

# Indigenous iTaukei Worldview

*Prepared by Dr. Tarisi Vunidilo*



*Illustration by Cecelia Faumuina*

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## Front image caption & credit



**Name:** Drua

**Description:** This is a model of a Fijian drua, a double hulled sailing canoe. The Fijian drua was the largest and finest ocean-going vessel which could range up to 100 feet in length. They were made by highly skilled hereditary canoe builders and other specialist's makers for the woven sail, coconut fibre sennit rope and paddles.

**Credit:** Commissioned and made by Alex Kennedy 2002, collection of Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, FE011790.

**Link:** <https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/648912>

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper is written from an Indigenous *iTaukei*<sup>1</sup> perspective on the discussion of ‘art.’ The two key questions of ‘what is art?’ and ‘how is art valued?’ is embedded in the discussions throughout the five sections of this paper. I deliberately included real life experiences that I observed and participated in, so as to provide a sense of ‘real talanoa’ and ‘real dialogue’ in the quest of answering these two questions.

In this paper, I will refer to Indigenous Fijians as *iTaukei* (literally meaning ‘owner’, in this case, owners of the land and resources in Fiji). Some literature omits the ‘i’ and just refers to the people as *Taukei*. Another option is the use of the word ‘Fijian’ and ‘*kai-Viti*’ (meaning, to be from Fiji), which is more informal. The term Fijian once referred to Indigenous Fijians only, while other ethnic groups were referred to as ‘*kai Idia*’ for Indians, ‘*kai Loma*’ for mixed European heritage and ‘*kai Jaina*’ for Chinese. Additionally, the current government in Fiji has redefined the term Fijian to exclude Indigenous Fijians and only include other ethnic groups such as Indians, Chinese and Europeans. Indigenous Fijians are now officially known in Fiji as *iTaukei*, and this is the option I will use.

Fiji’s location is known as the ‘hub of the Pacific’ and, as a result, has affected the historical and contemporary relationships of Fiji with its neighbouring islands. Fiji is located in the centre of the southern Pacific Ocean (below the equator) and sits on the border of Melanesia to the west and Polynesia to the east (refer to the map below).<sup>2</sup> Three thousand years ago, the Pacific was colonised by the Lapita people, whose archaeological mark has left its footprints on many islands, such as Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu,



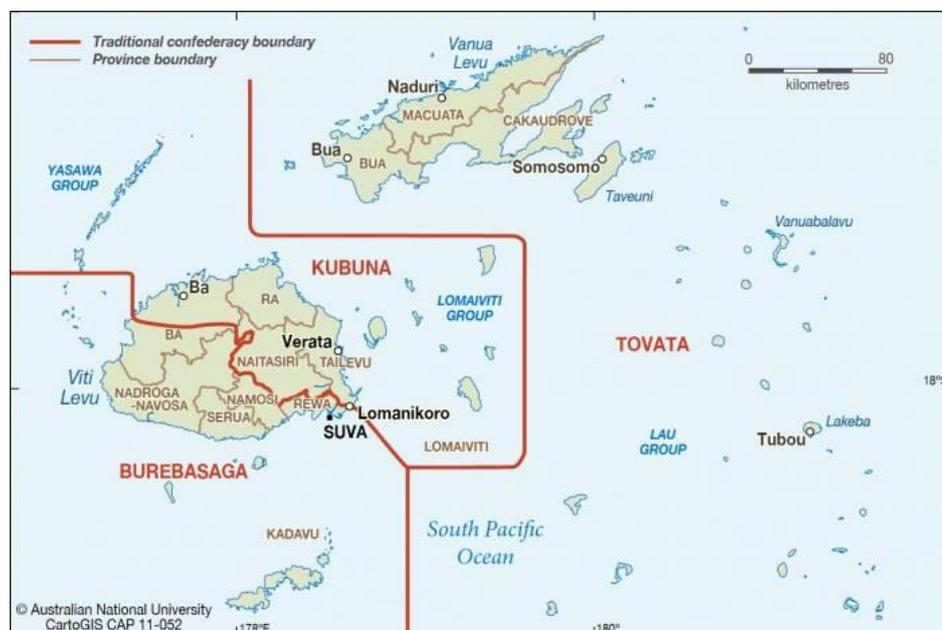
<sup>1</sup> *iTaukei* is currently the official term used to describe Indigenous Fijians. I will use *iTaukei* in this paper thesis rather than *Taukei*, as I believe that the term *iTaukei* is more formal and respectful.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to the the following link for the source of the Fiji map: <https://www.worldmap1.com/fiji-map.asp>

New Caledonia and Fiji. Evidence of such migration can be found in Natunuku in Ba, Sigatoka Sand Dunes in Nadroga and the outer islands such as Naigani, Mago, Yasawa, Beqa and, recently, in Vorovoro, Vanua Levu.

There are over 300 islands in Fiji and approximately one-third of the islands are inhabited. There are 14 *yasana* or provinces in Fiji and one major language spoken, which is known as the Bauan language. This language was collated and written down by early missionaries, notably Rev. William Cross and Rev. David Cargill. People that make up Fiji are predominantly *iTaukei* and Indians who came to Fiji from India in 1879 under the colonial Indentured system. As a result, languages used in Fiji are English, Fijian, Hindi and Urdu.

## SECTION 2: PREHISTORY OF FIJI<sup>3</sup>



*iTaukei* people are believed to have arrived in Fiji from western Melanesia approximately 3,500 years ago, though the exact origins of the *iTaukei* people are unknown. Later they would move onward to other surrounding islands, including Rotuma, as well as blending with other (Polynesian) settlers on Tonga and Samoa.

In the case of Fiji, Christianity arrived in 1830 and Fiji became a British colony in 1874 which as a result, opened possibilities for colonial rulers to have direct access to its people including their natural and cultural resources. Overseas diplomatic missions were created to make contact with the new government, businesses began to grow in Levuka and Suva, while lands on the main islands of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu were explored for commercial gain. With the

<sup>3</sup> Refer to the following link for the source of the Fiji Confederacy map:

[http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/maponline/sites/default/files/styles/cartogis\\_700x700/public/maps/bitmap/standard/2015/11/11-052\\_Fiji\\_update.png?itok=xCvGx67](http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/maponline/sites/default/files/styles/cartogis_700x700/public/maps/bitmap/standard/2015/11/11-052_Fiji_update.png?itok=xCvGx67)

arrival of merchants and the establishment of the indenture system by Sir Arthur Gordon in 1879, the European and Asian presence was felt all over Fiji.

Abel Tasman sighted Fiji in 1643. It was in the early 1800s when the arrival of Europeans began. Trade and many other forms of outside influences ensued. Before the Europeans arrived, there were some mass trading going on between Micronesians, Melanesians and Polynesians where evidence of Indigenous Fijian made sea going vessels, known as *Drua* (double-hull canoe) have been found in Tonga, and *kuro ni Viti* (Fijian clay pots) have also been found in Samoa (Wikipedia, 2016).<sup>4</sup> Fijians had their own local problems between tribes, fighting, burning of villages, and cannibalism. Before European contact, Fijians traded sandalwood with Tongans for bark cloth, sail mats and sting-rays. Furthermore, there were no paramount rulers in pre-colonial Fijian society but was structured with chiefs, especially males, who were born of high ranking or with courage and abilities (France, 1969). This also played a key role in Fijians not being used to working in sugar-cane farms, which led to the recruitment of Indian indentured workers from 1879 to the early 1900s. Sir Arthur Gordon, the first governor, played a part in merging colonial rule and Fijian rule together. This was evident when he himself assumed his role as the chief of rank from Britain. He spoke about this at his formal installation in Bau, and this made other rulers of the provinces view him as one of them (ibid).

Secondly, let us look at how societies of Fiji were affected during the colonial period and the first European contact. Abel Tasman (1643), Captain James Cook (1774) and William Bligh (1789, 1792) were some of the first Europeans explorers to visit Fiji but there were those accidentally shipwrecked in Fiji who were the first to reach its shores (Derrick, 1968). After that, traders for sandalwood and whalers from Australia, New Zealand and America passed through, and then came the missionaries in search of new converts. Survivors and visitors were brought into the Fijian society, including those that were left behind, but all survived on whatever they could find or were fed by hospitable chiefs. King Ratu Seru Cakobau, in 1874 authorized Fiji to become part of the British because Germans were forcing in to claim land. Between 1879 and 1916 the British government started sugar plantations and brought Indians in to work because Fijians are subsistence farmers and were not interested in working for the British. Apart from slave Indians and Britains, there were other visitors to Fiji with different interests and also brought in all sorts of diseases like measles that caused the loss of many Fijian lives (Derrick, 1968). Changes and development started taking place in the 1950s. Changes such as advancement in the field of education, infrastructure development, and transportation were becoming the next chapter of the Fijians in the next decade. The Colonial War Memorial Hospital was built, and in 1953 Suva was declared a city. Fijians thought that the new curricular was a false sense of values, because their local culture was completely ignored. The introduction of trade of sandalwood wood for alcohol, firearms and ammunition

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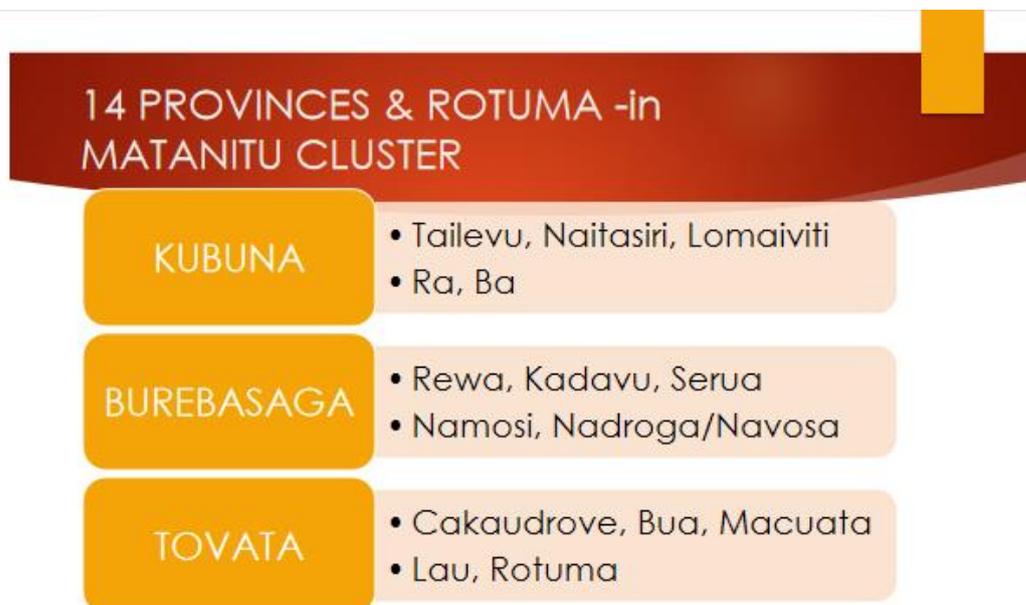
<sup>4</sup> Refer to the following link for source of information: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discovery\\_of\\_Fiji](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discovery_of_Fiji)

greatly influenced the chiefs; they developed the habit of alcohol abuse (and made wrong decisions).

Over the years, in particular post 1970, the door opened for many *iTaukei* to move and settle in New Zealand. Section 5 highlights the population increase and spread of those living in New Zealand since 2001 (the same year my family and I moved from Fiji in search of a new life and experience). Reasons for the move differ from family to family, however, the common denominator is that many are in search of better standards of living, education and a sense of adventure. With reference to the ‘art’ focus of this paper, many of these families that moved from Fiji to New Zealand, maintain their cultural connections to their tribes in Fiji. This contributes immensely in answering the questions of ‘*what is art*’ and ‘*how is art*’ valued from an *iTaukei* perspective. In order to answer these two questions fully, it is critical that we discuss the *iTaukei* social structure which provides the cultural foundation of this paper.

### SECTION 3: ITAUKEI SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Prior to colonial rule, Indigenous *iTaukei* communities had their own system of authority. Most Pacific societies, including Fiji, displayed a ranking system, some of which are still evident today. Some authors, such as Legge (1958, p. 203), refer to it as the ‘Native Authority System’. One such system is the ‘*Matanitu Vanua*’ which is translated as ‘Confederacy’ (see image below). These three confederacies are the conglomeration of the 14 *Yasana* or provinces including the 15th one, which is Rotuma.



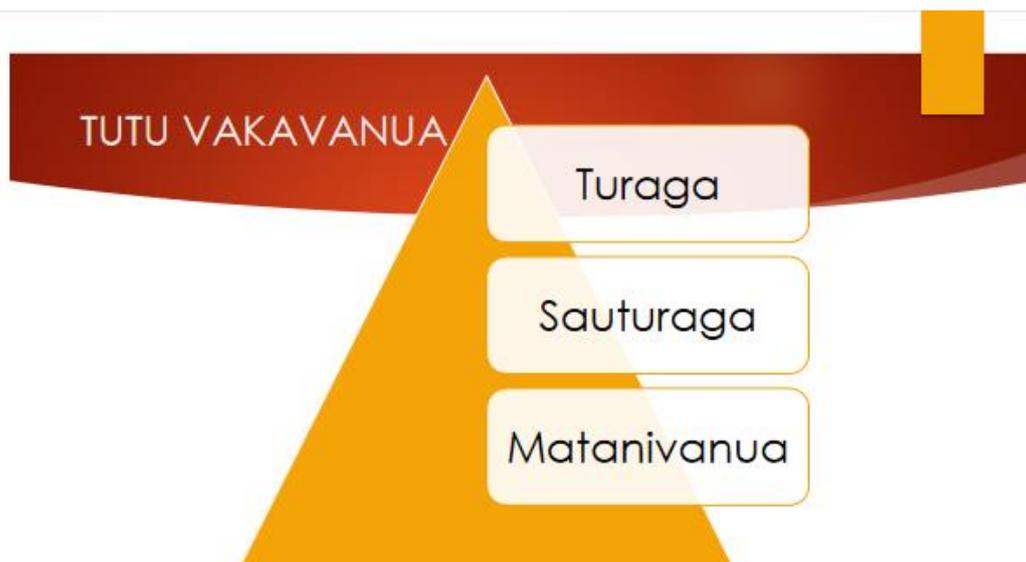
These three confederacies are listed below from the eldest to the youngest, in terms of migration to Fiji. Each confederacy has a Paramount Chief who is referred to here as the *Vunivalu* (translated as Root of War) and *Vuanirewa* (fruit of the Rewa plant), followed by

their kingly titles such as *Tui Kaba*, *Roko Tui Dreketi* and *Tui Nayau*. One can hear these salutations used in formal kava ceremonies. Even *iTaukei* residents of Aotearoa adhere to these chiefly groupings and this is followed through in a serious manner.



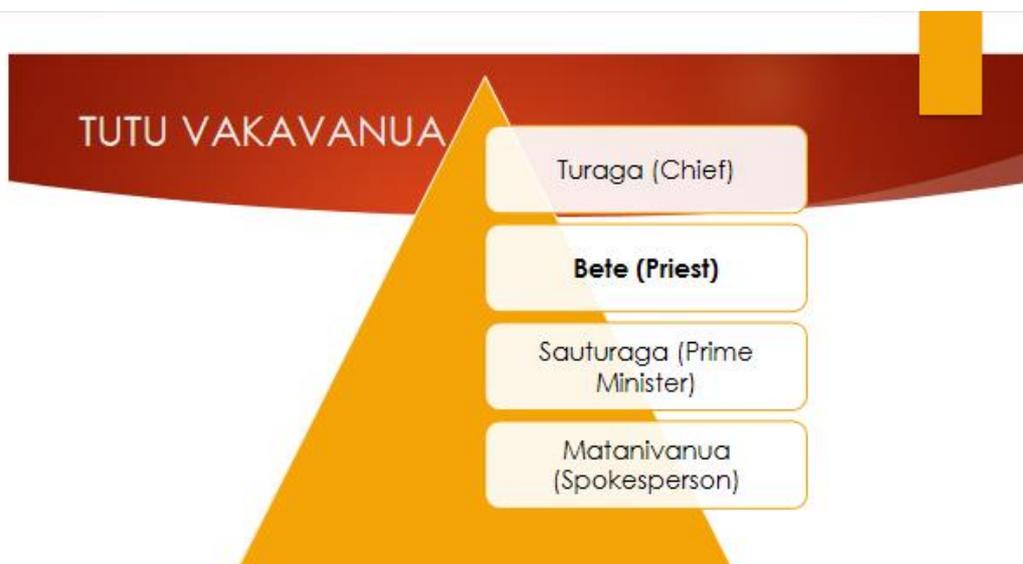
In the case of Fiji, Basil Thompson (Legge, 1959, p. 204) recognised that the natives have a complex social and political organisation in vigorous activity. Furthermore, Thompson preferred the native arrangement by saying that:

*“...it was not enough to abstain from seeking hastily to replace native institutions by unreal imitation of European models, but it was also of the utmost importance to seize the spirit in which native institutions has been framed, and develop to the utmost extent the capacities of the people for the management of their own affairs, without exciting their suspicions or destroying their self respect.” (Legge, 1959, p. 204).*



**Tutu Vakavanua** is the Indigenous system of authority that includes the *Turaga* (Chief) who is on the top of this figurative pyramid. The role of the *Sauturaga* is equivalent to a Prime Minister, as they are the king-makers and decision-makers for the *Turaga*, for the benefit of the *vanua* (land). The *Matanivanua* here is the Chief's spokesperson, who speaks on behalf of the *Turaga* to the people.

Before the arrival of missionaries to Fiji, the role of *Bete* (Priests) was paramount and they work alongside the *Turaga* in order to maintain peace in the *vanua* (land). *Bete* play the role of predicting results of war, famine, drought and other events. They are also the intermediary between the *Turaga* and their *Kalou* (supreme being). Their position would be more like this:



There are other roles within the Fijian social structure and they can be seen in the image below. These roles are crucial for the livelihood of the *vanua*. One has to appreciate the role of the *Bati* (warriors), as they are the protectors of the *Turaga* and the *vanua*. There are two categories of *Bati*: *Bati Leka* (those who guard the chief in close proximity) and the *Bati Balavu* (those who watch the border of the *vanua*). In the context of this discussion, fellow Fijians who belong to this tribe often play their role when a visiting dignitary visits the community or a Minister officiates during the Fiji Day celebrations.

## TUTU VAVANUA NI BATI, MATAISAU, GONEDAU

### Bati (Warriors)

- Bati Balavu
- Bati Leka

### Mataisau (Carpenters)

- Liga-ni-Kau
- Sivisivi

### Gonedau (Fisherfolk)

- Fishermen
- Potters

## TUTU VAKAVANUA



### Vuniwai (Healer)

Men and women can be healers and such skills are passed down through their generations



### Dautalitali (Weaver)

This particular activity is female or women generated. Recently in Fiji, some males are seen to be learning this creative artform



### Daunivucu (Composer & Choreographer)

Meka or dance is a key part of entertainment in social and ceremonial activities

As discussed above, this ranking system places those of higher rank on the top of the hierarchy and these people are mostly revered by their subservient counterparts. *Turaga* or chiefs are known to have powers that have been passed down over many generations. They are also known to be the human manifestation of *kalou* (supreme-being) on this earth. As a result, certain cultural privileges were given to them as individuals or within their family. Aristocratic chiefs know that their privileges are given to them based on their genealogies and blood-line. Others, such as *bati* or warriors can be given privileged authorities based on merits. Some acquire their rights through marriage. This is often applied to women in Fiji, where their rights and privileges change once they marry. When a woman's husband dies, there is a traditional ceremony that takes place where a *tabua* or whales-tooth is presented from her family, to request her to return to her family of birth. In addition, within the *Vaka Viti* (Fijian) concepts of *veikerekerei* (to request) and *veisolisoli* (to give), there are elements of *veivakaturagataki* (in a chiefly manner) where *veiwekani* (relationship) is bounded by cultural rights that are customary to *iTaukei* or Indigenous Fijians. Such customary rights were observed by

missionaries and other colonial administrators that were in Fiji in the early 1800s. Some observations showed how *tabua* (whales-tooth) were presented during *yagona* (kava) ceremonies to reaffirm customary relationships through marriage, death or other occasions. *Tabua*, and other *iTaukei* articles such as *masi* (bark-cloth) and *tanoa* (kava bowls), led to the collection of such artifacts by collectors with the aim of retaining such customary rights over time (Ravuvu, 1989).

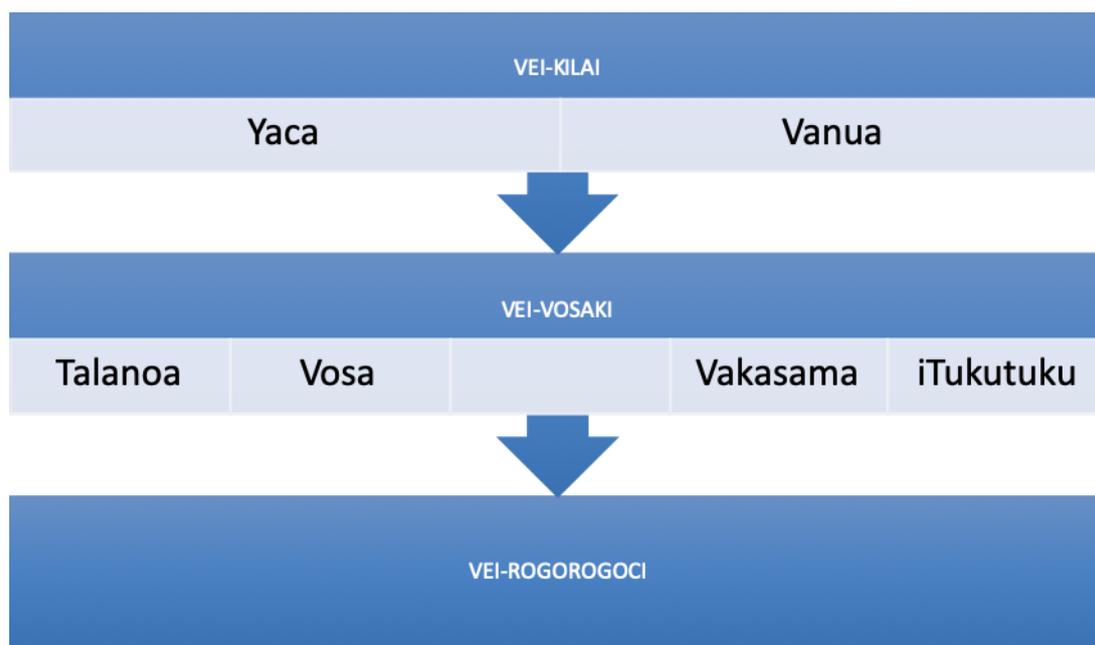
## INDIGENOUS WAYS OF SEEING - the VANUA WAY

This framework of looking at ourselves as *iTaukei* was documented in a visual way by Dr. Unaisi Nabobo-Baba (2008). It details the processes used when researching Indigenous Fijian histories, knowledge, skills, arts, values and lifeways (Nemani, 2012). It takes into account 'standards, protocols and epistemological bases of research and knowledge production' and 'in order to manifest Pacific cultural aspirations, preferences and practices that will ensure the achievement and outcomes of the research' is reached (Nabobo-Baba, 2008, p. 142). Additionally, this way of seeing empowers *iTaukei* to look at ourselves, using our own language of communication in order to reflect on our own complex systems of philosophies that are reflected in our arts and culture, such as songs, carvings, weavings, paintings and oral traditions. Even though our way of seeing may not be in written form, as expected by academic institutions, there are other ways that research findings can be transmitted such as 'story-telling' (ibid).

- 1. SOLESOLEVAKI** - This is a unique way of working together in a collaborative fashion. In a cultural context, for a *iTaukei* to be part of this process shows that he or she has strong family ties. There is this well known belief that self-sufficiency comes in the form of working together. This may not work in mainstream societies as rules of time and payment as seen in cash economies around the world must be adhered to. Communalism is what drives the Fijian society. *iTaukei* as a result, develop a 'Total Abundance Mindset'. This may not reflect in their bank account, as would be expected in a non-Fijian setting. However, many who are tied through communal ownership of land knows and feels that they have a supportive system that gives them peace of mind and collective prosperity. In the case of *Rise Beyond The Reef*, it is a locally owned business that is built on this philosophy of *solesolevaki*. *Rise Beyond The Reef* has however included income generating activities that involves 350 women and over 23 communities working together, creating a FJD \$500, 000 per year earnings in Ba Province, west of Viti Levu. Here, we can see how *solesolevaki* can be applied in non-monetary and monetary situations.
- 2. TUKUNI** - This is an ancient way of story-telling where goddesses and gods come alive through the creative presentations of elders who share ancient tales of prowess to younger ones through skits, miming and songs. It still takes place today, however, some in a different format, some around the kava bowl or through technological

platforms such as ‘live videos’ and recorded stories delivered online. Back in the day, young ones usually bring a yam, taro or even fish to give to the story-teller as a form of appreciation for their time and effort in story-telling. Some *iTaukei* living in New Zealand still conduct this art of story-telling within homes and publicly during the celebrations of Fijian Language Week in October of every year.

3. **VEIVOSAKI** - *iTaukei* operate well through dialogue and information sharing. During my PhD research, I developed this Indigenous Fijian way of looking at ourselves called ‘*Veivosaki Framework*’. A success in any venture lies within this framework, similar to the *Talanoa* framework put together by Timote Vaoleti (2006). One has to establish the *Veikilai* component first (getting to know your name and where you are from) before moving on to the *Veivosaki* (sharing of information and dialogue) and to the *Veirogorogoci* (listening intently with the notion of putting into action what each party is proposing to do). In the context of this paper, ‘art’ to Fijians is embedded in these dialogue which includes names, where one is from (this would include their *koro* (village), *yavusa* (tribe), *mataqali* (clan) or *itokatoka* (family unit)).



Vunidilo, T (2016) Veivosaki Framework & Indigenous Perspective

## SECTION 4: ARTS PERSPECTIVE - *ITAUKEI* LENS

It is critical to explore the depth to which the *iTaukei* maintain their traditional lifestyle. This depends greatly on how they meet the costs and labour towards providing materials and other necessities required for ceremonies such as weddings, deaths and other cultural events (Ravuvu, 1983, p. 52). Every member of the family (in particular adults) have certain responsibilities in the creation of wealth. For instance, a number of mats will be required to be woven over a period of time to prepare for a wedding. Others in the household will be expected to prepare *tabua* (whales-tooth) and *yaqona* (kava), and *kakana dina* (staple food) must be planted to be presented on the wedding day. Kinship responsibilities and obligations are paramount, therefore there is an expectation that everyone must contribute to maintain their identity within the family (Ravuvu, 1983, p. 62). After the wedding day, wealth such as *ibe* (mats), *masi* (tapa-cloth) and *tabua* are exchanged, and these are circulated until the next event. Strict protocols are adhered to in the form of who is given this wealth depending on seniority and their close relationship with the bride and groom.

It is important to note that certain items of wealth were made only in certain areas. For example, mat-weaving is a craft known and practiced by Fijian women all over Fiji. However, there are certain types of mats only woven in certain places and not in others. These variations can be determined by the patterns, designs and type of raw material used. In Fiji today, weaving mats have become the key responsibility and occupation of women and have thus become a source of income for most. Many women have sold mats or exchanged them for other goods in places where these special mats were not made. Since *solevu* (gatherings) are still part of *iTaukei* life and mats are key components of ceremonies and exchanges, mats are properties that can now be sold to procure money (Toganivalu, 1910, p. 2).

Names of artifacts also commemorate relationships, for instance the ancestral link between Fiji and Tonga. In the case of the *masi* (bark cloth), various types signify its Tongan origin such as the *kumi* or *gatu vakatoga* (tapa of Tongan origin). The *kuveti*, derived from the word *upeti* or *kuveji*, is a board made up of sewing together leaves of the screw pine, to be equal in breadth to the staining board, which is called the *papa ni kesakesa*. There is also a type of *kumi*, which is stained quite black and is called the black *gatu*. This is common in Tonga and is a highly valued property for Tongan women (Toganivalu, 1910, p. 3). Through *masi*, one can see the close relationships between Tonga and Fiji and, even though many are in storage in overseas museums, the practice of making them and its associated ceremonies where *masi* is used still continues today. It is then imperative for current generations to pass on this knowledge to future generations of Fijian and Tongan women.

The source of materials from which these artifacts are made with will provide evidence of which region they were taken from. For example, water containers are also found in museum collections. Some are made from large coconut shells called *kitu*. Smaller *kitu* are made for storing drinking and cooking water as well as the sea water used for cooking. In places where

there are no coconuts, they use bamboos, and clay water-jars made of earth to draw water, both for drinking and cooking (Toganivalu, 1910, p. 6). Coconuts can be seen more in coastal villages and outer islands. Bamboos are found in the highlands of Viti Levu, including the provinces of Namosi, Naitasiri, Navosa and Ra. Earthenware is found in the provinces of Rewa, Kadavu and Nadroga (Clunie, 1985).

## SECTION 5: *ITAUKEI* ARTS IN AOTEAROA - AN *ITAUKEI* VIEW

Based on the 2001 Census data in New Zealand, those that identified themselves as ‘Fijian’ included those people who stated ‘Fijian’ as their sole identity or as one of the several ethnic groups, including Indian and Fijian-Indian.<sup>5</sup> The Pacific population refers to all those who stated a Pacific ethnicity. The following table provides some relevant data that was collected for the 2001 Census:

<b>Population</b>	Fijian people were the fifth largest Pacific ethnic group living in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2001, comprising 7,000 or 3% of its Pacific population (231,800).
<b>Pacific population comparison</b>	The largest Pacific ethnic group was Samoan (50%), followed by the Cook Islands Maori (23%), Tongan (18%) and Niuean 9%) ethnic groups. The Tokelauan (3%) group closely followed the Fijian ethnic group in population size and was followed by the Tuvaluan group (1%).
<b>Population Decline</b>	The Fijian population decreased by 700 or 8% between 1996 and 2001. During the same 5-year period, the Pacific population increased by 15%. Between 1991 and 2001, the Fijian population grew by 38% from 5,100 to 7,000.
<b>Population in 2006</b>	Fijians were the 5th largest Pacific ethnic group in Aotearoa, making up 9,861 of its Pacific population (265,974).
<b>Population Increase</b>	Fijian population increased by 40% (2,820) between 2001 and 2006.
<b>Use of Fijian Language</b>	Fijians born in Aotearoa account for 44% of the total Fijian population. 29% (2,676) of Fijians are able to hold an everyday conversation in Fijian. This was a 1% point decrease since 2001.
<b>Living in Auckland</b>	59% (5,847) of the Fijian population live in the Auckland region, which is an increase of 1% point since 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Refer to the following link for specific 2001 census data on the Fijian community in Aotearoa New Zealand: <http://archive.stats.govt.nz/Census/2001-census-data/2001-census-pacific-profiles/fijian-people-in-new-zealand.aspx#gsc.tab=0>

<b>Living in Aotearoa</b>	However, compared to 2013, the population of Fijians living in Aotearoa has doubled. According to the 2013 New Zealand Census, an estimated 14,445 of people identify themselves as Fijian - a number that number has doubled since the 2001 Census.
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The key point I want to highlight here is that as more *iTaukei* immigrants arrived, change accelerated within *iTaukei* cultures in New Zealand. Many cultural values and practices have been maintained, but some are under threat.

This section highlights five key areas that *iTaukei* in Aotearoa continue to do to keep their culture alive. This in turn has direct impact on how they view and define ‘arts.’

- 1. Arts initiatives in New Zealand**
- 2. Language initiatives**
- 3. Religious Groups and Cultural activities**
- 4. Fiji Embassy and Government activities**
- 5. Sports initiatives**

## 5A: Arts Initiatives

The table below highlights some of these artists:

NAME	ARTFORM	IMAGE
<p><b>Nina Nawalowalo</b></p>	<p>Theatre</p>	 <p><a href="https://www.theconch.co.nz/the-company">https://www.theconch.co.nz/the-company</a></p>
<p><b>Ema Tavola</b></p>	<p>Curator</p>	 <p><a href="https://vunilagivou.com/">https://vunilagivou.com/</a></p>
<p><b>Margaret Aull</b></p>	<p>Artist</p>	 <p><a href="https://www.teatinga.com/page/margaret-aull/">https://www.teatinga.com/page/margaret-aull/</a></p>

<p><b>Luisa Tora</b></p>	<p>Artist</p>	 <p><a href="https://pimpiknows.com/tag/luisa-tora/">https://pimpiknows.com/tag/luisa-tora/</a></p>
<p><b>Joana Monolagi</b></p>	<p>Artist</p>	 <p><a href="http://www.objectspace.org.nz/exhibitions/awakening/">http://www.objectspace.org.nz/exhibitions/awakening/</a></p>
<p><b>Daren Kamali</b></p>	<p>Poet</p>	 <p><a href="https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/daren-kamali">https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/daren-kamali</a></p>

<p><b>Rowena Rooney</b></p>	<p>Artist</p>	 <p><a href="https://nzmosaicart.co.nz/member-gallery/rowena-rooney/">https://nzmosaicart.co.nz/member-gallery/rowena-rooney/</a></p>
<p><b>Veiqia Project</b></p>	<p>Tattoo Research</p>	 <p><a href="https://theveiqiaproject.com/">https://theveiqiaproject.com/</a></p>

**KEY LESSONS:**

1. Each of these artists are proud to represent their culture and heritage.
2. Their art resembles their tribe and cultural identity.
3. Whether it is contemporary or heritage arts, *iTaukei* manifest their pride through the work that they do.

## THE VEIQIA PROJECT

### KEY LESSONS FROM THE VEIQIA PROJECT:

1. This project brought seven *Marama ni Viti* (Fijian women) together representing various provinces of Fiji.
2. It was crucial that the research data was to be shared globally using the digital platforms of a website and social media.
3. Reminding all *iTaukei* that women played key roles in ancient Fiji and the revival of this artform of female tattooing.



Left to right: Back row – Ema Tavola, Margaret Aull, Luisa Keteiyau Tora, Molly Rangiwai-McHale & Merewairita Vunidilo; front row – Adi Asenaca Uluiviti, Joana Monolagi, Seniloli Sovea Tora & Dr Tari Vunidilo.

## MUSEUM ACTIVITIES

Museums promotes Fijian Culture and Heritage.

**Case Study : Pacific Collections Access Project (PCAP), Auckland War Memorial Museum  
Tāmaki Paenga Hira.**



**Saqqa Moli (water vessel)**

Water vessel made of qele (clay) with six spherical containers and six arms. Hole at the top (where arms meet) for suspension cord. One orifice near centre-top of a container and i gaga (pouring spout) near the top of another container. Three rows of somuna (decorative spots of applied qele) along the arms extending around the circumference of the waist of each container. Groove and ridge also across the circumference of each container. Incisions decorate the arms and upper areas of the spherical containers. Incisions decorate each arm and upper areas of each container. Outer surface coated with makadre (resin made from the Dakua tree).

Made pre 1870.

Collection of Auckland Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira, 12576 <http://www.aucklandmuseum.com/collection/objectfrom/humanhistory-object-558414>

### KEY LESSONS FROM THE PCAP PROJECT:

1. The importance of *Vosa Vaka-Bau* (Indigenous Fijian language) - see above image.
2. Acknowledging the *iTaukei* practitioners such as Railala Gade (masi or tapa) and Kulaya Nanuqa (weaver) who still practice their art.
3. Sharing the stage with Rotuma signifies the art of *veiwekani* (relationship) and *veisolisoli* (giving) that *iTaukei* people are known for.

## 5B. Language initiatives in Aotearoa<sup>6</sup>



### KEY LESSONS:

1. Language is indeed an artform that has to be celebrated.
2. New Zealand born *iTaukei* are interested to learn the language.
3. Teachers and students know that language is the key to knowing their heritage.

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<sup>6</sup> Refer to the following link for the source of the 'Fijian' infographic: <https://www.omniglot.com/writing/fijian.htm>

## 5C: Religious groups and cultural activities<sup>7</sup>

### Fiji: Religion

- The native population of Fiji mainly follows Christianity.
- More than three-quarters of all Fijian people are Methodist.
- Approximately 80% of the Indo-Fijians are Hindu, 15% are Muslim, and most of the rest are Sikh, while most remain Christian.
- Indigenous Fijians also follow traditional beliefs in spirit and ancestor worship.



### KEY LESSONS:

All the religious groups listed above have *iTaukei* and non-*iTaukei* as part of their flock. Most of the church programs are delivered in the *iTaukei* vernacular while others use English as their medium of preaching. Another observation is the increased numbers of families that consists of *iTaukei* marrying other ethnicities, resulting in an increase in both *iTaukei* and non-*iTaukei* speakers attending these church services.

<sup>7</sup> Refer to the following link for the source of the 'Fiji: Religion' infographic:  
[https://l.messenger.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2Fimgres%3Fimgurl%3Dhttps%253A%252F%252Fimage1.slideserve.com%252F2343119%252Ffiji-religion-l.jpg%26imgrefurl%3Dhttps%253A%252F%252Fwww.slideserve.com%252Frimona%252Fmy-cultural-exploration%26tbnid%3DQ2b2nSCTLqC0M%26vet%3D12ahUKEwix-DQzOzqAhWKx54KHZCSA8QQMyhBegQIARBF..i%26docid%3DXScbralve\\_qeXM%26w%3D1024%26h%3D768%26q%3Dreligion%2520in%2520fiji%26ved%3D2ahUKEwix-DQzOzqAhWKx54KHZCSA8QQMyhBegQIARBF&h=AT119QrgNCQeJmZxF3P\\_fU70snkhoZoXWH8ZyRGN\\_PNOJweB7WQ\\_B1qmprKgtxZ20HCzvr5bNne7aeE1IY4K6ZshXJaecTil7YvnZvt7QgQLgUOYhGOxrO-Z8Yj56gKYDnEHEZe\\_j6ESTI9NJzY7S7yx](https://l.messenger.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2Fimgres%3Fimgurl%3Dhttps%253A%252F%252Fimage1.slideserve.com%252F2343119%252Ffiji-religion-l.jpg%26imgrefurl%3Dhttps%253A%252F%252Fwww.slideserve.com%252Frimona%252Fmy-cultural-exploration%26tbnid%3DQ2b2nSCTLqC0M%26vet%3D12ahUKEwix-DQzOzqAhWKx54KHZCSA8QQMyhBegQIARBF..i%26docid%3DXScbralve_qeXM%26w%3D1024%26h%3D768%26q%3Dreligion%2520in%2520fiji%26ved%3D2ahUKEwix-DQzOzqAhWKx54KHZCSA8QQMyhBegQIARBF&h=AT119QrgNCQeJmZxF3P_fU70snkhoZoXWH8ZyRGN_PNOJweB7WQ_B1qmprKgtxZ20HCzvr5bNne7aeE1IY4K6ZshXJaecTil7YvnZvt7QgQLgUOYhGOxrO-Z8Yj56gKYDnEHEZe_j6ESTI9NJzY7S7yx)

## 5D: FIJI EMBASSY & GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES<sup>8</sup>



### KEY LESSONS:

1. Cultural singing and dances are key aspects of events organised by the FHC
2. Support and promotion of the *iTaukei* Language is a key part of the FHC programs
3. The Fiji High Commission (FHC) office showcases *iTaukei* artifacts in their offices, as well as their Facebook page showcasing *masi* (tapa) see picture above.

## 5E: SPORTS ACTIVITIES

*iTaukei* are great sportspeople. Numerous *iTaukei* have represented New Zealand internationally, such as Joe Rokocoko (All Blacks), Sitiveni Sivivatu (All Blacks) and Vilimaina Davu (Netball). Sports have served as events that brings *iTaukei* communities together on a local level and even on national and international level. From my own experience, I have seen how 'arts' transcends gender and sports, with special focus on the use of Fijian language and dialect. Spoken language is another artform celebrated by *iTaukei* in New Zealand.

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<sup>8</sup> The image of the Fiji masi with 'Fiji High Commission' is taken from the Fiji High Commission, Wellington Facebook page.

## KEY LESSONS:

1. Provincial representation is key to our sportspeople.
2. The use of *iTaukei* dialect in speech and song is evident
3. The art of *veisiko* is Fijian hospitality that reflects hospitality and love.

## Key Lessons, Discussions and Analysis:

Before I conclude, let us return to the 2 key questions that we asked at the outset:

### KEY QUESTIONS

1. What is art from your Indigenous lens?
2. How is art valued from your Indigenous lens?

To answer these two important questions, it is vital to say that to *iTaukei*, art does not belong on a wall of a museum or gallery. Art has life, and it breathes, move and connects *iTaukei* people with one another. I will summarize the answer to these questions in a table form that contains the relevant verb and examples to support the statements above.

## WHAT IS ART FROM YOUR INDIGENOUS LENS?

ART is.....	EXAMPLE
<b>COMMUNAL</b>	People defines 'art' and the <i>iTaukei</i> community owns and classifies 'art' into their rightful categories that has been passed down for many generations.
<b>LIVED</b>	As a people, we do not separate 'art' from our daily lives. Art is included in cooking, singing, dressing and music, to give a few examples.
<b>EXPERIENCED</b>	Art is not something to look at on a wall or admired from a distance. We feel and breathe art and we share such experiences with one another.
<b>SPOKEN</b>	Art is expressed through words and poetry, in particular through our Bauan Language or dialects. As a result, art is uttered and felt through our sense of hearing, and feeling.
<b>PERFORMED</b>	Art is movement, sound and story-telling. The example of Nina Nawalowalo depicts this definition so clearly through her theatre productions of <i>Vula</i> and <i>Masi</i> .
<b>INNATE</b>	We are born into our tribe that specifies our role in the Fijian society. Even though some of us may live outside of Fiji, these traits that we are born with travels with us across

	borders and time-zones. These traits determines our actions and how we represent Fiji in our homes or in public events.
<b>SHARED</b>	The ability for <i>iTaukei</i> to share their land and culture with other racial groups such as the island of Rotuma, this political bond has become a family bond that has brought these two island nations together, now known as ' <i>Ko Viti kei Rotuma.</i> ' During the Rotuma Day celebration at the Auckland Museum, the Rotuman community members brought cooked food well known in Rotuma such as <i>fekei</i> (dessert) and <i>tahroro</i> (fermented meat cooked in coconut cream).
<b>CELEBRATED</b>	<i>iTaukei</i> people celebrate life and death and they mark every facet of an individual's life from birth. Every milestone is remembered by every ' <i>vuvale</i> ' which adds to the life story of many.
<b>INTER-GENERATIONAL</b>	<i>iTaukei</i> people make sure that the past generation passes on their knowledge to those in the present generation. They ensure that it is passed down to benefit our future generations. During 'kava ceremonies', one notices the old and young participating together.
<b>RANKED</b>	<i>iTaukei</i> people are proud to have a culture that is organised so people can serve their chiefs successfully. Their division of labor is exemplified through its 'village structure' and is a classic example of how <i>bete</i> (priests), <i>matanivanua</i> (spokesperson), <i>bati</i> (warrior) and <i>mataisau</i> (carpenters) play their roles in order to fulfil a unified outcome.
<b>ADORNED</b>	The art of adornment comes in the form of <i>bui-ni-ga</i> (hair-style), <i>masi kesa</i> & <i>masi kuvui</i> (different types of tapa cloth), <i>itauke bati-vuaka</i> (boars' tusk pendant), <i>lawedua</i> (feather head-piece) and <i>itutu ni meke</i> (positioning of dancers) in a group dance, similar to the Tongan way of grouping dancers based on their lineage.

## HOW IS ART VALUED FROM YOUR INDIGENOUS LENS?

ARTS IS VALUED through.....	EXAMPLES
<b>CEREMONIES</b>	During the 2016 Fijian Language Week, the <i>Kubuna</i> Confederacy officiated the welcome ceremony to welcome the Minister of Pacific People to the Auckland Museum. All participants were dressed in full Fijian tapa attire that was appropriate for the occasion.

<b>DANCE</b>	During the same event, cultural performances were presented by Rotuman youths and the Santa Ana Meke Group that represented the youth communities of Auckland.
<b>CHANTS</b>	Alipate Trill, one of the Knowledge-holders for the Pacific Collection Access Project (PCAP) performed selected chants to celebrate our rich culture for the benefit of our young ones in Aotearoa. He is using his Te Mana Performing Arts (Dance & Language School) as a platform to showcase this ancient artform of story-telling.
<b>PRINTED ART</b>	Railala Gade Gaunavou, representing Moce Island, Lau Province is the masi or tapa expert that we invited to the PCAP. She was taught by her grandmother and has continued this artform until today. She shared her lifestory of being gifted with the skills of tapa-making that contains ancient motifs that are regarded as ancient languages although coded in patterns and designs.
<b>TATTOOING</b>	The Veiqia Project has been the key group taking the lead in research and exhibitions in New Zealand, Fiji and Australia showcasing and highlighting the importance of tattooing history in ancient Fiji for <i>iTaukei</i> to know.
<b>DISPLAYS &amp; EXHIBITIONS</b>	Rowena Rooney was selected as a practising artist to share her skills in ceramics and tile work. She worked alongside Joana Monolagi, who showcased the ceremonial masi (tapa) dress worn during special ceremonies.
<b>CELEBRATIONS</b>	Fiji Day is always celebrated every year during the commemoration of Fiji's independence Day on October 10. It is a day that all families and ethnic groups (Indian, Fijian, Rotuman, Chinese and European) come together to celebrate through food, songs, weaving and dancing.
<b>PERFORMANCES</b>	In March every year, the Polyfest dance festival for youths in secondary schools takes place in Manukau City in South Auckland. Fiji is represented on the Diversity Stage where more than 70 schools from across the Auckland region spend four days dancing and proudly representing their <i>iTaukei</i> and Fijian heritage and identity.
<b>TRADE</b>	In the past, a system of trade exchange known as ' <i>Veisa</i> ' was implemented between tribes and regions. In the modern context of Auckland (NZ), artists can showcase and sell their cultural wares and creations in a modern day trade.
<b>CULINARY ARTS</b>	The Pasifika Festival is an excellent example of where 'food' is celebrated through provincial stalls, that showcases special foods that are unique to each region in Fiji. For example, <i>fekei</i> and <i>vakalolo</i> are two desserts that are unique

	<p>and special in Rotuma and Fiji respectively. Purchasing and consuming these food reminds each buyer the history of these foods that differentiates one island nation from another.</p>
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## CONCLUDING REMARKS<sup>9</sup>

Art, in a western framework is viewed in a museum or art gallery mostly credited to an individual, who is viewed as the sole creator. The physical space is strictly determined by a curator who is the expert of the exhibition concept. In comparison to the *iTaukei* way of looking at art, which is totally the opposite. Our art is communally owned, celebrated through ceremonies, songs and dances and worn on our bodies with tattooing, *masi* (tapa), and through our *iTaukei Vosa Vakaviti* or Fijian language.

Finally from the pre-colonial society to the colonial society, this paper has brought the understanding of what *iTaukei* in Fiji, as well as those in New Zealand, have become with many European influences. Since the arrival of Europeans, *iTaukei* had their chances of fighting and disputes, however *iTaukei* were able to adapt, and they did just that. Although British colonists had impacted the lives of *iTaukei*, the effects of these changes were massive and influenced even those now living in New Zealand.

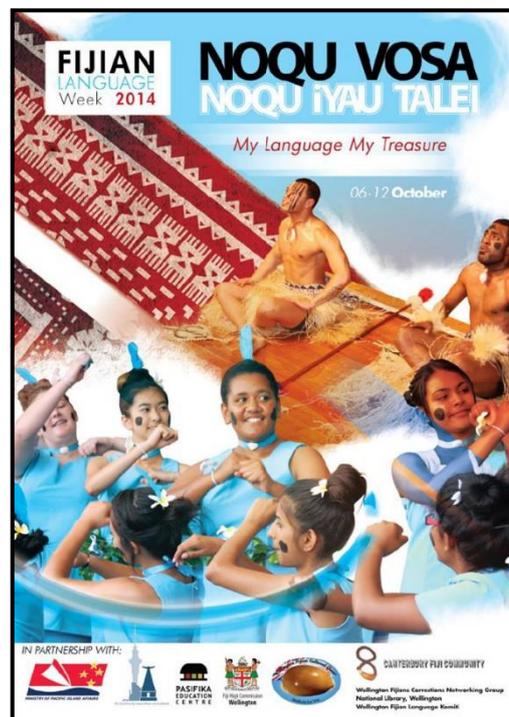
Without a doubt, the culture of *iTaukei* is still strong in the rural areas of Fiji. This is also evident with those that migrated to New Zealand. They are the ones that participate in ceremonies and take the lead in cultural events. *iTaukei* were aware of Europe's great seamen, explorers and fighters and were amazed of their achievements. However, they were equally aware of their own feats and achievements. Despite the many changes that were caused by Europeans, in particular through schools and the education system set up by the British, many chiefs were worried that their culture might die out so many held on strong to their beliefs. Furthermore, established colonial systems of governments were put in place that allowed decisions to be made by the governors or the president over the chiefs; the ownership of land have been transferred from tribes to individual; and finally the current Fijian culture is made up of different nationalities that include Indian, European and Chinese (Wikipedia, 2015).<sup>10</sup> In 1970, Fijians were granted independence by the British government and was called the Dominion of Fiji, and later was renamed to Republic of Fiji in 1997.

To conclude, despite the many political changes that has taken place in Fiji, it has not impacted on the way the *iTaukei* people view the arts in Fiji and New Zealand. Most *iTaukei*

<sup>9</sup> Refer to the following link for the source the Fijian Language Week poster: <https://www.facebook.com/152347608151169/photos/a.152601124792484/794619180590672/?type=3>

<sup>10</sup> Refer to the following link for more information: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Fiji](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Fiji)

in New Zealand have taken their view of the art more seriously when they migrated. Even when they return to Fiji for a visit, their families in Fiji are aware of how well versed they are with their culture and heritage. According to Kali Vunidilo (personal interview, 2020), it is like their culture and traditional knowledge have been captured in a 'time capsule.' To many of us, 'art' is a living thing, art is communally owned and celebrated in various forms. In mainstream cultures, others believe that art exists in a gallery or in the museum, however to the *iTaukei*, 'art' transcends generations, and is celebrated communally through *meke* (dances), *vosa* (language), *tukuni* (story-telling), *masi* (bark-cloth) and many art-forms that are shared by both young and old.



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