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Alexander Greene
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Music In Its Social Context:
Fiji In A Microcosm

By:
Alexander Greene

Fetaomi Tapu-Qiliho
Academic Director

Calvin Rore
Advisor

School For International Training, Fiji
Fall 2009

*To my Mom and Dad,
Bali and the Ner,
And Cubby*

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Abstract:

The music of Fiji flows throughout the country as rich as the food and as omnipresent as the kava. Music touches all aspects of the Fijian way of life. Whether one is Indo-Fijian, Indigenous Fijian, from another pacific island, kylomo, or a kavailagi, there is no escaping music while in Fiji. This paper looks to explore the different social settings and context that music is created and then in turn listened to, and how the social setting of Fiji has shaped what music is created here. This paper also attempts to gather in a cohesive manner, what music is being produced within Fiji at this time, especially in the genre of Hip-Hop; the voice of the people.

Contacts:

Communications Fiji Limited:
231 Waimanu Road, Suva
679-331-4766

Niuwave Media Solutions:
99 Gordon Street, Suva

Musica Records:
8 Mitchell Street, Suva
Apartment A106

Oceania Center for Arts and Culture:
University of the South Pacific, Laucala Campus
679-323-1000

Underdawg Productions:
www.youtube.com/underdawg

Introduction:

Music in Fiji is as much a part of the country as the ocean. It is always present, softly lapping against the shore or booming down onto a reef in a thunderous roar. It surrounds the island life, always present and ever true to the island atmosphere. It is as diverse as the ocean life. There is Sigidrigi, Vude, and other traditional music of the Indigenous Fijian population rolling languorously from village kava circles to the various performances in Albert Park. There are Bollywood hits, Hindustani songs, and blended remixes blaring from the corner stores and taxi radios. All of the Pacific Islands are represented on the radio and buses, as the youth's flavor of the week is blasted over the airwaves. And of course, the ever-present siege of globalization is shown on MTV or through the creative blended remixes of Pacifica music and western lyrics. The rest of the music that you see will lead you to find that the people of Fiji will listen to just about any type of music that gives them the feeling of relaxation and exaltation from their daily lives of work.

All of this music is obviously shaped by their social fabric and woven into their culture through many years of island life. It is hard to imagine that Fiji at any point went through a tumultuous period but in fact Fiji has been afflicted with four military coups. Two in 1987, one in 2000, and one in 2006 all of which turned back the nation many years over in cultural, racial and developmental progress. It is important to note that most of these coups arose out of racial tensions between the Indigenous and Indo Fijian populations. But as any nation with two groups in contention for control, there seems to still be a scourge of hatred and violence throughout the country. Whether it is in relation

to problems over land rights, who owns and controls the businesses, or simply because of differences in culture, there still seems to be a great amount of internal suffering within Fiji. On top of all this, there is an ever present population of other Pacific Islanders ranging from but not limited to, Papua New Guineans, Samoans, Tongans, Solomon Islanders, Tuvaluans and many more. Within the social framework of Fiji, there are many aspects and portals for music to take hold and take flight within this small island community.

To fully give a comprehensive look at the different frameworks of social uses of music that I studied, I will set up my paper as follows. I will first fully describe the main musical genres that I studied in Fiji, giving the reader a background in history, styles and aspects of the genre. I will then go through the different social frameworks that I studied and the music that was produced out of each. I will end my research paper with one case study I conducted with a contact within the Hip-Hop community in Fiji. Finally I will conclude my research and findings, tying together aspects of all parts of my research and work to create a final cohesive glance at the social constructions affecting the music produced in Fiji.

Justification For Study:

When given the task of coming up with a topic for my independent research project, I initially jumped at something to do with the musical life of Fiji. A musician myself, I almost always gravitate towards anything to do with music. But once I set my sights on the topic of music, I was not sure where my sights would land. I finally came to the conclusion, after some research and thoughtful consideration, that a research project

delving into the social context of music today in Fiji would be highly interesting, important and quite literally trailblazing.

There is almost little to no recorded documentation to the different social context and sub-cultures of musical life here in Fiji. Within each genre of music, there is an ever growing and changing life that surrounds and supports each style of music. No research or documentation of modern contemporary music has really been done except the few newspaper articles of some of the well-known artists from Fiji. While there was some documentation on the traditional music forms that occurred in the yesteryears of Fiji, I found it disconcerting that there were no records of what the musicians of today are doing. This is highly problematic. For one, the musicians of today deserve more credit, respect and representation. They are thriving in an industry that is continually becoming harder and harder to succeed in. Secondly, to study the different genres and aspects of music in Fiji, is to in a microcosm, look at society in Fiji today, allowing one to gain insight and information into a society from a completely different light. By looking at just one small aspect of musical life in Fiji, allows one to see the social context and institutions that are the force behind what is happening today in Fiji socially.

While I attempted to cover the entire scope of music in Fiji, I spent a considerable more amount of time looking into the culture of the Hip-Hop community in Fiji. The justification for dedicating a considerable amount of time to this genre panned out like this. Hip-Hop is often referred to as the voice of the voiceless, or the true representation of thought and ideologies for any given community. Hip-Hop, a musical style based primarily on lyricism, is an interesting form of music, sometimes reading as a historical look into a community. It is a forum for members of a given community to voice their

opinions, a style of music that comes with a highly stratified society, a musical genre that includes a distinct art form and dance, and most importantly, a musical style that has a thriving culture to it. Hip-Hop is more interesting than any other genre of music for these reasons and also because it is at times a dangerous genre, saying things that should not be said. With the coup culture of Fiji and the military backed government, I thought it would be interesting to look into the Hip-Hop communities reaction to these topics. Through my case studies I hoped to gain special access into this underground community of Fiji.

While my paper initially serves my use as the final component to my semester, I truly believe that the research I have conducted is beneficial to the musical community of Fiji. While it isn't much and was constrained and carved down due to time constraints, I believe that the data and information I uncovered is truly a original and new piece of work documenting the life of music in Fiji and the people who create it. I believe that my documentation of this topic is a note of sincere respect I have for the arts, especially music, and the people and culture that surrounds it. Music is far too often given little to no weight or respect in schools, government, or daily life and in the end, this paper is just one way of showing music that people care, and should care.

Audience:

For the purposes of my assignment, my audience will be those who are academia within Fiji and outside of Fiji evaluating my project and assessing the work I have done. While the people who will be reading this research paper will be highly educated individuals on the whole, not all will have a understanding of music itself and the terms used. I write this paper on the assumption that the reader has a little knowledge of

Western musical terms and philosophies. Likewise, I will use ideas and philosophies from sociological, anthropological, and ethno-musicological backgrounds in this paper and do not assume that all the readers will have a full understanding. I therefore will attempt to give a thorough explanation when needed of a term that I believe will not be understood. While I have no preconceived notions of what will come, I do hope that this paper will perhaps reach those people in Fiji who will be able to use the work I have done to fully document the musical culture of Fiji today.

Methodology:

When I first decided that I wanted to my research paper to be a study of music in Fiji, I was forced to decide what section, style, point, or area of music I wanted to study. As I looked more and more into the culture and history surrounding music, I realized that nothing had been documented thus far on the modern day music scene. This posed me with an interesting and challenging position from which to tackle this unstudied area of life in Fiji. I decided that through a few different methods I would be able to gain a good understanding and sound access to the world of music in the capital city of Fiji, Suva.

Research Methods:

For the research period, the research methods I used were interviews, observation, literary research, and participation; playing with various musicians in Fiji. All of these methods combined were able to give me a very good understanding and idea of what it means to be a musician today in Fiji. While all of the methods were not as fruitful in their

findings, I am convinced that it was necessary to have all of these styles of research a part of my methodology.

In my mind, the interviews were easily the most fruitful and thoughtful pieces of information I gathered during the whole research period. Thankfully for my own sake, all of the informants that I made contact with were so happy to help me in my quest for knowledge in their own private circle. My first informants came from my advisor Calvin Rore. Calvin, who is ingrained deep into the musical world of Fiji and Suva, was able to put me into contact with a handful of musicians from the Suva City area. With his help, I was able to make contact with some of these people and from there, more and more names were given to me from these first interviewees.

As I gained more names, I found that often the interviewees from the Hip-Hop community were the most eager to talk, and at times, were very excited at the proposition of having someone who wanted to talk with them about their passion. This initial observation is what prompted me to not only cover the Hip-Hop genre, but also dedicate a considerable amount of time to the culture and create three case studies out of the research I gathered. For the case studies I sought to meet with my informants more than once, gather music from them, and delve my interviews into deeper content than with my other interviewees. I kept my interviews informal, upbeat and very casual as to provide the most comfort for all of my interviewees, not just the case study informants. I often went in with not too many questions, but many guiding thoughts, phrases and ideas that I wished to talk about. I allowed our conversation speed and vibe determine how I breached certain topics and how to phrase certain questions. As far as I am concerned,

these interviews often seemed to be much more like to two musicians talking about what they love most.

Along with my interviewing I also engaged in observing these various musicians in action. The best way to get a feel for someone's music is definitely by seeing them play in the moment, live, in front of people. Through my various stops at different clubs, bars, outdoor venues and festivals, I was able to watch these various musicians play their hearts out. While there wasn't much concrete information gathered during these sessions, I believe it was important to see musicians in their element. I not only got to observe the musicians, but I also got to see the general public react to the music and in turn, see the whole cycle come full circle; music being played socially. These performances gave me the chance to see the mood and vibe of each individual setting of music.

The literary research, unfortunately, seemed to be the least effective to my research. I was unable to find any current ethnomusicology articles or scholarly research on the topic within Fiji. This at first seemed unfortunate and would have appeared to hinder my research, but after talking to my advisor and other academia, I found that this would allow me to craft my research however I wanted and be able to look into the culture without any other preconceived notions or ideas of what I should be finding. I was of course, able to find other ethnomusicology, anthropology, and sociology articles from other topics and fields to help guide me and lead me to a sound methodology of research.

The last component of research for my project was to actually engage and interact with the various musicians I studied and to play the music they know and love. This turned out to be for me to be the most fun, because I was able to experience their world of music from their point of view. This interaction and playing took place informally and

often impromptu, as the musicians themselves would be eager to play with some one from the outside who was a musician themselves. What began as just sheer pleasure and fun turned out to be an experience that allowed me to see their music from the perspective of a player and not an observer. This also helped me to gain the trust and friendship of a few of them and allow me to really be trusted with the information they were willing to pass along. Along with this, I was also privileged enough to be able to have been taught a few traditional sigidrigi songs from my own Fijian language teacher. These provided me with insight into the lyrics, meaning, and content found in some of the most popular traditional Fijian compositions.

Initial Objectives:

My initial objectives, while not far off from what I finally ended up completing, were far exceeding the time allotted to me for the research period. Four weeks to complete the whole project was certainly not enough time for me to complete the research I initially intended to complete. This however did not pose to be as big of a problem to me as I thought and in fact forced me to shave off some excessive topics and really helped me to force my hand in deciding what I thought to be the most important to what I wanted to research. However, there are certainly some parts of my research that I wish to have been able to complete, which I will now discuss in the challenges and weaknesses section.

Challenges and Weaknesses:

While on the whole my research flowed smoothly and without many problems, I certainly encountered a few hurdles while attempting my research. Besides some of the

smaller issues I encountered in my work, which I already briefly described in previous sections, these problems were of the most significance. I experienced issues in the following areas; difficulties in the planning stage, availability of participants, and most of all, time constraints.

During the planning stage I was in a sense, given the task of finding people I did not know much about or how to contact them. Besides the informants that were given to me by Calvin, I was given the challenge of finding my own musicians, producers, studio technicians and composers to interview. This proved to be a very time consuming and difficult process where I found myself spending considerable time on-line looking for local musicians and how to get in contact with them. I did however succeed in getting in touch with a handful of interviewees and was given a good depth of musicians in many fields. I am most upset however, at the fact that most of my informants came from a mostly Indigenous Fijian background. This however proved to be a consequence of the people I knew, who were all Fijian, and referred me to their Fijian friends. While I fully acknowledge the beautiful and absolutely melodious music that the Indian, Chinese, Rotuman, and other Pacific Islanders make, I unfortunately just did not have the resources or time to dedicate a good amount of research into their music and culture.

Another major source of difficulties came out during my attempts to reach certain informants that I wished to interview. The research was definitely made harder and considerably slowed down just by the difficulties I had in trying to contact certain people. Some interviewees never got back to me or never followed through on their supposed intentions of wanting to interview with me. One music instructor at FIT (Fiji Institution of Technology) never called me back after leaving over five messages with his secretary

and on his personal voice message machine. Other interviewees stood me up, leaving me at supposed locations where they were willing to meet with me. On top of that, often the interviewees I did finally get in touch with and did eventually interview took up to a week of planning to just arrange an appropriate time to meet with them, especially with my case studies, due to the length that I wished to interview them for. In the end, this appeared to contribute the largest part to my most frustrating problem and challenge, the oft despised and hated time constraint.

While I understand it is completely impractical to have a research period have no time constraint, and while I understand that in general, our three month program is not really that much time in the whole framework of a school year, I still am frustrated by the fact we did not have more time to complete our fieldwork. Four weeks is not a long time to plan an ISP, discuss plan and revise plan with an advisor, research said topic, seek out informants, get in touch with informants, gain trust with informants, go to performances, engage in activities pertaining to my research and so on. I found myself continually finding out that my eyes were bigger than my stomach and that I had bitten off more than I could chew. I originally intended to visit Nadi and Lautoka as well to conduct research, but found that due to monetary and time constraints it just wasn't going to happen. This at first felt considerably disappointing but I found that through an upbeat mind setting and philosophy that this just led me to what information I did find, which is considerably fruitful and forthcoming.

Ethics:

While my project for the most part went smoothly and without any major problems, there were a few small ethical dilemmas I encountered along the way. For one,

as I already have stated, this project was originally intended to be a research project that covered a very broad range of music and styles. As I stated before, there was unfortunately no time to interview and find all the informants I wanted and clearly I am lacking in information regarding other races in Fiji and their musical cultures. That is why I am being upfront and sincere when I say that I wish I had more time to make this an unbiased and fully comprehensive project but frankly, it just wasn't going to happen with the time allotted. Along with this issue came the ethical dilemma of not wanting to ask questions in the wrong way as to cause any difficulties or problems for my interviewees. While on the whole my project is not an intrusive topic or based on a touchy subject where one would feel uncomfortable, I always wanted to be sure that I was taking the best precautions I could as to be sensitive.

Another major issue I have been having throughout this process is to be as honest and unbiased I can be when quoting all of my interviewees in my paper. I have recorded all of my interviews, so misquoting is not going to be an issue but rather misconstruing or taking certain quotes out of context. I have done my utmost hardest and best to not misconstrue any of my interviewees as they are the lifelines of my project and I am most grateful to them.

Music In Its Social Context:

Music is alive as ever within the Fijian Islands. Music soars sweeps and dives from all possible mediums and from every possible corner. Ask anyone to sing and they can. Ask anyone who their favorite artists are and they'll have plenty. Music is as engrained in their culture as is Yaqona. Their social framework however, has shaped and molded their musical styles and the atmosphere that surrounds it and creates it into a distinctly Fijian style. The music that is produced, remixed, and enhanced here has been given a unique Fijian flare. The music taught in the schools here and the performances given live in the various venues for music all have a special Fijian stamp. This paper seeks to find out what exactly are the Fijian social structures in music, and how they have distinctly shaped what music is produced in Fiji today.

Education:

Education in every culture is often the way most children are introduced into subjects that they are not shown at home. For any kid who does not have parents, family, or friends growing up who are involved in music or musicians themselves, often their first introduction to music comes in their first years of schooling. For young children, having music at a young age can be of a huge importance to their over all well being and progress as students. In many studies, researchers have found that music involvement will help students cultivate good nature, strength in math, and overall awareness and appreciation of culture. In Ruth V. Brittin's research paper in the *Journal Of Research In Music Education*, she found that "assessing and understanding listeners musical

preferences is important for those wishing to cultivate tolerance, appreciation or fondness of practices of many cultures.” (Brittin 329) This correlation finds that musical experience and development in the arts can lead listeners from as young as the entry period of schooling to be able to garner a larger world sense and model of understanding to their outside world and cultures beyond. For the Fijian culture this would prove to be an important role of music education. For a society that is isolated from any major country by considerable distance, Fiji is in a sense, on its own in the middle of the ocean. The other major countries around Fiji are other small pacific island nations, many of whom you will find in Fiji because it is the largest of the Pacific Islands, Suva being the hub of activity in the area. For students to be able to learn and engage in other pacific cultures and musical styles would greatly help the nations forge a strong bond and relationship. But unfortunately this is not the case. As one of my informants passed on to me about his own education, he stated that,

“You have to do mathematics and English. And you do other subjects and if don’t pass you’d get whipped. We had nothing in music. Now there are music classes and art classes, some choir. Finally they are starting the curriculum to help kids for their future.”

Another of my interviewees stated as well that, “When I was in school, we weren’t taught any music or theory, there was no practical music training.” As my informant points out, emphasis is placed heavily on the sciences and literary genres of subjects in schools.

While sciences and literary studies are important, there are places for extracurricular classes in a range of subjects. But even here, music is far lacking behind all other extracurricular subjects. As far as extracurricular activities, this informant went

on to say that the only real viable option for most kids is sports. Furthermore, another one of my informants, a sound engineer in a local studio, went on to say that,

“I think it’s not fair (the lack of music classes in school). I think its one thing the Government should invest in. There are a lot of talented people here, but there is no money or time invested into them. But sports on the other hand, there is a lot of money and time, and people are not becoming famous and making money off it.”

Often the excuse to not spend time and money on music classes is that in the end, students wont be able to make money or better their lives off it. But what this informant points to though is that this doesn’t happen with sports either, which much time and money is invested in. But in the end what a lot of my informants pointed to is that there has been some change in the curriculum over the years. Slowly but surely musical education has been coming more into the limelight and given more weight as an important subject for the youth of Fiji to engage in but it is still far lacking in relation to all other programs in schools.

Youth Music Culture:

Because musical education has a lot of room for growth and expansion to become a larger part of the curriculum, there has been a strong decline in musicianship and musicians in the younger generations. As stated before, most of children’s introduction, schooling, and practice of music comes out during their formidable years as students. Without proper schooling and teaching, their skills in the arts will not expand and grow, as they should. This concept came out in many of my interviews. Many of my informants

when asked about schooling and the younger generations musical tastes and habits, they seemed at times unsure if there was a lot of musicianship at all in the youth. As one of my informants stated about his own childhood, when he grew up, “it was just your either going be a doctor or a nurse or a lawyer. No one thought maybe you can make money doing music.” This sense of a lack of regard for the arts has seemed to be prevalent even today and summed up well by his statement that “music here, today, is just not given any value.”

This seems to hold true when you look into what today’s youth are doing with music themselves. Very often my research led me to find that there was a very small group of young people today who are actively engaged in making music themselves. Often older musicians I interviewed and talked to were displeased at the youths lack of wanting to play. One musician I interviewed said he was discouraged from all angles when he was younger yet he still persevered and followed his heart to play.

“I was told when I was younger that playing music was not something I should be doing. My parents scolded me and told me there is no money. Then finally I got my first gig, playing with my uncle’s band, though I didn’t tell my parents. I got paid two dollars for that show, and when I went home that night I was so happy that even though it was two dollars, I had done it and proven them wrong.”

Many times these older musicians would almost feel ashamed that the next generation wasn’t interested in making music themselves. They would tell me that only in the village do you see kids who play music or want to play. They said that now, almost every kid has a cell phone with music on it and that is enough for them. These kids today believe that

music is just something put there for them to listen to and they never want to actually get involved and play themselves.

Often the older musicians would pass on the idea that kids weren't doing any music today whatsoever, but after doing some research and interviewing, I found this not to be the case. Today, the music the youth is doing has taken a totally new form and is challenging the perceptions of the older generations views on what playing music is. Youth today have fully engaged and grasped onto what is called remixing or mashing up songs. These youth, who have of late been quite enamored with western pop, have started taking western accapella (just the vocal track) versions of pop songs, and creating a Fijian island backing track to them. They are in fact taking western song influence and "Fijianizing" them. This is most often heard on the dance floors of the clubs in Suva or on the booming buses careening through the streets. The youth today have become very keen on creating island beats to western pop tracks and fusing the two together to create remixed version for their personal liking. This process begins with the kids finding accapella versions of songs they love, and then going back to their homes on their computers where they digitally create an island sounding beat to the same tempo of the vocal track. After layering the two on top of each other, they have now created a completely localized version of something they have seen and heard from abroad. While this holds true for a small amount of the youth population, most kids today only care if they have music to listen to.

Power Of Westernization:

Even more so, students of the arts and kids who are interested in music seem to only really be interested in what Western culture is propagating today. Globalization is

far-reaching and ever powerful, in Fiji as well. When television was introduced and came barreling into Fiji in 1991, so did the barrage of Western images and influence as well. What children are shown today on television is a predominance of western culture through mostly western television programs. With television channels like MTV, children are given a barrage of images and ideas and customs of western culture. As one of my informants, a local singer in the Suva area, stated “Influence from the west has made it so that people now are interested in western music and not local.” Furthermore he stated that, “The kids here really love to listen to western music and the trends from over seas. They are not that interested in what is being recorded here.” When I asked him further about why he thought kids were more interested in Western music, he stated that he thought it was because it was different and given more time and money in production. He thought that kids liked that a lot of the music videos shown on television have lights, dancers, and even special effects. He also went on to say

“I don’t think we have qualified sound engineers. Because if you listen to something recorded here in comparison to recordings from over seas, the stuff recorded here is of a poor quality.”

Therefore when kids are given the chance to listen to music locally produced or produced from over seas, they will go with the overseas recording. This however can be problematic.

When children are given the chance to listen and watch music and the accompanying videos, there are subliminal messages, philosophies and ideas that accompany each. Though on the surface watching television seems like a very simple and passive action, when one watches television, they are taking in all the nuances and

actions of the characters, their language, style, and even movements. For a nation with a drastically different culture than the one they are viewing, this can be a very intense observation of a life they may not fully understand. For a child who watches music videos here in Fiji of artists from America, they may immediately and without thought assume that what is happening in the video is actually how these people in America act normally at home. I have experienced this myself while being here in Fiji. On more than one occasion I have been sitting with my host family here in Fiji and been watching music videos from abroad. Often, when they see some particular action happen on the screen, whether it be from dancing, defamation of women, alcohol abuse and so on, they ask me if this is what life is really like in America. I in turn explain that this is an exaggerated scene used to give the artist an image that they wish to embody and portray, often very far from reality. Without my being here and explaining that, my family may have assumed that this was in fact a proper way of acting and how Americans act depending on the scene of the video. This is where the problem arises. Through music television, youth and adults alike are perhaps conjuring the wrong images of what music is like in America and abroad. From here they may be taking in the wrong messages and may be valuing things that should not have value.

During many conversations I have had with various parents in the Suva area, they have told me of their worries about what western influence is doing to their own children. They have told me that because their children are impressionable and may not understand the context of where the images and music video are coming from, then they are being taught things that they should not be taught. In one specific conversation I had with a local mother from Namadi Heights she stated that she believed,

“its terrible that our children see this. I think that they see these things on television and then they believe its true. They want to act like that and behave in bad ways and they don’t understand that it’s not real and not how people should act.”

This is perhaps the worse part of the globalization phenomenon. That people from other cultures are being shown actions that they themselves are not ready to see and understand. It can also have negative effects on their own culture.

From a few of my interviewees, I began to get a sense that while they enjoyed some of the benefits and new ideas that came in with Westernization, they often despised the fact that in the end, they found it watered down their own culture. When asked about music of the past and music of today one interviewee stated that,

“When you listen to older song’s lyrics, the songs are about palm trees, coconuts, and sunny beaches; the beauty of the island. But now, I hardly hear that in the songs. I think now, people are following western influence.”

From his perspective, the essence of Fijian music has been lost to the influx of western influence. The social context for which the music was once created has been shifted slightly, but not naturally he claims. “Television really shapes music. Shows like MTV, the kids get a lot of inspiration from what they see.” The advent of the television and the influx of western culture has begun to reshape their music. While many people are happy to see the globalization take effect, some are not happy that it is changing the traditional sense of what their music is and what it means to them. For now, you can even put the radio on and not hear a traditional song or any type of song produced from Fiji.

Radio:

For an outsider coming into Fiji, I was very taken aback at the fact that the music broadcasted to Fiji is for one, segregated, and two, mostly of western origin. While I have not spent a great deal of time surfing all of the airwaves, the most popular Fijian channels that are broadcast seem to have a distinct western influence. Fijians in their own country are now not even listening to their own music while tuning into radio stations. But this is not the biggest factor. The most dramatic point of interest on the stations is the fact that they are indeed segregated by Hindi listeners and Fijian listeners. This would appear to be on the surface quite alarming (which it was), but after talking to radio representatives I found that according to them, it was a clear and obvious choice. One radio employee put it this way,

“You find people who listen to both languages in a very small number. It would be very hard to cater to both the markets on one channel. FM 96 used to run English and Fijian and a lot of those different things (Hindi Music), but as those numbers grew, I mean a distinctive race number grew listening to that station, they want more of that music that they listen to. It was initially just one English station with a few hours of Fijian and a few hours Hindi and then as the markets grew for both of those, and different requests were made, the other channels were created.”

From the channels point of view, they found that the listeners wanted to hear more of what they liked. But with competing styles and numbers of listeners growing for both sects of music, the channels were forced to create two different channels to cater to their clienteles needs. While this does make sense, I still can't help but feel like that is only

hurting race relations and not helping tie the two races together. But one local DJ told me differently.

“The Indo Fijians, they listen to Fijian songs, and a lot of the Fijians, they will listen to Indo Fijian songs. If there is a local Fijian hit on the radio, a lot of times, you will see the Hindi taxi and bus drivers will be listening and playing the Fijian hit.”

This concept appears to be of a crossover affect. If the radio is playing Hindi hits only on Hindi stations and Fijian hits only on Fijian stations, then they are forcing the different races to cross over to different channels and open their minds to different music. As he summed it up well,

“We are diverse in Fiji. You have the indigenous population, the Hindi population, and all the other islands. But music is like a form of identity. Its something you can't take away. The Indo-Fijians will stick to the Hindi music, because that is something they identify with. But no one minds. You just listen to your own music.”

But while the radio stations are helping to tie the two major race groups together and forcing them to listen to one another's music, it appears they are doing little at all to help local emerging artists who are trying to make a name for themselves. The major radio stations in Fiji have given little to no attention to the starving local artists, hoping for their big break. With a weary group of investors, only willing to invest in young acts once they have radio play, its no wonder that very few make it.

“People are just waiting for these local artists to have a hit. Then they will lend the support. You will stay unknown unless you move to PNG or Australia.”

But with this attitude, artist will be forced out of Fiji, starting the country to have a smaller group of musicians. This will then allow the industry to take a huge hit, losing so many of their best and brightest musicians to nearby countries where it is easier to make it as a musician. For music to thrive in this country, it appears as if there needs to be an attitude adjustment. If the radios only play western music and promote that, then musicians will continue to be pushed out of their own homes to make a living. My interviewee went on to say that,

“There are no music programs on TV that encourages local songs, or producers or DJ’s. Being a DJ here is like being a janitor. They don’t see it as a profession. If only the radio came up with shows to invite producers and artists to come out.

Then we will see the kind of stuff people are working on that we don’t even know about.”

If there is to be a change in the atmosphere for musicians here today, then it seems like musicians need someone to step in from higher and come down and help them to create an open and better educated system for them to operate and create what they love. These musicians are all passionate about what they do, yet with no support system for them, there will never be progress and they will not continue to grow and evolve in the way that they should. “It’s developing slowly, it’s evolving. Local music is evolving, but the pace is not that fast in comparison to other pacific islands.”

Hip-Hop Case Study:

During the weeks of research I did, primarily through interviews, I often found that the Hip-Hop performers, artists, and DJ's, were the most eager to talk. They often insisted that I come right away, would be very curious as to what I was doing, and always wanted to tell me as much as they could. These artists were attempting to thrive in a society where they were shunned and told what they were doing was wrong. These men were forced to battle their way through societal pressures to conform to the norms of Fijian music yet they persevered and pushed through to create their own subculture. My research into the Hip-Hop culture proved to be the only attempt to capture their lives and music and my attempts did not go unnoticed. I take it as a testament to their struggle to maintain a sense of propriety that they were so pleased to help and their excitement that someone actually cared about what they were creating. While I know I am no gift to them, I just wish to share this with you to show you how little has been done to help this art form and musical expression. These artists deserve an extreme amount of acknowledgement for what they are doing, not only because they are talented individuals, creative minds, and outstanding showmen, but also because they do it with most of a nation breathing down their backs telling them it is wrong.

This case study aims to look into the views of one emcee within the Hip-Hop community and what it is that has shaped and focused his aim in their music. This part of my field research aims to shed light to the underworld of the Hip-Hop community through this musicians frank and condor explanation of life in his own musical society.

Case Study:

My case study delved into the life of one emcee from the Suva city area. This performer has spent his whole life growing up in Fiji and has been immersed into music since he was a young child. He began his journey into music through his first major purchase as a child when he bought a second hand guitar. From there as he said it, he never looked back. As far as Hip-Hop, he said he began listening to it first, when he was just a young lad in school back in 1996. Through a few friends he was able to get a hold of a few CD's from the states and from there the seeds were planted. He tells his story like this,

“I got into and deep into it in 96, 97. The Fugees just came out with the Score album and it was one of the top five hundred best albums ever. And it was hardcore Hip-Hop, not just that Vanilla Ice kind of stuff, one hit wonder. So back then, it wasn't like we could download, so we would just meet people who had a few hip hop CD's and from there we would get introduced to a bunch of other artists like Bone, Thugs and Harmony, and Tupac. And CD's back then were cheap. Back then it wasn't so much an excepted genre. Everyone was listening to Lucky Dube. And he's cool, but its just overkill. We all enjoy our reggae, but there is a lot of bad reggae and a lot of people really like it and like it loud. And so we all got into it, there was a small circle of us.”

From his retelling of his early beginnings it is easy to see that from the get go there was opposition to his lifestyle. As he states, everyone was listening to reggae, and he was opposed to that. His opposition to the norm was clearly going to be a catalyst for some problems. Throughout his interview he always continued to go back and talk about how

hard it was for people to accept what he was doing. He states that it clearly wasn't an accepted way to live and that people just despised what he was doing. He talked a lot about being beaten up in school, bullied by other kids, yelled at by his parents, and the vacant stares he would get from people passing by.

“You'd have one out of every ten or twenty gangs that listened to rap music, It was lonely, not many people were doing what we were trying to do and they didn't like us for that.”

This isolation however seems to have been a driving force for their creation of a very secular subculture. They have been able to create their own version of Hip-Hop culture that is based on what they have needed to gain out of it.

“We've managed to sort of tame it (Hip-Hop music) so it suits us. I mean you've been here a while, maybe you've see the way all of the pacific, how they take something and then localize it, whether it is clothes or food. And I think the same thing with the music. We talk or own talk, we have our own slang even in English, so we do take on a lot of western stuff but we do tame it so that it suits us.”

This isolation, from their own peers and from the greater outside Hip-Hop world, has forced them to be more creative, more productive and produce their own style and flare. In many of their songs, you will my informant and many of his other counterparts rap in a Fijian and English mix, slicing words together, creating their own code language from which they rap.

Often Hip-Hop is talked about coming in a three pronged attack. It is said to comprise of the emceeing and music, the breaking and dancing, and the graffiti or art

form of the culture. In America the art form of the underground Hip-Hop culture has steadily stayed in the form of graffiti writing, the act of tagging ones name and “composing advertisements through fat marker and spray paint,” (Chang 74) on city streets and subways. But here in Fiji, the local Hip-Hop culture has taken graffiti to a different level and have localized it.

“The graffiti goes back to what we were saying about localizing the types of western cultures. These groups here have their own artwork. But a lot of these crews have one person in their gang that’s a real good artist with a Pacific twist, and you see a lot of these gangs who travel around, they all have really good tattoos. Every group will have one really good tattooist. And that’s how it’s manifested here.”

This act of taking western ideas and concepts and making it their own has been one of the main staples to their thriving underground community. Through all the efforts and work my informant still thinks that “Fiji is trying to find what its adaptation of hip hop will be.” They are still attempting to mold and shape how Hip-Hop can be more mainstream and accepted in this Pacific community.

They are still even trying to break out their new sound here in Fiji. My interviews with this informant always touched on the fact that it is hard to have a new sound in Fiji and that their culture isn’t always an open and tolerant one.

“I think one of the hardest things about it (spreading the music) is trying to break out with a different sound here, is that you probably have to do it in Suva, and the Suva crowd is one of the hardest crowds in the world. MC Trek came out, she’s a Fijian girl from Sydney, and you would see her in her videos in Sydney or Japan,

and even if the crowd didn't know the lyrics they would just be waving their arms in the air just to be part of the vibe. It just not like that here at all.”

That lack of crowd to performer connection has forced the Hip-Hop community to stay underground and not be able to perform their music to the public. The radios aren't playing, the television isn't projecting, and the clubs aren't promoting, so therefore they are forced to continually take chances and attempt to put their music out into the forefront where the general public isn't necessarily going to be receptive. One possibility to this phenomenon that my informant had was this,

“Right now we have this rural to urban and vice a versa thing going on where people are moving a lot. Where everyone who used to live in rural areas are moving into Suva. But that's why everything has been slow here. People just come in to Suva and they are in awe and are not ready to be open. They can be self-conscious. In ten years time, ten times more tourists will have come and shown more western culture as well.”

This lack of crowd participation is now not letting the performers have a second venue in which to showcase their music. This diaspora from the stage had made their rapping and style different. Focusing primarily on lyricism instead of musical composition, these rappers are able to hone their lyrical skill to a specialty.

Many of these emcees have perfected their skill to the point of being able to rap about a range of subjects, from the sublime to the most heartfelt, poignant masterpieces. While not as prevalent, certain emcees have been able to write and pen original and perfectly accurate portrayals of city life in Suva and the hardships that many youths feel today.

“Hip-hop here is about everyone’s personal struggle. Gangs sing about finding out they have a kid, or not being able to make it in the corporate world. Hip-hop here is a more fun thing. The people who do hip hop here are the people you would want to go out and party till morning here. Its not so much the gangster thing as it would be in the states. We are big people, but we don’t run rings and things like that, what we rap about is everyday things, but you know that included fights and shit and getting arrested.”

My informant indicates that the personal struggle that all youths face today in Suva is an easily relatable subject that is good to communicate for the community. He went on to say that he believed that his community was in need of people who would be willing to put out conscious music that really touched on important subjects and accurately displayed life here with no political intervention.

My informant went on to explain that his use of music is often a therapeutic action, one that lets him breath easier and relieve stress from a hard day. In a high-strung fast paced job at one of the local radio stations, he stated that music is just an overall good thing for the mind, body and soul.

“Music is just a good form of venting. You just release what you are feeling at that moment. That’s why I started to write and why I continue to write. Some people have sports, but for me its music. It’s also cool to look back and see what you were going through at a certain time.”

On top of looking at oneself through a microcosm, one is also able to see the community at large through what one was artistically expressing at any certain time. For my

informant, he expressed that when he goes through any certain problem, whatever it may be, he usually has this epiphany,

“In any society, as much as you think what you are going through is a personal thing, you don’t realize how many people are going through the same thing as you. It’s just something everyone can relate to.”

In that way, my informant’s music has become a tool for him to use to express his deepest emotions and views with the general public, while knowing that those youth who are listening are going through the same feelings as well. This connection is a highly effective way and mean of allowing youth with their backs against the wall, vent and cope with issues that are perhaps too big for them to handle on their own.

Through all of the interviews I had with my informant, it was the ideas that Hip-Hop can be a tool for community strengthening and communication that was most important to him. He felt that in a way, his music was at times a documentary on the life of a boy growing up in Fiji. He truly feels that music is the great unifier, allowing anyone to listen and partake. His views are a great insight into a community that is forced to operate on their own level and are constantly scrutinized. His retelling and general frankness provide a stark contrast to what I believe the general public feels about Hip-Hop music and those who are involved. His account has provided a stark view of a closed off community lacking in documentation.

Conclusion:

Music is as much a part of the life in Fiji as anything. Music is part of the fabric of culture that is woven together tightly like a mat, creating a rich fabric, texture and

design, weaving in and out of daily life. It is a point from which all cultures and races within Fiji draw inspiration and are proud of. But furthermore, it is a special window from which to view many parts of Fijian society from.

The different places that music is used in daily life provide those who are patient enough to explore, a special look into a slice of life in Fiji. From my research I strove to be able to look at a few of these different pieces and be able to accurately portray some of the social implications that factor daily life and music today in Fiji. This research paper is a testament not only to the music of the people, but also to the culture of these people, the factors that shape their daily lives and actions. This culture is a rich and beautiful one, full of many traditions and parts, and to attempt to document just part of one seemed daunting. I hope that this paper proved to provide some of the only known insight into some forgotten cultures and communities and perhaps even helped to shed light onto some dark areas. I ultimately hope that in the end, this paper will be able to provide some people with a basis from which to see their own culture in a different light.

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