that extend and deepen community knowledge of and pride in Fijian arts.</p> <p>Jacobs' curatorial work in the UK, the USA, and Fiji has been the catalyst for transformative personal experiences of indigenous Fijian cultural heritage, inspiring, for example, Fijian artists to create original artworks and Fijian women to explore their heritage of tattooing.</p>		
2. Underpinning research <p>Dr Jacobs' underpinning research was generated over nine years of collaborative collections-based study. She was PI or Co-I on three AHRC-funded projects (3.6, 3.7, 3.8) that responded to a lack of knowledge about Fijian collections worldwide. With the UEA team at the Sainsbury Research Unit (Steven Hooper, Katrina Igglesden), Jacobs undertook research in 34 museums, including the British Museum, Fiji Museum, Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, National Museums Scotland, the Australian Museum, the Smithsonian Institution, Peabody Essex Museum Salem, Torquay Museum, and other UK museums. The collections and related archives shed new light on the missionary and trade relationships between Fiji and other countries, especially Britain, the colonial power from 1874 to 1970. A major reinvigoration of Fijian histories proceeded from this research and forgotten artistic skills were uncovered. Extended research for the major exhibitions (3.4) and for the eight project-funded 'exhibition packages' put together with UK regional museums (3.3), which involved working with local curators to enhance documentation and co-curate Fiji-focused exhibitions, showed that Fijian collections were not just the result of colonial (mis)appropriation, but that Fijians played strategic roles in their formation. This included Fijian women, who have often been neglected in representations of Fijian history. These exhibitions foregrounded the names, roles, and actions of indigenous (female) Fijians, effecting a radically changed perspective on Fijian history.</p> <p>Important to Jacobs' collaborative curatorial practice was her edited volume <i>Encounters with Polynesia</i> (3.1), where, based on research during a previous AHRC-funded project, she self-reflexively theorised the creation of exhibitions as a collaborative practice between curators, source communities, educators, and the public. She developed her object- and network-focused method in her 2012 book <i>Collecting Kamoro: Objects, encounters and representation on the southwest coast of Papua</i> (3.2), where she analysed collecting in that region as the result of encounters in which all parties influenced the collecting process. Her work in this politically delicate climate where people do not have access to knowledge held abroad, instigated a deep commitment to knowledge repatriation and cross-cultural partnerships as a methodology. This approach informed her collaborations with staff of Fijian cultural heritage institutions during the</p>		

AHRC ODA *Fiji's Artistic Heritage* project (3.7).

Jacobs' 2019 research monograph, *This is not a Grass Skirt*, resulted from recognition that important knowledge of nineteenth-century Fijian culture, in particular the everyday and female worlds captured in fibre skirts (*liku*), remained hidden in museum stores (3.5). Jacobs' path-breaking work on historic Fijian dress, unstudied due to their dispersal and fragility, challenges exoticist stereotypes, showing the complexities of their construction, use, and symbolism, and their close connections to female tattooing, *veiqia*, a practice which ceased in Fiji many decades ago.



Figure 1: Stylised drawing of a *veiqia*

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, a girl received her *veiqia* around the time of puberty before she received her first *liku* (fibre skirt). Photos or drawings of *veiqia* are extremely rare due to their placement around the genital area. While photos that Jacobs found in a personal archive could not be published, she was allowed to generate stylised drawings showing the patterns and include them in her book for the benefit of future generations of Fijian women (Figure 1).

Fibre skirts are complex and beautiful dresses which provide links to their original makers, users, and collectors – perspectives often suppressed by colonial histories. The revelation of these stories through publications, talks, and exhibitions has gone on to have a life in the present, provoking intensely personal responses from artists, the public, and museum staff. Jacobs' research opens up Fijian women's history as a living resource for the present, challenging nostalgic colonialist conceptions of disappearing indigenous cultures. Her current British Academy-funded GCRF *Youth Futures* project continues this method by giving underrepresented youth a chance to propose their concepts of 'Fijian culture' to policy makers (3.9). In sum, the results of her research and her methodology open the way for authentic community voices to be heard and listened to.

3. References to the research

- 3.1 'Encounters with Polynesia: Exhibiting the Past in the Present'. **K. Jacobs** (Editor), Special Issue of *The Journal of Museum Ethnography*, no. 21, 224 pages. (2009) (Saved on file at the UEA)
- 3.2 *Collecting Kamoro: Objects, encounters and representation in Papua (Western New Guinea)*. **K. Jacobs**, Sidestone Press. 288 pages. (2012). ISBN: 978-9088900884
- 3.3 'Exhibition Packages': outputs of the *Fijian Art* research project that provided funds to assist regional museums with the costs of producing text panels, labels and other display materials, enabling their Fijian collections to be exhibited, sometimes for the first time. (Exhibition Packages saved on file at the UEA)
Eight exhibitions curated by **K. Jacobs** (lead) with Fiji project members in collaboration with local UK museum curators:
 - Torquay (*Far Side of the World: Torquay's Fijian connection*, Sep 2013 – Feb 2014);
 - Aberdeen (*Fiji: Scotland & the Making of Empire*, Jan – May 2014);
 - Exeter (*Fijian Art: Dancing & Clubbing*, June – Dec 2014);
 - Glasgow (*The Art of Fiji*, Jan – May 2015);
 - Plymouth (*Fiji: Ocean Connections*, Oct 2015 – Jan 2016); Sheffield (Feb – July 2014); Perth (Oct – Dec 2013); London (photo exhibition at the Fiji High Commission, 2012-16).
- 3.4 Two international exhibitions (Exhibition Packages saved on file at the UEA):
 - (a) *Art and the Body: Exploring the Role of Clothing in Fiji* (Mar 2014 – Sep 2015) at Fiji Museum, curated by **K. Jacobs** with Fiji Museum staff.
 - (b) *Kamunaga: The Story of Tabua* (June 2017 – Dec 2019), curated by Fiji Museum and iTaukei Trust Fund Board staff with guidance from **K. Jacobs** after training during the 2016-17 AHRC/ODA project.
- 3.5 *This is Not a Grass Skirt: On fibre skirts (liku) and female tattooing (veiqia) in nineteenth century Fiji*. **K. Jacobs**, Leiden: Sidestone Press, 212 pages (2019). ISBN: 9789088908149

Grants

3.6 Co-I: K. Jacobs

Project: *Fijian Art: political power, sacred value, social transformation and collecting since the 18th century*. Funder: AHRC. Project dates: 2011-2014. Grant value: GBP605,173.

A collaboration between UEA and the Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology, University of Cambridge (PI: S. Hooper, UEA; Co-Is: K. Jacobs, UEA, A. Herle, Cambridge; Postdocs: A. Mills, UEA, and L. Carreau, Cambridge; PhD student: K. Igglesden, UEA). Project partners: British Museum, National Museums Scotland, World Museum Liverpool, Pitt Rivers Museum University of Oxford, Maidstone Museum and Bently Art Gallery, Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac Paris, Peabody Essex Museum Salem, Smithsonian Institution Washington DC, Fiji Museum. The *Fijian Art* project was selected by AHRC to feature in their 2014-2015 report, *The Impact of AHRC Research* (2016: 19-21), in their research review, *10 Years of the AHRC* (2015: 110-12), as well as on the AHRC website homepage.

3.7 Co-I: K. Jacobs

Project: *Fiji's artistic heritage: impact and engagement in Fiji. a collaboration between UEA, Fiji Museum and the iTaukei Trust Fund Board*. Funder: AHRC/ODA. Project dates: 2016-2017. Grant value: GBP77,176.

Research was translated into impact in Fiji during this AHRC/ODA Follow-on-Funding project *Fiji's artistic heritage*, a collaboration between UEA, Fiji Museum and the iTaukei Trust Fund Board (TTFB, a Fijian institution created to foster indigenous culture).

3.8 PI: K. Jacobs; Co-I: C. Wingfield

Project: *Who cares? The material heritage of British Missions in Africa and the Pacific, and its future*. Funder: AHRC. Project dates: 2012-2013. Grant value: GBP33,133

Collaboration with Fiji Museum was part of an AHRC Networking project on missionary heritage that brought together representatives of UK missionary societies and Pacific and African stakeholders.

3.9 PI: K. Jacobs; Co-I: F. Koya Vaka'uta, (University of the South Pacific, Fiji)

Project: *(Re)defining Culture: Engaging Urban Fijian Youth in Sustainable Employment Opportunities in the Cultural Heritage Sector*.

Funder: British Academy. Project dates: 2020-2022, start delayed due to Covid-19. Grant value: GBP296,853.

Further collaboration with Fiji Museum and University of South Pacific are central to the British Academy GCRF 'Youth Futures' project.

4. Details of the impact

(1) Empowerment of UK and Fijian custodians of Fijian collections to extend and deepen community knowledge of and pride in Fijian arts

Thirty-four museum research visits led to substantial enhancement of documentation by Jacobs, especially that concerning women's dress and body adornment, including a significant contribution to documentation on the largest Fijian collection outside Fiji, at the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA). Senior Curator [REDACTED] noted that the project provided the opportunity to 'improve their documentation and storage conditions' and photograph 'approx. 3,000 objects and nearly as many photographs' for digital storage. MAA then made these accessible online (5.1b). One example of documentation enhancement is in contextualising the daily lives of nineteenth-century Fijian women for the first time – adding the Fijian name for fibre skirts, catalogued as 'belts' by colonial-era collectors, helps museums move away from Anglo-European assumptions of modesty (5.2b). 'Exhibition Packages' were conducted with eight UK regional museums. A concept created and developed by Jacobs, exhibition packages involved working closely with local curators responsible for Fiji collections, but who lacked specialist expertise, to review their collections and develop and help fund exhibitions suited to their key audiences and communities. [REDACTED], curator at Plymouth Museum, noted that 'it is only through collaborative research projects such as this that regional museums like us can access

detailed research', and that through the *Fiji: Ocean Connections* exhibition they were able to make 'contact with the (surprisingly large) local Fijian community' (5.1a). Plymouth Museum was then assisted in obtaining a 'Vital Sparks' bursary for the local Fijian community to run cultural activities during the Plymouth Art Weekender (September 2017). [REDACTED] (Curator, Royal Albert Memorial Museum Exeter) commented that the project helped them 'to better understand the objects we care for' and 'greatly enhanced the very basic interpretation we had for the items', (5.1c). The enhanced knowledge developed through their exhibition *Fijian Art: Dancing & Clubbing* gave the museum the confidence to apply successfully for a Designation Development Fund to redisplay their Pacific gallery (for which Jacobs acted as a consultant) and to connect with Fijian artists such as [REDACTED] whose poetry is now included in the permanent display (5.3).

Jacobs' expertise in indigenous Fijian dress was central to her co-curation of the major exhibition *Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific*, at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts (15 Oct 2016 – 12 Feb 2017) and Los Angeles County Museum of Art (15 Dec 2019 – 2 May 2021). Fijian artworks were on loan from all project partner museums, where their documentation was improved and they reached Fijian audiences. For example, [REDACTED], considered this exhibition showed:

'a totally different version of Fijian history ... especially the version we are taught in schools where the missionaries and the traders brought all the good changes and what we once had was all wrong and bad and had to be forgotten. This one celebrated our traditional knowledge and skill' (5.4).

After seeing the LA exhibition, [REDACTED], Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Museum Association, wrote to Jacobs:

'Thank you for including your research on liku [fibre skirts] in the exhibition ... Many of my relatives don't know that our women wore these beautiful creations, as these were replaced by other dress by missionaries in the 19th century' (5.2b).

Jacobs' exhibition at Fiji Museum, *Art and the Body: Exploring the Role of Clothing in Fiji* (April 2014 – Sep 2015) focused on the contemporary resonance of historical garments such as *liku*. Fiji Museum Director [REDACTED] noted that it was the first exhibition 'to use its own collections for about 30 years' and Jacobs' collaboration with museum staff offered 'a valuable experience' that 'instigated a new confidence in museum staff' and attracted new audiences by showing that the museum was not 'just a storehouse for objects from the past' (5.5). This 'new confidence' was enhanced when Jacobs hosted staff from Fiji Museum and the iTaukei Trust Fund Board (TTFB; an institution that promotes indigenous Fijian culture) in the UK between 2016 and 2017, where they received curatorial training as part of the AHRC/ODA project (5.6). TTFB Project Officer [REDACTED] reflected:

'This project had impacts at not only the institutional level ... but more so on the individuals that were engaged as representatives of this institution to come over to the UK ... [the TTFB] is now more confident than ever to carry out exhibitions and we've been on a roll since' (5.4).

These experiences enabled the group of Fijian curators, with Jacobs as advisor, to organise the Fiji Museum exhibition *Kamunaga: The Story of Tabua* (ongoing since June 2017), which focused on ceremonially important whale teeth. The exhibition sparked public debate on the cultural importance of museum collections and was used as a classroom by Fiji Museum and TTFB staff; for example, 85 high school students from urban areas learned cultural protocols of *tabua* (*Fiji Times*, 5.7f & 5.7g). [REDACTED] wrote, 'We have never stopped sharing and implementing what we've learnt as individuals and as institutions through exhibitions and training ... it's as if the project has set off a chain reaction'. The TTFB then developed a field workers' network, 'using the same exact approach with the fieldworkers' they learnt working with Jacobs (5.4). Continuing Jacobs' productive engagement with Fiji-based cultural institutions, she has been invited to be a member of Fiji Museum's Peer Review Panel for Fiji Museum Policies, and Fiji Museum is a partner in her current British Academy-funded project (5.5).

At a diplomatic level, successive Fiji High Commissioners, Presidents, and the Fiji Prime Minister have used these exhibitions to champion Fijian culture. They are appreciative of Jacobs' work at

the grass-roots level. The current Fiji High Commissioner to the UK wrote that he was very pleased to hear of Jacobs' new project on Fijian youth culture, '*so all your hard work continues to produce an enduring legacy, for which all Fijians are deeply grateful*'. (5.8)

(2) Transformative personal experiences of indigenous Fijian cultural heritage and stimulation of new artistic practice by working with Fijian artists

Jacobs' creation of the *Fabricating Fashion* series of workshops, started in the UK in 2012 in association with the first London Pacific Fashion Show brought together many of the Pacific's finest fashion designers and contemporary fibre artists with museum professionals, academics, and textile arts enthusiasts to assert the contemporary relevance of Pacific textiles by creating art works. Some of these were exhibited in the Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver, for *Paradise Lost? Contemporary Works from the Pacific* (25 July – 29 Sep 2013) and in the *Fabricating Fashion?* exhibition and 4-day workshop at the Oceania Centre for Arts, Culture and Pacific Studies, University of South Pacific, Fiji (21 Mar – 10 Apr 2014), to coincide with the opening of the *Fijian Art & the Body* exhibition at Fiji Museum. Fijian artist Lambert Ho told national newspaper *Fiji Sun* that museum collections inspired him: '*The workshops have brought together two different cultures; that of the past and present coming together and creating something beautiful*' (5.7b).

For her book *This is not a Grass Skirt*, Jacobs also collaborated with a group of Fijian artists who united in *The Veiqia Project*, a Fijian female collective of artists, curators, and researchers based in Fiji, Australia, and New Zealand. Members [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] directly translated their contact with recovered Fijian artefacts and traditions into new artwork that was shown in exhibitions in New Zealand and Australia. Jacobs' research inspired Fijian women artists to take the cultural practice of *veiqia* out of the museum and reawaken it for contemporary Fijian bodies ([REDACTED], 5.2a). As [REDACTED], Veiqia Project curator and PIMA Secretary-General states:

'I will never forget your presentation [of research on liku] ... It opened my eyes and led to our funding application to Creative New Zealand and the start of our Veiqia Project in 2015. And look at us now, we have had exhibitions in Fiji, New Zealand and Australia and the artists have created wonderful art work, even some new liku! The drawings of veiqia and the photos of liku that you shared will inspire generations of Fijian women to come' (5.2b).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1** Testimonials from curators at (a) Plymouth Museum; (b) Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology; (c) Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter; (d) Webpages detailing Exhibition Packages.
- 5.2** Statement from (a) Fijian Veiqia Project artist; (b) Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Museum Association and Curator, Veiqia Project; (c) The *Marama Dina* exhibition includes work inspired by Jacobs' research; (d) *Names held in our Mouth* shows Veiqia Project artwork.
- 5.3** Statement from Fijian artist.
- 5.4** Testimonial from iTaukei Trust Fund Board and Fiji Culture Project Concept Note.
- 5.5** Testimonial from Director Fiji Museum.
- 5.6** *10 Years of the AHRC* (2015:110-12); the 2014-2015 AHRC report: *The Impact of AHRC Research* (2016:19-21).
- 5.7** Selected newspaper coverage: (a) Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific, Norwich, 'Rich Adornment' *The Financial Times*; (b) Exhibition shows off 'Art and the Body', *Fiji Sun*; (c) Success of UK exhibition to help standard here, *Fiji Sun*; (d) President opens Kamunaga exhibition called The Story of the Tabua, *Fiji Village*; (e) Exhibition highlights importance of tabua, *Fiji Times*; (f) Schools participate in 'Kamunaga' exhibition, *Fiji Times*; (g) Students take advantage of exhibition, *Fiji Times*.
- 5.8** Letter from the Fiji UK High Commissioner.