Menarche Ceremonies & Social Change in Fiji

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Abstract: Fiji is undergoing rapid urbanization. Over fifty percent of Fiji's population has moved from traditional villages to the city. Changes in lifestyle associated with urbanization bring challenges to traditional Fijian values and ways of life. The occurrence of menarche ceremonies in Fiji is a lens by which to explore the implications of these social changes on Fijian women. Inductive interviews with sixteen Fijian women reveal that birth order, proximity to home villages, and maternal agency are three general factors that determine the occurrence of menarche ceremonies. Education is also identified as an impacting force on first menstruation events in Fiji, and reinforces the social changes occurring with urbanization in Fiji.

Introduction

When I arrived in Fiji, my aim was to explore how urbanization affects the way menstruation is treated in Fijian communities. I wrote a compact research proposal hypothesizing that as the force of urbanization pulls Fijians to the city, and as traditional lifeways are renegotiated, I would find that young Fijian women are less likely than their mothers and grandmothers to experience a traditional menarche ceremony with the occurrence of their first menstruation. The construction of my proposal was based on three fundamental assumptions: first, that cultural systems profoundly shape how people experience bodily phenomena (i.e. bodily phenomena, such as menarche, are a legitimate lens through which to understand cultural systems); second, that cultural systems are open, fluid, and continually changing; and finally, that menarche ceremonies in Fiji, even if they are becoming fragmented with the force of urbanization, are long established and widely recognized as an important traditional celebration. I had scarcely begun my stay in a rural village on the island of Kadavu before I understood that while the two former assumptions held, the latter most certainly did not.

As I began initial contextual interviews with women, young and old, I realized that the status of menarche ceremonies in Fiji was more complex than I had anticipated. I was hearing stories of first menstruation events that were diverse, contrasting, and as ambiguous as they were particular. The array of personal experiences that were collected in these interviews begged a variety of questions about menstruation and coming of age in Fiji. Why is it that some women had a menarche ceremony while others did not? What factors influence what will occur at a girl's first menstruation? Do any common themes emerge from these interviews that illuminate broader social changes occurring in Fiji? The transcripts from inductive interviews with sixteen Fijian women suggest possible answers to these questions. Three general criteria were identified as factors that influence when menarche ceremonies occur and when they do not. These are: (A) birth order, (B) proximity to village, and (C) maternal agency. Additionally, education was a recurring theme in the interview transcripts, and was identified by participants as a definitive factor shaping how young Fijian women are coming of age. Boarding away from home villages, concentrated peer interaction, and health education are three ways that education is shaping how a young Fijian woman experiences her first menstruation event. Education as it was linked to experience at first menstruation is evidence to support urbanization as a force that is reorganizing traditional ways of life in Fiji.

Literature Review

Historical Background: As with most former colonies, British colonial rule has had profound implications on the structure of contemporary Fijian society. Rather than exploit the indigenous population for labor, the British imported a secondary ethnic population from South Asia to work as indentured servants, and their descendents remain a separate but substantial group in Fiji today. Colonial powers reinforced Fijian hierarchical chiefdoms, thereby affirming traditional systems of power and indigenous ties to the land. Fiji gained independence on October 10, 1970 (Fiji Ministry of Information and Media Relations 2003), and it was not until this post-colonial era that Fiji was forced to grapple with the complex power structures existing between the Pacific Islanders who owned the land and the Indo-Fijians who worked it. While terms like "urbanization" and "Western influence" are often assumed to be a direct repercussion of colonial rule, in Fiji their weight and relevance have grown exponentially in post-colonial society. The social and political fabric of Fiji remains in transition today, as Fijians must reconcile traditional political structures (reinforced by the British) with the power vacuum left in the absence of formal colonial rule, as exemplified by the string of coup d'etats in 1987, 2000, and again in 2006 (Naidu 2004).

Communal Identity & Adolescent Initiation in Fiji: Anne Becker has conducted fieldwork in Fiji exploring the ways that the individual body is thought about and cared for communally (Becker 1995). Unlike Western societies, where the body of an individual functions both as the locus of the self and the primary vehicle for individual expression, the physical body in Fiji is modified and celebrated insofar as it serves to unify the community and affirm its collective values (Becker 1995). Often rituals marking life transitions in Fiji are centered around feasting and food sharing,

manifesting transitions in the individual's body through the cultivation, nourishment, and affirmation of the collective social body (Becker 1995).

In cultures throughout the world, adolescent initiation rituals are of particular social importance for their role in formalizing an individual's entry into adulthood (Schlegel & Barry 1980). Rituals and ceremonies surrounding the initiation of adolescents affirm the life stages of the society as a whole. Schlegel and Barry's cross-cultural study suggests that female adolescent initiations are far more likely to emphasize fertility. Given these findings, it is not surprising that a primary female adolescent ritual in Fiji occurs at the event of first menstruation (Sniekers 2005, Silverman 1971). Solomoni Biturogoiwasa describes this ritual, saying "When a girl begins to menstruate, a special mat is laid our for her and she remains at her home under the supervision of one of more female elders, who teach her about the nature and importance of this life event. On the fourth day, the girl's family prepares a feast, on this occasion known as *tunudra*, to celebrate her womanhood" (Biturogoiwasa 2001). This feast marking a girl's first period is one example of a traditional cultural practice that reinforces Becker's research on the emphasis and affirmation of the communal body in Fijian society.

Village Life & Traditional Female Roles: Traditional village life is organized by and around shared needs and communal living. This strong cultural preference for communal ways of relating stands at the center of traditional Fijian social organization, and it is reflected in numerous cultural norms and village practices, including group ownership of land, ceremonial feasting, and reciprocal gift-giving (Biturogoiwasa 2001). While it is true that village members care for and support one another based on communal norms and values, traditional villages are not egalitarian, and should not be romanticized as such. Rather, indigenous Fijian society is built on a dense network of hierarchies,

encompassing age, status, and gender (Ravuvu 1983). Fiji is a patrilineal society, with descent traced through the father's line, and also patrilocal, meaning that upon marriage a woman relocates to live in her husband's village, where her children will be incorporated into his lineage. One implication of these patriarchal structures is the control of socio-political domains within village life being left exclusively to men.

For women in Fiji, particular value is placed on their ability to bear children and produce large families (Becker 1995). But beyond bearing children, Fijian women have always participated in significant ways to the prospering of their villages (Jones 2009), organizing and carrying out activities (e.g. fishing, cooking, mat-making) that not only support daily subsistence, but also underpin the very fabric of Fijian society itself. Often these important female tasks are carried out in groups, as women work together to set out the fishing nets or harvest and prepare the material for weaving mats. Thereby, traditional communal values are lived out in the rhythm of day-to-day life, in addition to the ceremonial life of the village. But with rising rates of urban migration, female economic contributions are transitioning from traditionally-oriented, locally-based domestic activities to measurable participation in the formal economic sector, necessitating migration to cities for advanced schooling and employment.

Urbanization & Cultural Transition in Fiji: Urban living is associated with changes in lifestyle and traditional family structure. In light of these changes, and the connectedness of economic opportunity and urban migration, Fijians must negotiate between traditional life ways and the pressures and changes that accompany the macro-force of urbanization (Brison 2003). Urbanization poses challenges to the ideal of communal identity, especially as opportunities for further education and formal employment in the city allow for the expression of individual identities and the pursuit of

individual aspirations. In *The Fijian Way of Life*, Asesela Ravuvu elaborates on the tension between traditional communal values and those emerging with urbanization saying,

"Increasing contact with other people and their cultures have offered alternatives and provided the people with elements of choice which were once very much controlled in their traditional setting. New ideas and philosophies of life, whereby the rights and freedom of the individuals are unduly emphasized, have wrenched the grip of customary group demands; the trend is towards increasing individuality" (Ravuvu 1983).

Urban migration, observed especially among younger women in Fiji, lowers fertility rates and by extension changes the relationship between cultural attitudes and fertility. The fertility transition associated with urbanization has continued to gather force among the ethnic Fijian population, with fertility rates dropping a full percent between 1996 and 2007 (FIBS 2007). Schlegel and Barry's research suggests that industrialization has an inverse correlation with adolescent initiation rituals (Schlegel & Barry 1980), meaning as a society urbanizes, initiation rituals are more likely to decline. Given that over half the Fijian population now resides in urban areas (Fijian Islands Bureau of Statistics 2007), and that the gross enrollment ratio for secondary education in Fiji is nine percent higher among females than among males (UNICEF 2010), urbanization is transforming the traditional treatment of gender roles and gender-related rituals.

In keeping with Becker's research on the communal body, I hypothesize that changes and transitions in the status of Fijian women will be manifest in the communal treatment of life cycle events, such as first menstruation. Erosion of traditional lifeways and changing social expectations for Fijian girls occurring with urbanization may suggest a decline in menarche ceremonies and changing attitudes about menstruation in Fijian communities. Thereby, first menstruation events

among different generations become a lens by which to explore social changes caused by the collision of urbanization and traditional lifeways.

Methods

Field Setting: The country of Fiji is comprised of three hundred islands, only one hundred of which are inhabited by the population. The interviews forming this research were conducted on Kadavu (pronounced Kandavu), Fiji's fourth largest island. Kadavu is relatively remote, with no internal roadways or established infrastructure for electricity. Access to urban areas from Kadavu is either by overnight ferry or by small plane. For the duration of this field research, I lived in one traditional Fijian village, made up of roughly twenty households, with a total village population of around 120 people. The formal focus groups were conducted in a neighboring village that was a half-hour hike up the mountain. This village was larger in size, with a more robust pool of young menarcheal women. The research site was selected because it lacked direct proximity to urban areas, and was therefore more likely to demonstrate traditional values and retain traditional celebrations and practices, but was not so disconnected as to completely prohibit access to the city.

Participants: The sample for this study was a group of sixteen Fijian women, living in a rural village on Kadavu Island. The sixteen research participants formed two cohorts. Nine of the women comprised a young, post-menarcheal cohort between the ages of 17 and 39, and the seven remaining women comprised an older, menopausal cohort, and were between 46 and 71 years of age. Given that patrilocality is Fijian custom, these women were from a diverse array villages, and collectively they represent several regions throughout Fiji. Each participant was

invited to participate in the focus group by the wife of the *turaga ni koro* (the village administrator), in compliance with appropriate village protocol.

Data Collection: Permission to collect the data was granted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted using a focus group model, with 3-5 women per group. Focus groups were adopted for this research because of a strong traditional preference for interaction in communal settings. Anthropologist Anne Becker articulates this preference in regards to her own fieldwork saying,

"Although it seemed initially that the presence of others might bias the designated respondent, it gradually became quite clear that an exclusive one-on-one interview, being more than a bit unnatural in the context of village life, was likely to introduce a different kind of bias to the interview material" (Becker 1995).

The interviews took place in a village household where no men were present, and each group interview lasted approximately one hour. The focus groups were facilitated in the native language by the expertise of a female Fijian research assistant. These interviews were digitally recorded with the consent of the research participants, and translated into English by a female Fijian research assistant who was present during the focus groups.

Data Analysis: Multiple copies of the interview transcripts were printed, read, and reviewed over a series of months. With a basis in grounded theory, the transcripts were manually coded for emergent themes. Given the risk of bias inherent in the research process, combined with the reflexive nature of anthropological fieldwork, a conscious effort was put forth to situate these

interviews within the larger framework of Fijian culture, and to hold the interview transcripts accountable to field notes and relevant life histories of the interviewees, so that the integrity of the research question and the research process as a whole was upheld.

Results & Discussion

Menarche Ceremonies—Patterns of Occurrence: There is a limited body of literature on menarche celebrations in Fiji. The scarcity of ethnographic documentation of traditional menarche ceremonies reflects both the historical primacy of male anthropologists working in the field and the limitations of their ethnography. In cultures such as Fiji, with strongly enforced traditional gender roles and taboos against adult male-female interaction outside (and even within) the familial context (Ravuvu 1983), male anthropologists had restricted access to, and thereby limited knowledge of, female social realms. The literature that does exist on menarche ceremonies, however, suggested that not only is it a legitimate traditional celebration, but one that is commonly-held in village life (Sniekers 2005, Silverman 1971). Indeed, my initial research question relied on the operating assumption that menarche ceremonies are a widely recognized and commonly experienced celebration in Fiji, even if these ceremonies are declining due to the force of urbanization.

Initial contextual interviews, however, revealed this assumption to be false—the occurrence of menarche ceremonies is highly fragmented and by no means universal, even among the older research cohort. Four of the sixteen participants (25%) experienced a menarche celebration on the occurrence of their first menstruation, one from the older cohort and three from the younger cohort. The other twelve women had a diverse array of perspectives and experiences when they began menstruating. This naturally led to questions about the fragmentation of menarche ceremonies within the traditional village setting. Clearly age was not

the most salient factor in predicting the occurrence of menarche ceremonies. What might explain when and why these ceremonies occur, and when they do not? Are there factors that might help to understand patterns of occurrence? As each participant's personal experience of her first menstruation event was recorded and manually coded, three factors emerged as basic determinants of when menarche ceremonies occur and when they do not: (A) *birth order*, (B) *proximity to elder female kin*, and (C) *maternal agency*.

Birth Order: Listening to the personal accounts of the interviewees, it became clear that traditionally only the *eldest* girl in each family has a menarche ceremony. Sometimes this was explicitly stated, as one participant in the older cohort said when asked if she had a menarche celebration, "No, only the eldest in the family has a celebration." But more often, the interviewee indirectly implied this eldest-only norm or the eldest-only link was drawn by her response to various questions. One woman, who did experience a menarche celebration at her first period, was asked how many siblings she had and her reply was, "We are four altogether. I am the eldest in our family." Another woman from the younger cohort, who did *not* have a menarche celebration, said in response to the same question, "We are eleven altogether. Eight girls and three boys. I am the third eldest in our family." The interviewer then followed up this response by asking if any of her sisters had a menarche ceremony. "Yes," she said, "only my eldest sister." Still another participant from the younger cohort who experienced a celebration at her first menstruation was asked if it was important to her that she had a menarche celebration, and she responded, "Yes. I know it was important to me because I am the eldest in our family."

Identifying menarche ceremonies as an eldest-only ritual is significant because it substantiates deeply held communal values that underpin both menarche rituals and traditional

Fijian ways of life. Menarche celebrations held only for the eldest female offspring indicate that the function of the ritual is not to provide a special celebration for each *individual* girl, but rather the celebration is enacted to reinforce the communal, and also hierarchal, norms that are significant to the organization of traditional village life. At the center of a menarche ceremony is not the adolescent girl, but rather traditional, familial, and hierarchal ways of being—thereby a girl's first menstruation is appropriated by her family to affirm and celebrate these values through collective feasting and nourishment of the communal body.

Proximity to Elder Female Kin: The proximity of a girl to her elder female kin, particularly mothers or grandmothers, at the time of her first menstruation is another important factor in understanding when menarche ceremonies are likely to occur. Mothers or grandmothers are the instigators of these family-based menarche ceremonies. The male-head of the family would be otherwise unaware that a girl has begun menstruating due to strongly gendered realms of relating in traditional village life, and therefore, it remains the responsibility of elder female kin to instigate the celebration. A girl living in the city, boarding at secondary school in town, or otherwise disconnected from her elder female kin is not likely to experience a menarche ceremony. Three of the four participants who had menarche ceremonies were living in their village in direct proximity to their mother or grandmother at the time of first menstruation. The other participant who experienced a menarche ceremony was studying at boarding school, but she belonged to a family who had the resources to travel to her at the time of her first period, and to enact a simple celebration with her there (see discussion on maternal agency).

In the transcripts, the importance of a girl's proximity to elder female kin was often made clear by the responses of participants who did *not* experience a menarche ceremony. One woman

from the older cohort was living in Fiji's capital city of Suva when she began menstruating. She said, "When I had my first period, I wasn't with my parents. I was with my uncle and auntie in Suva. When I had my first period I was scared. I was 12 when I had my first period"—she did not have a menarche ceremony. Another woman from the older cohort was asked if she knew of any girls in her village who had menarche celebrations, and she responded, "No, I don't know anybody who did because I was living in Suva." This reinforces that girls living in the city are less likely to have a menarche ceremony, and that traditional age rituals decline with urban migration.

In addition, girls who live in relatively remote villages and who seek to complete secondary school are often required to go to boarding school. As for location of this research, a high school was not proximate enough to the village to make daily commuting feasible, which makes boarding away from mothers or older female kin inevitable for girls who wish to complete secondary school. But depending on the location of the village, this could necessitate movement all the way to Suva, Fiji's capital city, to live with distant kin. Several research participants began menstruating while they were boarding at a secondary school about a forty-five minute boat ride away from their home village, and they shared their experiences. One woman from the younger cohort, who did not experience a menarche ceremony, was asked:

Interviewer: When you had your first period, were you at school or at home?

Woman: I was at school. [the boarding school 45-minutes away]

Interviewer: Who is the first person that you went to when you had your first

period?

Woman: Just one of my friends from school.

Interviewer: Did she tell you anything? **Woman**: Just that it will happen to all girls.

Interviewer: Did you also tell your mother?

Woman: Yes, on one of our school breaks, I came home and told my mother that

I had my period, and then she gave me some advice...

Interviewer: What was some of the advice your mother gave you?

Woman: She told me that I am no longer a young girl. I am a young woman, and I should know what is right and what is wrong. She also told me that there are a lot of boys around, you should be careful of yourself. And also just to make a right decision.

This young woman was away from her mother, and relied on the support of her friend at the actual occurrence of her first menstruation. While she was not proximate to her mother at the time when she might have otherwise had a menarche ceremony, she was still obliged to disclose the news to her mother when she returned to the village, and their interaction affirms the role elder female kin play in imparting knowledge about the social significance of menarche within the context of village life. This role almost always encompasses a warning about the traditional taboo of male-female interaction with the onset of menstruation. This young woman's experience resonates with the accounts gathered from other girls who started their periods at boarding school, and even girls who started menstruating when they were attending a local primary school. The majority of focus group participants who were at school when they began menstruating recounted an interaction their mothers offering advice, warning, or wisdom, that otherwise communicated the social significance of menarche. This substantiates the functional role elder female kin play in preserving tradition, imparting wisdom, and initiating ceremonial practice.

Another woman, from the older cohort, had an experience that illustrates how a mother-daughter are disconnected by dynamics other than urban migration or boarding school. She was asked if she had a daughter:

Woman: Yes, she is in form three (high school).

Interviewer: Did you know when she had her period?

Woman: I didn't know because my daughter grew up in Tailevu, in her father's village. I was married there. I had two kids, one girl and one boy. Then I divorced and I took the boy, and the girl is with her father. I left when she was three years old.

Interviewer: Did you know when she had her period?

Woman: It's been a long time now, and I haven't heard anything about her.

This participant's experience exemplifies the *patrilocal* nature of Fijian social organization—
children are written into their father's lineage—and her response supports the notion that
menarche celebrations are less likely to occur with the dissolution of a marital unit. This is due to
the conflict that exists between the traditional structure of patrilocality and the reliance of
menarche ceremonies on intergenerational female connectivity. Without proximity to a mother or
grandmother, a celebration is not likely to occur. These rituals are fundamentally a familial
celebration initiated by knowledge on the part of mothers or grandmothers that a girl has begun
menstruating, which this particular mother did not have.

Maternal Agency: In addition to birth order and a girl's proximity to her elder female kin, maternal agency also influences the likelihood that a menarche ceremony will occur. Maternal agency is a term meant to capture the control a mother possesses, as an individual actor moving within the larger framework of Fijian culture and traditional ways of life. Mothers make decisions about what will occur on the event of a daughter's first period, and often these decisions are based on the mother's personal experience when she began menstruating. Choices made based on maternal agency vary greatly—mothers may demonstrate a preference to retain the tradition of a menarche celebration or they may be detached from the ritual altogether. If a woman herself did not grow up in a family that practiced the ritual, she may be less inclined to initiate the celebration for her eldest daughter. A mother's decision not to instigate a celebration might also be made based on the resource security or resource scarcity of her family. One woman from the older cohort was asked about why she didn't have a menarche ceremony. She responded first that she was not the eldest in her family, but then she added, "It also depends on

the parents whether they do the celebration or not." Because menarche ceremonies are centered on feasting, the position of a family and the amount of resources they have at their disposal to prepare an adequate feast might also influence the likelihood that a menarche celebration will occur.

While maternal agency is certainly able to limit the occurrence of menarche ceremonies, there was an intriguing personal account recorded in an older focus group where a woman demonstrated the unique power of maternal agency to reclaim and re-enact ritual. Her story affirms the power of one woman's choice about what will take place for her daughter when she begins menstruating. She first described her own story about how she did not go to her mother to tell her when she began menstruating, and therefore, she assumed was the reason she did not have a menarche celebration. She said,

"I was mad at myself because I didn't tell my mom the first day that I had my period. If only I would've told my mom, maybe there would have been a celebration. That's why we celebrate with my daughter. And I also talked to my husband about when my daughter had her first period, we have to celebrate it."

Then, she described the context leading to her own daughter's celebration saying,

"From the day when she left me and went to secondary school, I always told her about menstruation. I was always praying to God that my daughter would be with me when she had her first period. I'm glad that one day when my daughter was on holiday and we were going to the farm with my husband, my daughter told me that she started her period. And I told my husband about it, and we came home...we celebrated it. We had a small feast. My parents and brother were there.

On that same day, when she first had her period, we celebrated it. She was 16 years old when she had her period."

This woman's story provides a fascinating example of how maternal agency is able to revive tradition, even in the case where a mother herself did not experience a celebration. Even though a culture is deeply communal, the nurture of group identity and the prioritization of group needs depend on the choices of individuals. 'Maternal agency' as a factor influencing the occurrence of menarche ceremonies seeks to acknowledge this reality.

Education & Social Change: One theme that emerged in each focus group as a force influencing young women coming of age, and Fijian society as a whole, was education. Formal schooling was a common thread in discussion among both the younger and the older cohort of women. Education as a force of social change was brought up contextually in the participants' stories and personal experiences, but also in direct response to questions about how it is different for girls coming of age in Fiji today. Based on my interpretation of the interview transcripts, I will discuss three implications of education in Fiji as transformational forces both in how girls experience their first menstruation events, and also to society as a whole.

First, the pursuit of formal education in Fiji beyond the primary school level sometimes necessitates *boarding away from a girl's home village*. While most villages have accessibility to local primary schooling, access to secondary school is not always so proximate. In the case of the location for this research, which represents a moderately traditional village setting, there was no high school close enough to the village to make a daily commute to and from school feasible. Girls boarding at secondary school are likely to be away from their mothers and grandmothers when they begin menstruating. As previously discussed, proximity to elder female kin is an

important factor in understanding when and why menarche ceremonies occur. As the value of education increases in Fiji, given a flourishing urban ecology and growing formal economic sector, more and more girls are likely to leave their villages in order to pursue further study at secondary school or a university. While not every village is remote enough to necessitate boarding school, the geographical location of secondary schools away from traditional villages is a significant force facilitating social change.

Second, given the prevalence of boarding for secondary school girls, *female peers are* playing more significant roles at first menstruation events. Schools where students board foster environments with nearly exclusive peer interaction. This environment is a departure from traditional Fijian social organization, and is certainly not organic to village life. As a result, female peers are playing an integral role in disseminating knowledge about menstruation to each other, and in supporting one another when menstruation first occurs.

In a boarding school environment, the presence of elder female kin around the time of menarche is removed, and female peers augment this absence by explaining menstruation to friends who are confused or who are unaware, and also by taking active roles when their friends experience the onset of menstruation. One participant from the younger cohort described her own story saying:

'I was having a class in school when I had my first period. I was ready to go out for recess. Then one of my friends who sat behind me said that my skirt was stained, and then I asked her, "What stain?" She said that there was blood on my skirt, and then I went to the toilet. She ran to one of my home economics teachers and told her that I had a stain on my clothes and needed to change, and I went to change my clothes.'

The participant was then asked if she had known about menstruation before her own menarche event, and she responded, "My mother didn't tell me anything about menstruation. I only hear it from some of my friends that already had their period." Her story resonates with the personal experience of a woman from the older cohort who said, "Before I had my first period, somebody told me about it already because I was in boarding school. When I had my first period, I wasn't too worried about it because I already knew. When I had my first period, I was in school and not with my mom. The first person that I told about it was my friend." Even those women who started menstruating prior to secondary school age told of personal experiences where they relied on female friends at primary school when they began menstruating at recess or in class. This is not to imply that in a traditional village setting, peers don't play formative roles in each other's lives or during first each other's menarche events—but rather, this interaction always occurs within the larger multi-generational context where elder female kin are present.

Finally, the introduction of health education shapes the way girls come to know about menstruation. Most girls receiving formal education are likely to learn about menstruation through a physiological or health-oriented lens via a female teacher or school nurse. This stands in contrast to a more traditional lens that is likely to emphasize the social and cultural implications of the life event. Even girls who do not attend secondary school away from their home village come in contact with a health-oriented view of menstruation through village nurses, who possess basic training and are responsible for dispensing medication, pamphlets, and other health resources to the village. One village nurse was a participant in a focus group from the older cohort, and responded to the question "Do the women here talk about menstruation with girls today?" by saying, "We [referring to the village nurses] brought pamphlets and charts that

explain the changes in girls and boys lives, when she has her period, and other health issues." Another woman from the same focus group added,

> "Back then we were living in the village and suddenly we had our periods. We didn't have a village nurse like we have today, so we had no idea about menstruation. Now we have a village nurse and so they talk to our young girls about health issues, especially menstruation for them to know and be aware of what will happen to them as a part of growing up."

This woman's response seems to imply that older generations of women in the community did not know about menstruation. While several of the women from the older cohort said that they did not know about menstruation before they started their period, all of them had interactions with their mother after it occurred, during which there was a discussion about the social implications of menarche to some degree or another. But this woman also confirms that the younger generation in the village is educated about menstruation from the village nurse.

Another participant, from the younger cohort, was asked if a local nurse ever facilitated a talk about menstruation within the village, and she responded:

Woman: Yes

Interviewer: Who came?

Woman: Some nurse from town

Interviewer: What did they talk about?

Woman: Just something about our health, and also what is going to happen when

boys and girls are together.

Interviewer: Who all was there? Only girls or boys too?

Woman: Yeah, both boys and girls.

Interviewer: What was the reaction of boys and girls during that day?

Woman: Some always laugh and some are ashamed when the nurse talked about

that topic.

This young woman's account is striking because not only does she identify the impartation of a health-oriented lens towards puberty, but she also highlights a significant social change in the

presence of both males and females together in the discussion. Traditional Fijian values would advance a strong taboo against the intermingling of adolescent men and women together, particularly in discussion of gendered topics such as puberty or menstruation. A grandmother from the older cohort further confirmed a loosening of this value by saying, "Back then we were not allowed to go to any place where only boys are, compared to this day when there are groups of boys talking or doing something you will see one or two girls with them, which was not allowed in our time." The interviewer then followed up this response by asking why this change had occurred and she responded, "Because time changes things and there is more education coming that enlightens their mind." This grandmother identifies in her response that education is a force of social change—as more young women become educated, they will have the opportunity to move in new social spheres that break traditional gender roles.

Education as an agent of social change is not unrelated to urbanization trends in Fiji.

Because traditional villages are underpinned by subsistence living and indigenous knowledge of the land, formal education remains an artificial value in the successful functioning of village life. Rather, the growth of cities in Fiji has opened up economic and employment opportunities that make education valuable. Girls who finish secondary school and have the opportunity to seek employment or to further their studies at a university must travel to one of Fiji's cities, and this urban migration brings with it immense life change. The implications of urban lifestyle on the factors that influence the occurrence of menarche ceremonies is profound—maternal agency, proximity to home villages, and traditional age hierarchy are each vulnerable to the social changes associated with urbanization.

Dialogue with younger female participants in the focus group setting often led to discussions about future plans for themselves or, if they were young mothers, future aspirations

for their daughters. Often these women would organically draw links between education, employment opportunities, and migration to cities. One young woman said, "At this time, I already have a child, and I am a single mother. I want to go to Suva to find a job so that I can support my daughter." Another young mother said in regards to her two daughters, "My plan is that when they grow up I have to tell them everything about women's life. And also, I want them to have a good education level and a good job." These aspirations raise legitimate questions about the tension between traditional communal values and opportunities for individual achievement in the city. Anthropologist Karen Brison aptly captures this tension in a passage of her book *Our Wealth is Loving Each Other: Self and Society in Fiji*. She says,

'We no longer live in a world where "communal" and "individualistic" cultures can be neatly opposed...people are confronted with two conflicting moral systems, one stressing relationalism and another stressing individual accomplishment. These conflicting ideologies pose problems. Rural Fijians want to live up to communal ideals; but they also feel pressure to prove that they are autonomous individuals who can achieve personal success. Faced with these contradictory ideologies...many villagers find that imagining self is a matter of trying to prove that they are both autonomous and conform to communal ideals...In the process, they blur distinctions between global and local, urban and rural, and create new kinds of translocal identities" (Brison 2007).

The force of urbanization, as it brings about new identities and profound social change in Fiji, is also in play throughout the world, touching and transforming every culture. The broader impacts of this force on women are profound, as they must actively negotiate between traditional gender roles and new opportunities for personal advancement arising with urbanization. However, while

these two forces are easy to categorize as "either/or," they are often lived out in the lives of individuals as "both/and". Menarche ceremonies in Fiji, and female adolescent age rituals in a diverse array of the world's cultures, remain a fascinating lens by which to explore traditional/transitioning oppositions as they are shaping the lives of women around the globe.

Limitations & Future Directions

One of the benefits of the qualitative method is that it treats personal accounts as legitimate sources of knowledge—it is capable of accounting for individual experience without threat to the purity of the research or the integrity of the method. There are, however, obvious limitations to the qualitative approach. Sixteen women cannot, and should not, speak definitely or absolutely on the topic of menarche ceremonies or on the subject of social change in Fiji—and this research does not seek to posit these interviews as such. On the contrary, these research results are humbly offered up to the academic community as a launch pad for deeper and more extensive inquiry. The basic pattern in the occurrence of menarche ceremonies that emerged from these interview transcripts remain open for testing, correction, and augmentation, as there is still much to be learned about the traditional practice of menarche ceremonies in Fiji, and the potential of these ceremonies to magnify social change.

Conclusion

Given that urbanization trends continue to grow exponentially, menarche ceremonies remain fertile ground for continued research at the intersection of traditional lifeways and social change, specifically as it relates to implications on young women in Fiji. The three criteria—birth order, proximity to elder female kin, and maternal agency—emerging from these interviews

as factors that influence the occurrence of menarche ceremonies provide a framework for deeper and more comprehensive research on these topics. Based on the emergent theme of education, which was strongly identified by participants as a force of social change, future research should pay particular attention to the ways in which opportunities for formal schooling are reorganizing traditional ways of life and facilitating cultural transition.

Appendix: Initial Research Proposal

REU: The Effects of Urbanization on the Communal Body in Fiji

Research Question: Are the forces of urbanization and Western influence changing the way menstruation is communally conceived and treated in Fiji?

Intellectual Merit: This research will contribute to the limited body of literature on menarche ceremonies in Fiji, and will provide data helpful for understanding how menstruation is communally treated in the context of urbanization and the subsequent shifting of gender expectations.

Broader Impacts: Research on the changing attitudes and communal treatment of menstruation would contribute qualitative data helpful for understanding the transitioning status of women in Fijian society. This research will contribute to understanding the effects of globalization on small-scale communities, particularly as it relates to gender and gender roles in Fiji. In addition to illuminating issues of gender, this research will further explore tensions between traditional communal values and individual attitudes and ambitions, with particular emphasis on potential generational differences manifested in urbanizing Fijian society. The opportunity to carry out this research would also enrich my scholarship as an undergraduate student of anthropology, supplying me with data to serve as the spine for my senior project at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo.

Introduction and Literature Review: Anthropologist Anne Becker has done extensive fieldwork in Fiji researching the ways in which the individual body is conceived of and cared for communally (Becker 1995). Unlike Western societies, where the body of the individual functions both as the locus of the self and the primary vehicle for individual expression, the physical body in Fiji is modified and celebrated only insofar as it serves to unify the community and affirm its collective values (Becker 1995). Ceremonies marking important life events, such as the birth of a child (Thompson 1972), the first-fruits celebration (Quain 1948), and also a girl's first menstruation (Sniekers 2005, Silverman 1971) are fundamental to the functioning of the community. Often rituals marking life transitions in Fiji are centered around feasting and food sharing, manifesting transitions in the individual's body through the cultivation, nourishment, and affirmation of the collective social body (Becker 1995).

Adolescent initiation rituals are of particular social importance for their role in formalizing an individual's entry into adulthood (Schlegel & Barry 1980). Rituals and ceremonies surrounding the initiation of adolescents affirm the life stages of the society at large. Schlegel and Barry's cross-cultural study suggests that initiation ceremonies for girls are equally as common as those for boys, however female initiations are far more likely to emphasize fertility. Given these findings, it is not surprising that female adolescent rituals in Fiji occur on the event of a first menstruation. Solomoni Biturogoiwasa describes this ritual, saying "When a girl begins to menstruate, a special mat is laid our for her and she remains at her home under the supervision of one of more female elders, who teach her about the nature and importance of this life event. On the fourth day, the girl's family prepares a feast, on this occasion known as *tunudra*, to celebrate her womanhood" (Biturogoiwasa 97). This feast reinforces Becker's research on the emphasis and affirmation of the communal body in Fijian society.

But with the infiltration of Western values, beginning with colonization and continuing with the growing force of globalization, Fijians must negotiate between traditional life ways and the pressures and changes that accompany globalization (Brison 2003). Schlegel and Barry's research suggests that industrialization has an inverse correlation with adolescent initiation rituals (Schlegel & Barry 1980), meaning as a society urbanizes, initiation rituals are likely to decline. Given that over half the population of Fiji now resides in urban areas (Fijian Islands Bureau of Statistics 2007), and that the gross enrollment

ratio for secondary education in Fiji is nine percent higher among females than among males (UNICEF 2010), urbanization may be transforming the traditional treatment of gender roles and gender-related rituals. In keeping with Becker's research on the communal appropriation of the body, it is appropriate to hypothesize that changes and transitions in the status of Fijian women will become manifest in the communal treatment of their life processes, such as menstruation. The erosion of traditional frameworks for conceiving the communal body, along with changing expectations of Fijian girls might suggest a decline in menarche ceremonies and changing attitudes about menstruation in Fijian communities.

Historical Background: As with many former colonies, British colonial rule has had profound implications on the structure of contemporary Fijian society. Rather than exploit the indigenous population for labor, the British imported a secondary ethnic population from South Asia to work as indentured servants, and these Indo-Fijians remain a separate but substantial group in Fiji today. Colonial powers reinforced Fijian hierarchical chiefdoms, thereby affirming traditional systems of power and indigenous ties to the land. Fiji gained independence on October 10, 1970 (Fiji Ministry of Information and Media Relations 2003), and it was not until this post-colonial era that Fiji was forced to grapple with the complex power structures existing between the Pacific Islanders who owned the land and the Indo-Fijians who worked it. While terms like "urbanization" and "Western influence" are often assumed to be a direct repercussion of *colonial* rule, in Fiji their weight and relevance have grown exponentially in *post-colonial* society. The social and political fabric of Fiji remains in transition today, as Fijians must reconcile traditional political structures (reinforced by the British) with the power vacuum left in the absence of formal colonial rule, as exemplified by the string of coup d'etats in 1987, 2000, and again 2006 (Naidu 2004).

Traditional Female Roles & Village Life: Indigenous Fijian society is built upon a dense network of hierarchies, encompassing age, status, and gender. Fiji is a patrilineal, patrilocal society, with the control of socio-political domains left almost exclusively to men. For women in Fiji, particular value is placed on their ability to bear children and produce large families (Becker 1995). However, this male/female gender hierarchy too easily overrides the complexity and importance of women's economic contributions to society. Fijian women have always participated in significant ways to the prospering of their villages (Jones 2009), organizing and carrying out activities (e.g. fishing, cooking, mat-making) that not only support daily subsistence, but underpin the very fabric of Fijian society itself. With post-colonial urbanization, female economic contributions are transitioning from traditionally-oriented, locally-based domestic activities to measurable participation in the formal economic sector, necessitating migration to cities for advanced schooling and employment. Urban migration, observed especially among younger women, lowers fertility rates and by extension changes the relationship between cultural attitudes and fertility. The fertility transition associated with urbanization has continued to gather force among the ethnic Fijian population, with fertility rates dropping a full percent between 1996 and 2007 (FIBS 2007).

Methods:

Specific Aims: There are four specific aims in researching how urbanization and shifting gender expectations in Fiji are manifest in the communal treatment of menstruation.

- Identify how each study participant's first menarche was marked by the *community*.
- Identify the *individual attitudes* of the study participant towards her first-menstruation event.
- Understand the *personal ambitions* of each study participant.
- Explore how the study participant conceives and *negotiates between individual versus communal* attitudes, values, and concerns.

Study Site: The island of Kadavu in Fiji is home to about 100 remote villages. Most travel around Kadavu is done by boat, with some limited travel on the few unpaved roadways. While there are a small number of cars and an airport at Vunisea, very little travel is done through the interior of the island. Local villages rely heavily on fishing and subsistence farming for their livelihood. SoSo village on the island of Kadavu is selected as the site for this study because its remote location is likely to provide a robust pool of postmenarchal girls, who may have plans to migrate to Viti Levu, but who have not yet done so. There is a primary school for children in SoSo, and a secondary school located within walking distance of the village.

Study Participants: Two cohorts of women ($N\approx24$) will be drawn from households currently enrolled in Dr. Dawn Neill's ongoing study in Fiji. Relying on enrolled households will provide background data (e.g. demographic, educational, economic) on the study participants to inform my own analysis. The first cohort (N=10) will consist of girls between the ages of thirteen and sixteen who have recently undergone their first menstrual cycle (average age of menarche is 13.8 years for Fijians, Clegg 1989). The second cohort (N=10-14) will consist of every elder female kin (e.g. mother, grandmother, aunt) within the household.

Propositions:

- 1: The younger cohort is likely to experience less elaborate initiations, with fewer girls having formalized menarche ceremonies.
- 2: The younger cohort is more likely to demonstrate individual ambition (e.g. educational attainment, urban migration).

Procedures and Assessments: Qualitative data will be gathered to test and analyze these propositions, providing a context by which to understand the erosion of menarche ceremonies in Fiji, how girls negotiate between individual values and those of the community, and how elder kinswoman support or resist these transitions. My research aims will be specifically addressed using semi-structured, open-ended interview questions to assess variation in the experiences and attitudes of the two age cohorts towards menstruation, along with discrepancies between individual versus communal ambition within the two cohorts. Interviews will be conducted with eligible female participants, using a Fijian research assistant fully proficient in English and Fijian. All interviews will be digitally recorded with the participant's knowledge, and then transcribed by a research assistant using Microsoft Word. Atlas.ti will be used to analyze the qualitative data and code for emergent themes. In addition, descriptive statistics will be provided to assess the propositions, and cohort experiences will be linked to individual ambitions through further qualitative analysis. The methodological framework used to assess and analyze the collected data will be based in grounded theory, emphasizing emergent themes within phenomenological study.

Timeline:

Action	Dates	Action	Dates
Arrive	June 24	Wrap-up	July 22-23
Set-up	June 25-29	Depart	July 24
Data Collection	June 30-July 21		

Budget:

Action	Cost	Notes
Airfare/transportation	\$1500	US-Nadi-Kadavu-Nadi-US
Village stay+ Intl hotel	\$1000	\$30/day x 30 days
Research Assistant Pay	\$1050	Salary + boat transfer x 2

Insurance	\$100	Cal Poly Requirement
Research Expenses	\$350	Miscellaneous supplies

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