

# **Traditionally Contemporary? Understanding Urban Fijian Masi**

Volume I

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Dissertation Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
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July 2019

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## Abstract

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This research investigates how the contemporary use and significance of Fijian barkcloth (masi) in Suva, the capital of Fiji, has been adapted from its traditional use and practices and how this urban environment has created new ways of distributing, displaying and presenting it. I aim to explore the notion that contemporary masi practices, while superficially divergent from those historically, still reflect and pay homage to the traditional customs and codes that made masi culturally significant in the past.

Masi is made from the inner bark of the paper mulberry tree (*Broussonetia papyrifera*). A laborious process, the bark is beaten to produce sheets of cloth of varying thicknesses and sizes and then decorated using one (or a combination of three) technique, depending on the type of masi being made. Historically one of the most pervasive exchange objects in Fiji, masi is a female iyau (valuable) and still plays an integral role in Fijian cultural practice.

In particular, this research looks to the dynamic and fast-moving urban scene in Fiji and its many global diasporas, especially in terms of urban contemporary Fijian fashion and the presence of ‘masi couture’, and examines masi’s increasingly modified modes of display. The term ‘Urban-Fiji’ will be introduced and speaks to masi’s twenty-first century creative adaptability. Perhaps the first study in which urban Fijian masi is understood in terms of its adaptation and transformation, specific ‘Urban-Fiji’ (diasporic) case studies assist in exploring ‘non-traditional’ uses and resulting artistic practices.



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## Preface

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During the writing up process of this thesis, there were times in which I was unable to see the wood (or more appropriately here, bark) for the trees. At one of those times, and quite by coincidence, my father sent our family a number of old home movies which he had recently digitised. Not knowing what I would find, I opened one and began to watch. What greeted me were some of the faces of my childhood – many of whom shaped who I am today and who are no longer with us. Probably most poignantly for the path I have been travelling with this study, I found myself viewing an evening in my childhood home with my Fijian family (both blood- and diasporically-tied to each other) in the middle of a sigidrigi evening, my Auntie Maraia leading the singing of popular Fijian songs composed by my grandfather. At a time when I was grappling with why I was following this pathway, those videos reminded me of why I am here doing this work. I was raised in ‘Urban-Fiji’ surrounded by the culture, values, things and people who make up the social and cultural fabric of my being. That one video from my father brought everything back into focus and reminded me that my journey is not just for me, but for my family and ancestors on whose broad shoulders I stand.

Although this PhD journey began in 2011, there hasn’t been a time in my life when I haven’t been following a culturally minded pathway. My earliest memories involve ‘Fijianness’ and learning what it means to be included in this dynamic culture, both in Fiji and elsewhere. In May 2011, I came to Norwich to work on the UK Arts & Humanities Research Council-funded research project called *Fijian Art: Political Power, Sacred Value, Social Transformation and Collecting Since the 18<sup>th</sup> Century* (2011-2014; AHRC grant no. AH/I003622/1) and through that project I was able to spend time with and have access to the UK-based museum collections that grounded this doctoral research. I initially began this study intending to create a corpus of Fijian masi from the historical to the present day, but along the way it adapted to focus on the understanding of urban Fijian masi and its enduring significance to Fijian people. While looking for one thing through this research, I found something else. Today, I see my own reflection in much of what I have done in the last 7.5 years: as a child of a Fijian diaspora, I have based my research on examining masi’s role and significance in the diaspora of ‘Urban-Fiji’ in the hopes that one day future diasporic Fijian children may read this, feel connected to their culture and, like me, be proud of their traditionally contemporary Fijian identity.

## Acknowledgements

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This research has been generously funded by the Sainsbury Research Unit for the Arts of Oceania, Africa and the Americas. I am grateful to Professor Hooper and the SRU for the opportunity to undertake this research by way of a studentship and maintenance awards and I also thank the SRU staff and students for the valuable experiences gained. Special thanks go to Lynne Crossland for being a constantly shining light, a safe haven and sympathetic ear.

My sincere gratitude goes to my supervisors, Professor Steven Hooper and Dr Karen Jacobs for their unwavering support of this project and their belief in my ability to take multiple pathways of discovery before finally landing here. The sage advice, professional wisdom, and many laughs will continue to serve me well into the future. As an aside, it was a privilege to be able to also work alongside both of them during the Fijian Art research project and be able to view them as colleagues as well as mentors.

The Fijian Art research project afforded me opportunities that I wouldn't have had otherwise and for which I will always be grateful. I was very lucky to work on the project and contribute to Fijian arts and culture studies so early in my career. Project members Dr Anita Herle, Dr Lucie Carreau, Dr Andy Mills, and associate member Fergus Clunie, provided encouragement and support for the duration of the project which has continued to date. While not a member of the project, I wouldn't have been on the project if it were not for the guidance of Dr Carol E. Mayer, my mentor at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia (Vancouver, Canada), and her belief in me. It was through her that I was introduced to both Hooper and Herle and it was with her that I first encountered Fiji in a Western museum when she invited me to be her student intern after meeting her at a Club Loloma event hosted by my Vancouver Fijian diasporic family in 2002.

This thesis would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of many wonderful people and organisations in Fiji, the UK, and around the world. To them I am greatly indebted and deeply humbled for being allowed to share in their lives, families, work, research, passions and futures. To avoid risk of favouritism or preference, as all have been essential to this research, the following are listed in alphabetical order. While seemingly sterile and cold, that is not at all the case, and my deepest thanks are extended to: Opeta Alefaio, Faraz Ali, Pene Baleinabuli, Ratu Jone Balenaivalu, Philip and Sue

Brown, Sagale Buadromo, Paulini Cakacaka, Yvonne Carillo-Huffman, John Connor, the late William Copeland, Graham Davis, Dr Jocelyne Dudding, Adi Litia Dugdale, Bethany Matai Edmunds, Bernadette Rounds Ganilau ,Adi Koila Ganilau Lee, Rachel Hand, Hupfeld Hoerder and family, Roy and Joan Igglesden, Daren Kamali, Sakiusa Kataiwai, Ana Lavekau, Samson Lee, Lindah Lepou, Mereia Luvunakoro, Natasha Lewis-Vaike, Dr Ruth McDougall, Kolokesa Mahina-Tuai, Ambassador Solo Mara, Sepeti Matararaba, Don and Agnes Mitchell, Vika Musumoto, Tulia Nacola, Ratu Jo and Anne Nacola, Mesake Nacola, Jotame Naqeletia, Sipiriano Nemani, Fuli Pereira, Adi Meretui Ratunabuabua, Rosanna Raymond, Freddie and Sera Rokodi, Keren Ruki, the SaVAge K'lub, Greg Semu, Prakashni Sharma, Ben Simonds, the late Mereseini Tagilala, Dr Apolonia Tamata, Shona Tawhiao, His Excellency Jitoko Tikolevu, Epli Tuibeqa, Maca Turagabeci, Kinisimere Vakaloloma, Lianne Verma, Senitieli Wainui, Jo Walsh, Hansel Whippy, Ellen Whippy-Knight, Florieann Wilson, Anton Conway Wye, and Robin Yarrow.

To my family – on both sides, both blood and diasporic - there are no words to express my deepest gratitude for all that you have done for me throughout my life. Each one of you have shaped this journey for me and I will be forever grateful to you. The diasporic Fijian community of Vancouver has provided a cultural home for me throughout my whole life, and the UK Fijian community has embraced me in adulthood. To my aunts and uncles in the UK – Roy and Joan Igglesden, Philip and Sue Brown – thank you for being my home away from home, for providing guidance, support and love, and for being there for some of the most significant moments I've experienced here. Finally, to my parents, Eric and Josephine, you raised Sera and I in a world where Fiji, England and Canada seamlessly flowed into and out of one another and where we never felt out of place in any country/culture. To say we were fortunate is an understatement. You taught us how to navigate our identities in this world, even when it proved challenging. This work is a reflection of both of you: I have been fortunate to spend the last eight years working on a project that has immersed me in my mother's culture while living in my father's land. What a perfect thing to be able to do. Thank you for your encouragement, love and support.

# Orthography and Glossary

The Fijian language was not written until the arrival of Europeans. Wesleyan Missionaries created a customised ‘Fijian’ orthography to help the indigenous Fijian population learn to read and write in their own language. Most of the letters correspond with those of their English alphabet pronunciation, with the exception of vowels, which are all short sounds, and the below consonants. Stress is usually placed on the penultimate syllable.

**Q** Waqani is pronounced wanggani (ngg as in finger)

**G** Saganikali is pronounced sanganikali (ng as in singer)

**B** Senibua is pronounced senimbua (mb as in number)

**D** Tadruku is pronounced tandruku (nd as in thunder)

**C** Ceva is pronounced theva (th as in that)

Adi	female chiefly title, ‘Lady’
Bete	pre-Christian priest
Bitu	bamboo; bitu ni kesakesa, a bamboo roller for printing masi
Bui	tail
Buiniga	hairstyle similar to the African American afro
Bula	life, to live; greeting ‘hello’
Buli	1. cowrie shell; 2. administrative head of a <i>tikina</i> (district)
Bure	men’s meeting house, temple
Cakau	reef; Tui Cakau = paramount chief of Cakaudrove

Civa	pearl shell; breastplate; civavonovono, composite breastplate
Daunimasi	masi making specialist
Drau	leaf; draudrau, stencil for masi making
Drua	1. double, twins; 2. double-hulled sailing canoe
Dudua	anvil used for beating masi
Ibe	mat
Ike	a wooden mallet
Ika	fish
Iri	fan
Kali	headrest
Kamiki	vane swastika design; called <i>manulua</i> in Tonga
Kesa	dye; kesakesa, to stencil masi
Koro	village
Kupeti	rubbing board or tablet for printing masi
Kuvui	smoke; masi kuvui, smoked masi
Lase	coral
Lewena	flesh
Liku	skirt; short, formerly worn by women; long worn by men for dancing
Lotu	Christianity, to practice Christianity
Magimagi	coconut husk (coir) cord
Malo	1. Loincloth made from <i>masi</i> ; 2. Barkcloth
Marama	lady, woman
Masi	barkcloth, the tree from which it is made, <i>Broussonetia papyrifera</i>
Matai	1. skilled; 2. Carpenter clans
Matanitu	state, the government
Mataqali	clan, type
Qia	tattoo, on women in pre-Christian Fiji;
Rara	village green, ceremonial ground
Ratu	male chiefly title, form of address
Rerega	turmeric; masi rerega, turmeric dyed masi
Ro	chiefly title used for both men and women in Rewa, Serua, Nadroga, Namosi, etc.
Roko (Tui)	senior provincial administrator, also a traditional Fijian title
iSala	turban worn by chiefs
Samusamu	masi beating process
Seavu	very thinly beaten masi; chiefly in wear/use
Seru	comb
Siga	day, sun
Solevu	large-scale exchange
Solofua	masi the size of a bedcover used to sit on or as a wall hanging
Soqosoqo	group of women
iSulu	clothing/dress; isulu ni vakamau, wedding attire
Tabu	forbidden, sacred
Tabua	whale’s tooth for presentation on important occasions
Tagane	man, male
Talanoa	to talk, tell stories
Tanoa	circular wood bowl
iTaukei	indigenous Fijian; owner
Tui	1. king or sovereign; 2. to lift with a string
Turaga	chief, gentleman
Vale	house; Vale ni Lotu = church
Vanua	land, chiefdom
Vau	hibiscus tree, <i>Hibiscus tiliaceus</i>
Vinaka	good, goodness, ‘thank you’
Voivoi	type of pandanus plant, <i>Pandanus thurstonii</i> ,
Vulagi	guest
Vulavula	white
Wai	water
Waitui	the sea, saltwater
Waq	boat, canoe
Yalewa	woman, female
Yaqona	drink prepared from the root of the pepper plant, <i>Piper methysticum</i>
Yara	train
Yasana	province
iYau	valuables, wealth

# Maps



**Map 1:** Situating Fiji in the Pacific



Map 2: Fiji

# 1 Understanding Fijian Masi

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## Introduction: The 'Aztec' Dress

I am truly sorry for misnaming the Aztec Dress. I respect local artists everywhere and I apologise for any offense this has caused. (Nanette Lepore, 6/8/13; [www.nanettelepore.com](http://www.nanettelepore.com))

In the early summer of 2013, American and New York City-based fashion designer Nanette Lepore launched her latest line, the 'Aztec' collection. Included in the July/August issue of *Women's Health Magazine*, and posted on Lepore's social media pages on 20 June 2013, her 'Aztec' dress was featured on the title-page spread of the 'Passport to Style' fashion editorial (figure 1.01) and captioned as 'African'. Powerful tribal prints and heaps of colourful beads showcase the self-celebration of African dressing' (*Women's Health Magazine*, July-August 2013:136). Almost immediately Fijian and Pacific communities, both in the region and globally, began to take notice of the motifs on Lepore's Aztec Dress (figure 1.02). With a black base colour, the dress's pattern displayed horizontal bands of white geometric motifs, as well as two bands of red/brown triangles facing each other on a white background. These designs are found almost exclusively on Fijian masi kesa (patterned barkcloth). As word of Lepore's 'Aztec' dress spread, so did opposition to it, both in Fiji and in global Fijian and Pacific diasporas; the consensus was that Lepore's dress was not Aztec in inspiration, but instead a direct copy of Fijian masi. Not artificially or graphically rendered, the motifs looked like they had been stencilled directly onto the fabric, complete with small areas of pigment bleeding or smudging that one sees on hand-made Fijian masi. The only thing slightly askew was the motif composition.

Individuals and organisations alike took to social media, fashion retail websites and news outlets to protest not only Lepore's use of masi motifs, but her (and *Women's Health Magazine*) mis-labelling of one of Fiji's most pervasive forms of material culture. The Fiji-based Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and Fiji Fashion Week Ltd made public statements criticizing this misappropriation in strong terms. Other urban and semi-urban Fijians also voiced their concerns:

Miss Nanette Lepore, I understand there are often overlapping motifs and designs throughout cultures worldwide, especially since the world is now more connected than ever before. However, the so-called Aztec Linen Dress you have going for more than \$FJD [800] is misappropriation of traditional tapa designs and I hope that you will take note of the outcry from Fijians everywhere and give credit where credit is due, as well as acknowledge this exploitation of our cultural property. Vinaka. (Drue Slatter, 6/8/13, Suva; Facebook)

These designs are definitely not Aztec. Please do the right thing by withdrawing from sale all items with this fabric and please acknowledge the [true] design origins. (Corrine, unknown date, Korovou; Revolve Clothing website)

What an utter cheek to use a Fijian masi design that we Fijians have used for centuries...each motif actually has a name and a significance...and then to claim it is Aztec! Get your facts right before you go public! Shame on you!! (Tima an authentic Fijian, unknown date, Suva; Revolve Clothing website)<sup>1</sup>

Lepore's apology (quoted above) did little to quell the mounting anger surrounding her Aztec Dress because it remained on the market after her apology and was still named 'Aztec' by retailers. Furthermore, Lepore did not acknowledge that the patterns and motifs she was using were Fijian. Diasporic Fijian and Pacific communities began to band together to put pressure on Lepore. Katherine Lobendahn created a petition with over one thousand signatures entitled 'Stop Appropriating Traditional Fijian Tapa Designs and Motifs and Calling it 'Aztec' or 'African' or Any Other Culture Not Its Own For That Matter'. Vaimoana Niumeitolu published 'Passport to Stealing: Open Letter to Nanette Lepore', stating: 'The designs and patterns you have been using, which are shown in the "Passport to Style" fashion spread and on your website, Facebook page and elsewhere, have all been stolen' (Niumeitolu 2013; see chapter 5). Two objectors referenced Article 31 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,<sup>2</sup> declaring bluntly:

[Because] it's part of my cultural identity. (Nacanieli Susu, 14/9/13; County Galway, Ireland)

Because it's my culture, heritage and identity that you are trying to claim as your own. (Eleni Nabalarua, 19/9/13; Suva, Fiji)

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<sup>1</sup> In all of the comments in this section, the author's names have been recorded exactly as they appeared on their respective websites. Interestingly to this study is Tima's (third comment) inclusion in the name box of 'an authentic Fijian'. It further describes her role as a Fijian person facing the struggle of appropriation.

<sup>2</sup> For information on Article 31 see United Nations (2007).

The furore generated by this case of misappropriation is discussed in greater detail in chapter 5, but it is signalled here to demonstrate the continuing importance of barkcloth and its designs to Fijians. This is not only the case in what might be called traditional village contexts, where it continues to play a key role in kinship exchanges and rites of passage, especially at weddings, but also in new urban and international contexts. It is these recent dynamic contexts of masi use which are the main focus of this thesis. The study aims to track and record this new urban life of masi, and to investigate the factors which are affecting this developing story. It is not so much a story of traditional versus modern, but an appreciation of the enduring adaptability of masi in Fiji. As will be seen, masi was always changing in terms of designs – which is why nineteenth and twentieth century Fijian masi looks distinctively different from that produced in neighbouring island groups, and why different regions of Fiji had and have their own distinctive recognisable designs. Modernity, rather than consigning traditional cultural productions such as masi to the past, in fact has provided a number of stimuli to invigorate and extend the reach of masi as an important Fijian signifier all around the world.

The remainder of this chapter will provide an introduction to the historical and cultural contexts of masi manufacture and use in Fiji, thereby setting the scene and providing a platform for the discussion of recent urban developments. It will also present the research questions which frame the thesis, review relevant literature and give an outline of the structure of the thesis.

### **Barkcloth in Fiji**

Archaeological evidence shows that humans first arrived in Fiji about 3,000 years ago. The ‘Lapita people’, named after a distinctive kind of pottery first identified at the site of Lapita in New Caledonia, came from the west and had settled in coastal Fiji and Tonga by about 850 BC (Spriggs 1997, 2015; Burley 2013, 2014). It is probable that these early settlers brought knowledge of making barkcloth with them (Matthews 1996). What is sure is that barkcloth-making was present in the Western Polynesia region (Fiji-Tonga-Samoa) by the end of the first millennium AD, because Polynesian voyagers who at that time quickly spread to all parts of Eastern Polynesia, including Tahiti, Hawaii and Rapa Nui/Easter Island, took knowledge of barkcloth with them and developed different styles

over the following centuries.<sup>3</sup> Barkcloth was also noticed in Aotearoa New Zealand in the eighteenth century by European voyagers, although it did not flourish in those temperate islands, where flax was used as the main textile (Clark and Anderson 2001:77).

### ***Fiji – a Brief History***

Located in the Pacific Ocean between 16° and 21° South and 177° East and 178° West, Fiji is made up of over 300 islands (see Maps 1 & 2). Called Viti in the indigenous Fijian language, the largest of the current independent nation state's inhabited islands is named Viti Levu (Great Fiji), with the second largest called Vanua Levu (Great Land).

Historically, Fiji has been populated by successive waves of migrations over the last 3,000 years. The first direct contact between Fijians and Europeans was in the late eighteenth century, both in Fiji and in Tonga. European traders looking for sandalwood and then bêche-de-mer arrived in the early nineteenth century, followed by Methodist missionaries in 1835. Planters and other settlers arrived in the middle of the century, obtaining land by fair means and foul. Fiji was ceded by local chiefs to the British Crown on 10 October 1874 and the first Governor, Sir Arthur Gordon, prevented further land sales to non-Fijians. To deflect the anger of resident planters in 1879 he instituted a system of indentured labour from India to provide plantation workers. Few of these returned to India, which accounts for the current high percentage of Fiji citizens of Asian heritage (c. 40%). Towards the end of the Second World War many thousands of US servicemen were based in Fiji, mainly on Viti Levu, and the post-war period can be regarded as the beginning of the tourist trade in Fiji, the airport at Nadi being large enough for intercontinental flights to land. With respect to masi, Kooijman (1977:19) has suggested that for Moce Island, tourism acted as a stimulus to certain kinds of masi production – particularly smaller stencilled pieces (masi kesa) which were easily portable. A similar situation appears to have encouraged masi production on Vatulele Island (Ewins 2009:81-82). Vatulele and Moce are now the two main sources for tourist masi in Fiji; tourism has now outstripped sugar as Fiji's main source of economic income. Fiji became independent on 10 October 1970 and remains a member of the Commonwealth. For further historical information, see Hooper (2016: 36ff.) and Herle and Carreau (2013). Fiji has a democratic central

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<sup>3</sup> A European classificatory system, the Pacific is divided into three zones: Polynesia (many islands), Melanesia (black islands), and Micronesia (small islands). The term Polynesia was devised by Charles de Brosses (1756), while Melanesia and Micronesia were coined by Jules Dumont d'Urville in the 1830s as a means to divide the large Oceania area into smaller zones (Hooper 2016:28). For more information on Pacific barkcloth styles see Kooijman (1972) and Neich and Pendergrast (1997:9).

government and the regions are divided into fourteen yasana (provinces), each with its own provincial council and government staff.<sup>4</sup> It is a multiethnic and multicultural country, with longstanding European, Chinese and islander populations. According to Fiji's 2017 census, the population was 884,887 with 55.9% (494,252) living in urban areas including the capital city of Suva with 87,000 (which inflates to roughly 175,000 when including Suva's suburbs).

### ***Masi – from Tree to Cloth***

Barkcloth is and has been made in many regions of the world including Africa, Southeast Asia, South America, the Philippines and Indonesia. However, its manufacture and use in the Pacific region is considered the epitome of its variety and skill (Neich and Pendergrast 1997:9). While several different plants are and have been used to make barkcloth, the trees used for barkcloth making in the Pacific belong to the *Moraceae* family and include the genera *Artocarpus*, *Ficus*, and *Broussonetia* (Kooijman 1988:15-16). The most commonly used in the Pacific region, and in Fiji, is the paper mulberry tree (*Broussonetia papyrifera*). Considered to yield the finest quality of cloth (Kooijman 1972:1), the paper mulberry is not endemic to the Pacific region; the early migrations which populated the Pacific introduced paper mulberry to the islands (Larsen 2011:121). The most widely used term for barkcloth in the Pacific is tapa, which probably originally derives from the Hawaiian kapa. It also specifically refers to the undecorated border of Samoan siapo (barkcloth, Flowers *et al.* 2019:1). However, different island groups have different names for barkcloth. In Fijian the name for the paper mulberry tree and the cloth which is made from its inner bark is masi. This is the term which will be used throughout this thesis.

### ***Making Masi: Techniques and Designs***

Simon Kooijman (1977) has provided a detailed account of all stages of masi production on Moce Island in Lau. Rod Ewins (2009) had provided similar detail for Vatulele. This information relates to the twentieth century, but little information has survived about nineteenth century techniques and any regional variations at that time. Examination of collections of nineteenth century masi indicates that it is likely that similar basic techniques were used to make the plain cloth throughout Fiji, and that these techniques are

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<sup>4</sup> The fourteen yasana are: Ba, Bua, Cakaudrove, Kadavu, Lau, Lomaiviti, Macuata, Nadroga-Navosa, Naitasiri, Namosi, Ra, Rewa, Serua and Tailevu. Each of the provinces belongs to one of the three traditional matanitu (confederacies) of Fiji: Burebasaga, Tovata and Kubuna, though these have no formal government function.

probably centuries old. However, different methods were used to apply designs in different parts of Fiji. It is probable that plain masi was made in many places in Fiji, but that only in certain places women had the hereditary skills to apply complex and distinctive decoration. The following technical information comes from twentieth-century sources.

The paper mulberry tree is cultivated on plots of land or in vegetable gardens maintained by individual families; recently its growing conditions are regularly being challenged by natural disasters and climate change (Fiji Arts Council 2016:4). Exclusively used to produce barkcloth in Fiji, both the paper mulberry tree and the cloth are called masi; there is no name distinction between the raw material and final product (Hocart 1929:131).<sup>5</sup> Masi reaches maturity between eight to twelve months after planting. Fully grown trees can be approximately two to three metres tall; with a diameter of circa three centimetres, mature trees are first chosen for their straight stems. Straight-stemmed trees, in which branches have been removed during the growing process to ensure fine cloth, produce the highest quality masi destined for ceremonial occasions. Immature and crooked trees yield bark of lower quality which ‘is used for the production of commercial tapas. It is also used for the making of the [gatu vakatoga], since these cloths are not valued for their aesthetic qualities but for their dimensions’ (Kooijman 1988:37-39). However, an anomaly arises in that immature trees are also used for the production of a fine cloth made from a single thickness of bark, worn by chiefs and used in chiefly occasions (Neich and Pendergrast 1997:100; Dugdale, interview 30/6/09). So thin that it is almost translucent, Anatole von Hügel, a visitor to Fiji in the 1870s, described this masi as ‘so fine in texture as to be almost like gossamer’ (Roth and Hooper 1990:333).

Masi making is strictly a woman’s industry and women usually work in groups to produce the cloth and decorate it, though for the commercial production of small sheets women may decorate it alone (Kooijman 1977:18). When harvested, the outer and inner bark is slit vertically from top to bottom and removed from the tree as a single piece. Masi, and all barkcloth, is made from the white inner bark of the tree. Once the inner (lewena) bark is separated from the outer bark and cleaned, it is dried in the sun if not being used right away or, if/when being used, soaked in water to ready it for beating. The laborious samusamu (beating) process is performed by women using a dudua (anvil) and ike

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<sup>5</sup> In the nineteenth century, the term malo was used for barkcloth in Fiji (Ewins 1982:5; Hooper 2016:158). Malo was also the name for the loincloth worn exclusively by men, a principal use of masi at that time.

(beater/mallet; Thompson 1940:195; Larsen 2011:121).<sup>6</sup> Kooijman notes that the veilali, the sound produced by rhythmical beating of masi, is as important in the process as the physical hammering of the lewena (1988:43; figure 1.03). As von Hügel observed when visiting Sicila village on the island of Koro on 1 June 1876, ‘The rhythmic strokes of the masi mallets is the first sound that greets you as you approach a village...and the last you hear as you go away from it’ (Roth & Hooper 1990:348).

Felting, a Fijian method of making sheets of masi in which the bark is wet and beaten so that its natural juices make the fibres adhere to one another (Kooijman 1972:13; 1988:44), creates ‘fine even-textured barkcloth, quite distinct from the coarse paste-ups of neighbouring Tonga and Samoa’ (Clunie 1986:126). These coarse large sheets are achieved by using boiled arrowroot or cassava as a glue. The beaters usually have four faces with varying numbers of grooves – widely spaced for initial beating and closer together for finer beating.

After the initial manufacture process has been completed, the maker is left with plain white pieces or sheets. Called masi vulavula, white masi can be used for a variety of purposes, including in chiefly or ceremonial contexts. The most prestigious is that which in the 1870s von Hügel compared to gossamer: seavu. Veil-like and lightweight, when adorning a chief in the form of an isala (turban) or yara (train) it would float and create movement when left to trail from behind (Neich and Pendergrast 1997:100). The province of Ra was especially well known for its relationship with the chiefdom of Bau to whom they supplied fine masi vulavula (Neich and Pendergrast 1997:100). The following techniques and design applications are used to transform white masi.

Masi kuvui, masi smoked to create a rich red-brown colour similar to that of a tabua damu (Hooper 2016:158), is worn as isala (turban), wabale (sash) and vesa (armlets) and indicates chiefly rank.<sup>7</sup> Produced in both Cakaudrove and Lau, masi kuvui demarcates high ranking chiefs. On Nayau, masi kuvui is worn as a turban and tied around the right arm of Tui Nayau during installation as a symbolic action of passing and recognising the mantle of chieftainship by the installing clan (Dugdale, interview 30/6/09; pers. comm. 3/8/16). Masi rerega, another type of richly coloured masi, was historically made by soaking masi in coconut oil mixed with turmeric and powdered dogo (mangrove) root. A

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<sup>6</sup> For detailed information on the beating process, see Neich and Pendergrast (1997:13), Kooijman (1972:344-355; 1988:37-45) and Spicer and Me (2004:30-40).

<sup>7</sup> For a full description of the smoking process, see Roth (1934:302-303). One step omitted in Roth’s description is that the masi was soaked in coconut oil before the smoking process began (Clunie 1986:126).

deep yellow/orange colour was the result and this type of masi was used when children were born, with turmeric also applied to the body of the mother.

Masi is decorated using one (or a combination of) three techniques: stencilling, rubbing and freehand painting. In all cases, the kesa (dye) used to decorate the cloth is made of vegetable and mineral components; masi's colour combination is black, red/brown and white. Black is obtained from the soot produced by burning candlenut kernels, or more recently from a kerosene lamp, which is mixed with a dye extracted from the root of the gadoa tree (*Macaranga seemanni*). In some places dogo (mangrove) root juice is used to make the black kesa (figure 1.04; Buasala, interview 18/2/14). To produce the red/brown colour the dye is mixed with umea, a red clay found principally on the island of Komo in Lau.

It is unclear how stencilling arrived in the region,<sup>8</sup> but the technique is particular to Fiji and is practised in the majority of Fiji's historical and contemporary masi-making centres. The product of stencilling is masi kesa (patterned masi); beautifully patterned and the result of great skill, it was formerly decorated with geometric motifs (Neich and Pendergrast 1997:97-98), although naturalistic designs, such as turtles are now becoming quite common on commercial masi. The act of stencilling is called kesakesa and the stencils are called draudrau. Once cut out of leaves (pandanus, coconut, plantain/banana), they are now fashioned out of used X-ray film, plastic, or in some areas, rubber sheets (Kooijman 1972:366; Colchester 1999:65-70). Still similar to the nineteenth century practice, stencilling is performed by laying the stencil on the masi and applying pigment over the top of it; once the stencil is lifted, the pattern is left behind. The Reverend Thomas Williams described the process he saw in the 1840s, which is identical today: 'Out of the leaf is cut the pattern – not more than an inch long – which she wishes to print upon the border, and holds by her first and middle finger, pressing it down with the thumb. Then taking a soft pad of cloth steeped in dye in her right hand, she rubs it firmly over the stencil, and a fair, sharp figure is made. The practiced fingers of the women move quickly, but it is, after all, a tedious process' (Williams 1858:66).

The rubbing technique appears to have been introduced to eastern Fiji from Tonga in the eighteenth century, either by Fijians returning from visits there or by Tongans who settled in the Lau Group. A kupeti (rubbing board or tablet) that is placed under the cloth was used to decorate large sheets that could take the form of gatu vakaviti (Tongan

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<sup>8</sup> Hypotheses have been provided by Balfour (1924) and Kooijman (1972:368-370).

barkcloth made in the Fijian way) or *gatu vakatoga* (barkcloth made in the Tongan style). *Gatu vakaviti* is differentiated from *gatu vakatoga* because it also includes stencilled motifs; the centre of the cloth shows rubbed designs, while the borders are densely stencilled with geometric motifs. In the interior of Viti Levu, rubbing was also used to decorate *masi*; however, it was accomplished using black *kesa* and a *bitu ni kesakesa* (bamboo roller) placed underneath long thin pieces of cloth used for body adornment and presentation (Roth 1934; Clunie 1986:128). Freehand painting was practised in the interior of Viti Levu to accentuate the rubbed designs, as well as on *gatu vakatoga* and *gatu vakaviti*. Perhaps the most striking use of freehand painting is seen in the province of Cakaudrove on both *masi bolabola* (long thin strips) and *gatu ni bolabola* (large sheets used as *taunamu* (screens); Cakobau, pers. comm. 4/9/16) in which the *masi* is folded and concertinaed to create diagonal and rectilinear patterns on the cloth. These are then outlined and filled in using a bamboo reed ‘brush’ (Neich and Pendergrast 1997:97).<sup>9</sup>

### ***Regional Variations***

In the nineteenth century Fiji’s main *masi* making centres were concentrated in the following provinces: Lau (Moce, Namuka, Kabara, Nayau, Lakeba, Moala and Matuku [Yasayasamoala]), Cakaudrove (Somosomo, Natewa), Lomaiviti, Naitasiri (interior/highland Viti Levu, formerly referred to as Colo - Navatusila, Nadrau), Ra, and Kadavu. The twentieth century introduced Nadroga-Navosa (Vatulele) as a centre, but saw Naitasiri, Kadavu, and Ra largely withdraw from *masi* making.<sup>10</sup>

Designs and patterns on *masi* vary around the archipelago, as does size and thickness of the cloth, with more divergence occurring historically than contemporarily. The nineteenth century marked the height of *masi*’s regional complexity, especially in terms of motif distinctiveness. Lau’s production was primarily divided into two design variations: *gatu* (*vakatoga* and *vakaviti*) and *masi kesa* (Hooper 1995:152). *Gatu vakatoga* was made in large sheets and used in public settings such as weddings, mortuary rights and as screens in houses (figure 1.05). *Gatu vakaviti*, on the other hand, was a hybridised version of *gatu* and *masi kesa*, probably originally produced as a result of political and marriage alliances forged between Fijian and Tongan chiefly lineages (Clunie 1986:193).

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<sup>9</sup> For potential origins of the *bolabola* style, see Kooijman (1972:379).

<sup>10</sup> See Roth (1934:289) for a list of remaining *masi* making areas at the time of that publication. Many areas formerly made *masi* in Fiji, but the focus of this review is on the major *masi* making centres. Vatulele was making *masi* in the nineteenth century as well, but it only became a strong centre in the early twentieth century.

Lauan masi kesa was characterized as ‘short’ in designs, especially in Lakeba where stencils were placed one beside the other creating a repetitive pattern (Hocart 1929:133). Moce, Nayau and Namuka made masi tutuki (figure 1.06), made of long narrow strips of masi decorated with repeated vutu (circular/flower-like) designs. Always a black motif repeated and spread out on a white cloth, masi tutuki was sometimes edged with a border of red/brown and black motifs or had a band of kesakesa in the middle of the piece with scattered vutu on either side. It was worn on ceremonial occasions as a three-piece outfit, and also hung on the lower beams of houses as wall décor (Thompson 1940: 196). It can still be seen in some houses and churches. ‘Long’ design compositions belonged to Cakaudrove, where masi bolabola was made by hand painting long linear design motifs (Hocart 1929:133; Kooijman 1972:377). Matuku’s masi kesa was also called ‘long’, exhibiting a possible mixture of stencilling and freehand painting, but was applied to large sheets instead of long and narrow pieces. Intricate and dense, Matuku and the whole of Yasayasamoala’s masi kesa was considered to be regionally distinct and was favoured by those of high-rank such as King George Tupou I, who gifted a sheet of his own Yasayasamoala masi to Reverend R.B. Lyth in the 1850s (see chapter 4, figure 4.09).

A transitional and blurred boundary existed between Southern Cakaudrove and Northern Lau in the nineteenth century and is reflected in the masi of the region.<sup>11</sup> ‘Long’ designs and cloth, mainly freehand painted with accents of simple stencilling, were produced in this area. Completely different than any other region, these pieces of masi would have been used and worn during ceremonial occasions as yara (trains), as was witnessed by Sir Arthur Gordon at the Bose Vakaturaga in 1876 at Waikava, Vanua Levu when Tui Cakau was adorned in a ‘train of black and white masi over 300 feet long, borne by innumerable pages’ (Gordon 1901:235). At the same occasion Alfred Maudslay noted:

After he [Tui Cakau] had made a speech of welcome, and presented some whale’s teeth, the train was dropped... Many other chiefs went through the same ceremony according to their rank: the pile of masi left at the end was enormous. Then a great roll of masi covered with mats was presented. It took about a hundred men to carry it...Of course all these presents were afterwards divided up, and given to the visitors, who had some of them come long distances to attend the Council. (Maudslay 1930:153)

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<sup>11</sup> See Spurway (2015) for more information.

A similar style was made in the interior/highlands of Viti Levu. Rubbed using bitu ni kesakesa, the mostly black masi was worn during ceremonial exchanges. Perhaps the most well-known drawing of it is by Theodor Kleinschmidt (1877) in which he depicts Tui Nadrau wrapped, looped and adorned in hundreds of yards of black masi from interior Viti Levu (figure 1.07). By the 1930s, when Roth was documenting masi from the interior, Vatulele was becoming a major centre for its manufacture. On Vatulele, it is believed that masi making first came to the island from the people of Taunovo village who were originally from Korolevu-i-Colo, far up the Sigatoka River near to Roth's own 1934 study in Navatusila (Ewins 2009:23). In the nineteenth century, only three types of masi were made on the island: masi vulavula, masi kuvui and red-rubbed kumi. Vatulele did not make masi kesa until knowledge of the technique and motifs was introduced by Adi Arieta Tegei, the wife of Vatulele's first resident Wesleyan minister. From Gau, she was on Vatulele between 1909-1914 and had learned masi making at a religious college (Ewins 1999:231). Nowadays, masi kesa is made in large sheets and as three-piece ceremonial attire. Considered a hybrid of different regions, Vatulele masi is characterized by the large motifs applied to the cloth and their widely spaced configuration (as opposed to denser Lauan kesakesa). Tegei assimilated several masi traditions in her teachings to the Vatulele women, resulting in the 'pick-and-mix' motifs used by its masi makers (Ewins 1999:232).

Today, Vatulele and Moce are the largest producers of barkcloth in Fiji, for both commercial sale and local ceremonial use. Cakaudrove still makes large amounts of masi bola ni Cakaudrove (gatu ni bolabola) for ceremonial occasions.

Documented motifs from Cakaudrove, Lau and Vatulele have the potential to demonstrate both similarities and differences between Fiji's masi making centres and the resulting gradual lack of regional distinctness in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The three corpuses of regional designs are based on mid- to late-twentieth century examples of masi, examined during fieldwork conducted by George Kingsley Roth (1953-57), Simon Kooijman (1973) and Roderick Ewins (1980-1999).

Roth's corpus (figure 1.08) consists of designs from Natewa in Cakaudrove. Recorded on a single piece of masi which he commissioned in 1957 to illustrate Natewan masi designs, each 'pane' of the masi shows one named design. Totalling twenty-four motifs, some are individual designs which have been repeated to fill the space while a few appear to be a series of design motifs which have been named in their compositional structure. Roth commissioned other pieces which corroborate the designs on 1963.208 (the corpus piece), now housed in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of

Cambridge. Data recorded by Colchester (1999) during her doctoral fieldwork also accord with these designs. In general, Cakaudrove motifs appear to be relatively homogenous – Colchester’s Somosomo data (1999), as well as Veys’ data of *bola vaka Cakaudrove* (2005), show that many of Roth’s recorded Natewa motifs are the same in Somosomo.

Kooijman’s corpus (figure 1.09) is made up of seventeen designs which he documented in 1973 during fieldwork on the island of Moce in Lau. Each of the motifs is named, with some having multiple (and slightly varied, but still of the same family) designs under one name. In this instance, only the type was counted as a motif category in the corpus; variations such as those found in the vutu stencil (eg. vutu veituitui, vutu ni drali, vutu tutuki) were not counted as an individual motif, even though each itself has several variations. Ewins’ corpus (figure 1.10) is compiled from many years of examination of Vatulele masi, the majority being in the 1980s. He notes nine Vatulele masi motifs of which several also have variations (Ewins 2009:275). Many of the masi motifs he describes can be compared to motifs from other masi producing regions. However, although they are similar in appearance, they do not have the same names.

### ***Historical Adaptations***

Since the eighteenth century, there have been continuous changes in form and style of Fijian masi. When considering technique, shortcuts to the final product have become more commonplace. Moreover, masi makers who would not have used certain techniques have now begun using them, which may be a reason for adapted methods of manufacture. For example, recently on Vatulele and in urban Suva, masi made to resemble (and stand in for) masi kuvui is not actually smoked. Instead, masi vulavula is soaked in a dogo (mangrove root) juice dye and then spread out in the sun to dry (Spicer and Me 2004:51). When looking closely at ‘real’ and ‘fake’ masi kuvui, the evenness and richness (or lack thereof) of the colouring is often a giveaway of the method used to obtain the red colour. Masi rerega too is now made by simply rubbing plain masi with turmeric-coloured kesa instead of soaking it in turmeric infused coconut oil. Popular today for its unique colour, the historical significance of female fertility and procreation is no longer understood (Buasala, interview 18/2/14).

The use of Tongan-style gatu is no longer restricted to Lau (Hooper 1995:156) and is used in urban areas, particularly for life-cycle events where barkcloth is expected and required. Certain contemporary Cakaudrove design motifs differ significantly to earlier ones. The ‘long’ bolabola motifs have largely been replaced by ‘short’ stencilled ones,

possibly borrowed from Lau and other areas of Cakaudrove (Kooijman 1972:377). Today, bola motifs have virtually disappeared from all areas of Cakaudrove except the chiefly village of Somosomo (Ewins 2013:95) and those that still exist, such as the walu, are indeed much ‘shorter’ than in their nineteenth century counterparts. In Somosomo itself, two design systems are now in existence: ‘The women there continue to provide absolutely traditional cloth for weighty occasions, but stencilled masi kesa is used for routine rites of passage and occasional sale to other Fijians or Westerners’ (Ewins 2013:95). Here, Ewins distinguishes between gatu ni bolabola and masi kesa in that gatu ni bolabola is the ‘traditional’ cloth that is made and used for ceremonial occasions and is not for sale, while what is for occasional sale is masi kesa decorated with a mixture of Somosomo-specific stencilled motifs imported from Northern Lau. However, the selling of such pieces is not done in a formal or organised way but is random and opportunistic. Cakaudrove masi is not commercialised in the way that Lauan and Vatulele masi is, so pieces appearing on the market does occur but is not common. Yasayasamoala’s Moala and Matuku islands, once known for their highly developed stencilling technique, no longer make masi (Kooijman 1972:377). Examples housed in museum collections are the only evidence of these previous manufacturing centres and are of great interest to Fijian women.

### **Masi in Fijian Culture**

As one of the most important ceremonial exchange objects in Fijian culture, masi continues to be presented on a range of occasions. Life-cycle rituals such as births, deaths, marriages and chiefly installations are not considered complete without both the presence and presentation of masi, cementing and strengthening alliances, bonds and relationships (Clunie 1986:126).

### ***Valuables, exchange, gender and masi’s role in ritual***

iYau (valuables) is a very important category in Fijian culture. It evokes meanings of things to be treasured, valued and, in particular, things which can be brought to be given away at ceremonial presentations. It is often paired with the term magiti, meaning feasts, and any formal gathering between kin will usually involve presentations of iyau and magiti. These are different from ordinary things and ordinary food, although in a non-ceremonial context things regarded as iyau and magiti may be referred to as iyaya (ordinary baggage or equipment) and kakana (food). So iyau are special things, to be

presented on formal occasions. They are also in their core meaning female things, the products of women's skilled labour. As summarized by Steven Hooper (2016:98):

At base, valuables are female products ... for any kinship presentation and exchange, the products of women's labour are regarded as essential. Women are life-givers who bear children and whose mats, barkcloth and [scented coconut] oil in turn wrap, protect, give lustre to and secure life in others, men and women, on ritual occasions throughout their lives. The role of women is recognised as crucial and is symbolised in their specific manufactures, which wrap newborns and the dead, which provide pathways for divine chiefs and, formerly, for the spirits in pre-Christian temples.

Masi is an important iyau, and at major ceremonies vast quantities of it were, and sometimes still are, produced and given away, making the givers immensely proud to demonstrate the cultural strength of their family, clan or chiefdom. Other important things are classed as iyau, such as tabua (presentation whale teeth) and specialist wood products such as bowls, digging stick and canoes, which appear at major chiefly exchanges. But the use of tabua by ordinary people is relatively recent (Hooper 2013) and specialist wood products do not usually feature in everyday kinship exchanges. A product of the land, and of women's hands, masi making is called *cakacaka ni liga* (lit: work of the hands). Acting, working and 'doing' in the manner of the land (*vakavanua*), refers to way of living and behaving that is culturally appropriate. Christina Toren has observed that the notion of tradition:

As culturally appropriate action makes it possible for Fijians at once to transform their culture and affirm its dynamic integrity. The Fijian equivalent for 'ritual' as a generic term is also *cakacaka vakavanua*. Thus, in Fiji, ritual is doing something in a Fijian way; its meaning arises from how things are done, as well as from what is done. Moreover, if one does something in a Fijian way then the doing of it becomes Fijian. This is a processual notion and so it can incorporate change. (Toren 1999:62)

Ephemeral in nature, masi as a form of iyau was 'held only until some *oga* or obligation required its distribution as a signifier of relationships or connectedness' (Hooper *et al.* 2015:100).

Being wrapped in masi/cloth is an important element of ritual in Fiji, signifying accumulated and preserved power, sacredness and exalted status. Masi not only protects, it

also absorbs and becomes suffused with the power of the entity which it decorates, constrains and restrains (figure 1.11; Gell 1993:89). Presenting and processing large volumes of masi during ceremonial occasions such as solevu (see chapter 3) accentuates the power of the giver for two reasons: the first displayed collective wealth and prestige, the second demonstrated the unwrapping of the masi 'skin' and divestment of mana (Gell 1993:89). When examining the components of a solevu, wrapping and unwrapping emphasises relationships, gender and identities.

Weddings, funerals and chiefly investitures are three rites of passage and life-cycle rituals which demonstrate masi's key role in display during cakacaka vakavanua. Presenting iyau during engagement and wedding proceedings seals the union between the bride, bridegroom and their two families (Ravuvu 1983:50; Hooper 1995:157). One of the main roles of masi in this process was its presence in setting up the new marital home, particularly the davodavo ni vakamau or marital bed (figure 1.12; Ravuvu 1983:51). Masi also served as attire for the wedding ceremony; in recent decades each party is adorned in a three-piece costume consisting of an underskirt, a waist skirt and a sash. Dressing the bride and bridegroom, wrapping them in masi, is enacted ceremonially and is performed in the designated house of each side of the marriage (bride and groom) by female relatives (Kooijman 1977:77). In Lauan wedding ceremonies, masi is also exchanged between female members of each side via the butu, an exchange in which the bride and groom are successively paraded between their respective houses, clothed in surplus masi and with large pieces of masi or gatu carried before and behind as a train. The piece in front is put on the ground and walked over as a pathway into the house. Once inside the bride or groom is divested of their outer masi layers of clothing, the pathway and train are put aside and new masi outer clothing and pieces of gatu assembled for the return procession. These masi-bedecked journeys between the headquarters of each side, which are pre-planned, may take place many times, according to the resources of the female relatives on each side (Kooijman 1977:82-84; Hooper 1982: 76-79). Mortuary rituals are similar to marriages in that offerings of iyau were presented to the deceased's family, mats and masi being two of the most important female-produced ceremonial gifts to take when one goes to reguregu (Ravuvu 1983:64). As women were traditionally responsible for life and death (Ewins 2009:138), female-made iyau were crucial to such events (figure 1.13). When considering chiefly funerals, as well as installations, masi functioned as a way to envelope and acknowledge the chief's mana (divine efficacy) and spirit. Upon the death of Ro Jone Mataitini, Vunivalu of Rewa, in 2008 masi not only served as an indicator of chiefly status,

but as a 'second skin' in which his efficacy was absorbed and transmitted. His body was wrapped in masi inside the coffin, which was then wrapped and draped in cloth. The path from his resting place within the chiefly house to the church was covered with masi so as not to let any part of him or his mana come in contact with anything that would neutralise his chiefly power.

In pre-Christian Fiji, masi played an important role in communicating with gods and vu (spirits). Bure kalou (spirit houses) and chiefly houses had large masi screens which partitioned public from private sectors of the building and Reverend Thomas Williams (1858:222-23) noted that inside a temple he visited in the 1840s a long white masi streamer hung down from the top and formed 'the path down which the god passes to enter the priest, and marks the holy place which few but he dare approach.' When bete (priests) interacted with the spirit world, they performed rituals involving lengths of masi and thus became vakawaqa or possessed as a result. The term waqa, meaning 'skin', 'container' or 'vessel', was used in descriptions of masi design composition, with lewena (flesh/contents) being motifs which were embedded in the waqa (Colchester 2005:147). In the twentieth century, older Natewan ladies suggested that the ongoing reproduction of patterns and motifs on masi is a method of transporting ancestral powers into the world of the living. Even more, 'The notion that masi clothing was a vessel that could serve as a conduit for divine intervention was also suggested by the terms used to describe formal components of masi design which had an affinity with those used to describe spirit possession' (Colchester 2005:147).

Marshall Sahlins (1985) developed the concept of women's power as embodied in masi when he analysed the rituals of installing the paramount chiefs of Lau. He noted how masi was used to bind the head of the new chief in the form of a turban, how it was tied around his arms, metaphorically binding him, and how long barkcloth pathways were used when the chief walked from the shore to his house. The masi ties had to be worn for four nights before they and the other masi he wore were discarded into the sea. Sahlins interpreted these rituals as the way in which female agency and productive power was embodied in the masi they made, which was in turn used to control, channel and protect the chief and his potentially dangerous mana.

When considering masi as an embodiment of women's power, procreation is viewed in both metaphoric and literal means; women 'birth' masi in the same way that they birth the future leaders of their society (Colchester 2005:147). This is significant in that while women do not outwardly present or adorn themselves in masi in ceremonial exchange

contexts (with the exception now of marriage exchanges), without them there would not be cultural heritage (object and person) to ‘display’. However, an anomaly exists in the theory that masi embodies female power in Fiji. This relates to the interior/highlands of Viti Levu. In Eastern and Southern Fiji, women were responsible for the entire exercise of masi making, aside from minimal male assistance in cultivating and harvesting paper mulberry trees. However, Roth (1934:289) describes that while women beat the masi into its desired shape and size (long thin strips suitable for body adornment), it was men in Navatusila who undertook the task of applying the designs. Daunimasi (expert in masi) is the term used in Lau to denote a masi making specialist, but Roth refers to the male printers at Navatusila as matai.<sup>12</sup> Little is known about why or how men came to be involved in masi making in Nadroga-Navosa, where Navatusila is located. That said, Ewins’ (2009:23) suggestion that Vatulele masi-making originated close to Navatusila may help explain the fact that he saw men participating in masi decoration during his fieldwork.

### ***The Problem of Meaning***

While much has been written about masi’s design techniques and applications, a more difficult to decipher issue surrounds the problem of ‘meaning’. There is a popular notion that masi motifs have direct meanings, as if they are a kind of code or script which can be read off. Although names are assigned to individual motifs, which may differ in different parts of Fiji, they do not necessarily have fixed meanings. They may relate to the appearance of the motif, such as seru, meaning comb, for a motif with several straight lines emerging from a solid block. But why a comb should be prioritised for inclusion in a masi design remains unclear. The same applies to a Moce design called saga ni uga (tracks of the hermit crab; Kooijman 1977:51), which closely resemble the angled marks left by hermit crabs moving across a sandy beach. Whether the hermit crab has any particular sanctity or special quality is debatable. But the design makes a very nice border when combined with vetau straight lines. Other names for motifs are obscure. For example, kamiki has no other meaning in Fijian than for the vane swastika design, which in Tonga is called manulua, meaning two birds, to which its four ‘wings’ has some resemblance. In Fijian it is not called manulua (two birds) but kamiki, which is likely a very old name, the significance of which has been lost.

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<sup>12</sup> A ‘dau’ is an expert in something, such as a daunivucu (composer of chants and meke) or daubati (tattooist, related to veiqia, the practice of female tattooing) (Gatty 2009:61). A ‘matai’ is a skilled person, usually a male carpenter.

Looking at the form and composition of barkcloths can give some insights into meaning. Hooper (1995) analysed Lauan gatu vakaviti, which are tent-like when in ritual use at weddings, as being symbolic houses, linked to the new household which was being established at the wedding. Certain parts of the design including the doka (ridge pole) were equivalent to those used in house construction. But meanings are elusive and as this study will show, masi and its designs are interpreted and reinterpreted according to context and are developing new meanings for new audiences in the twenty-first century.

### **Understanding Masi Today**

One of the main aims of this study is the endeavor of understanding masi today, particularly in the light of its enduring cultural significance and importance to Fijians, wherever they may be located in the world.

### **Research Questions**

This research focuses specifically on urban contemporary Fijian masi and the notion of ‘Fijianness’ in twenty-first century Suva. It investigates the overarching question of how to account for the continuing significance of masi for urban Fijians by addressing three more detailed research questions. Designed to engage with this complexly dynamic and fluid situation and reflect its constantly shifting and adapting contexts, these questions have been constructed to address the social biography of urban Fiji masi in a comprehensive way:

1. In what ways does masi’s presence in the urban market place affect its form, design and meaning for Fijians?
2. In what ways are traditional gender roles in Fiji being challenged by contemporary production, decoration and presentation of masi?
3. What aspects of masi use, display, and to a lesser extent masi motifs, express cultural identity for urban and diasporic Fijians?

The first question looks at the relationship between the Fijian terms vakavanua (in the manner of the land) and the more recent vakabisinisi (in the manner of business), and questions the way in which, if at all, urban contemporary masi making, decoration and use fits into both of those realms. Investigating the role of masi as a product of the land intrinsic to enduring cultural practices such as solevu, as well as masi’s place in the urban

market place as an actor in the cash economy-driven capital city of Suva, shows that masi has for centuries been made for transfer and used in transactions, so that its inclusion in vakabisinisi practices is merely an adaptation of its original nature. An accepted form of deviation from vakavanua ways to a vakabisinisi practice has been the development of ‘handicraft’ markets in Suva from the 1970s, as well as masi’s inclusion in urban visual and performance art. Thus, if masi is produced vakabisinisi, then not following culturally dictated methods of design and decoration (and in turn, using motifs that may not be accessible in a vakavanua context because of regional distinct patterning) can be overlooked. To classify it in a ‘business’ context allows concessions to be made that would not necessarily be tolerated in traditional realms. Although this may weaken historically strong regional identities associated with masi-making centres, it has the potential to promote a stronger ‘Fijian’ one. I consider the separation of tradition and business as an adaptation created for contemporary situations in which traditional aspects of form, motifs and cultural identifiers can be altered in order to fit into an urban and globalising world while still retaining ceremonial and ritualistic presentation-like qualities.

This leads to the second question, gender and masi, which in the urban contemporary arena are connected on many levels. Visual and performance art, in which urban contemporary Fijian fashion is included, is mainly dominated by male artists, many of whom are located in and around Suva. Juxtaposed with the historical relationship between masi and women, which is highly symbolic of procreation and life (Colchester 2005:147-148), Fiji’s fashion industry is considered here as a context in which traditional gender roles are being challenged. The presence and prominence of masi in fashion, notably masi couture (a Fijianised version of haute couture), exemplifies the ways in which gender has been modified in urban Suva without largely affecting the inherent significance of masi to Fijians. With masi kesa couture gowns and wedding dresses increasing in popularity in the twenty-first century, and the promotion of such creations by fashion-focused organisations and in large-scale fashion shows and events, I consider how the shift from tradition to fashion adapts the cultural meaning of masi, no longer strictly connecting or adhering to gender identity. Fashion challenging traditional gender roles of masi appears to be creating a new form of ‘Fijianness’, which is not gendered but centred in cultural distinctiveness.

Continuing on the pathway of cultural distinctiveness, the final question addresses the notion of cultural and creative adaptability in masi design, use and significance. While traditional pathways of masi continue to be followed, including in life-cycle events such as weddings, funerals and birthdays (Kooijman 1977; Ewins 2009; Hulkenberg 2009, 2015),

adaptations in those rituals and adaptations which have been created in strictly urban contexts have developed. Urban contemporary masi use, both for cultural and for national purposes, will be explored through the notion of Urban-Fiji, a concept borrowed from Auckland's large and diverse Urbanesian community. 'Urban-Fiji', the premise that urban Suva is just as much a Fijian diaspora as global Fijian diasporic communities, is significant to issues surrounding being 'Fijian'. Displaying an Urban-Fiji identity through masi, and its increasingly modified and adapted modes of display, will be examined through the notion of the materiality, or physicality, of masi and the significance of masi's designs and motifs. Looking at how urban and global Fijian communities have identified with *masi kesa* as an expression of cultural identity will point the research towards Were (2010:133), who notes that, 'Patterned cloth or clothing can thus carry ideas and associations that strive to make connections to things that lie beyond the surface, in the social world.' The motifs on masi are visual qualities which, when compared to historical records of masi use and significance, do not necessitate ancestral or deeply embedded cultural meaning to convey identity and be seen as uniquely Fijian designs.

### **Methodological Framework**

I take an interdisciplinary approach, adapting anthropological, museological and practice-led methodologies. As a part-time student, I have completed four short periods of fieldwork in Fiji (October 2012 - February 2013, December 2013 – April 2014, December 2014 – February 2015; December 2015 – March 2016). Electing to undertake multiple periods of fieldwork, instead of committing to one continuous fieldwork period, has allowed me to appreciate current issues and debates affecting masi in Suva. Two additional visits took place (June 2017 – July 2017; February 2018 – March 2018) in which I was able to continue engaging with my work and follow-up on developments, even though the purpose of those specific trips was not research-focused. Museum collections visits have also been conducted as has ongoing research with diasporic Fijian communities, both as a participant-observer and as an active artist.

Already having an established link to Fiji and its cultural practices through my maternal lineage (*kai* Nukubalavu, Vanua Levu; *vasu i* Nukuni, Ono-i-Lau), and growing up within the diasporic Fijian community (Vancouver, Canada) and in Fiji itself, my personal connection to this research has allowed me to bypass the often time-consuming task of forging relationships during the initial stages of fieldwork. Additionally, being a female researcher studying a female cultural product has given me opportunities to learn

information to which male researchers may not have had easy access, especially from older makers and artists. The research has required establishing relationships with the staff of the Fiji Museum, masi makers in Fiji's capital city of Suva, vendors in Suva's three main masi-selling markets and proprietors of corporate companies selling masi.

During my first fieldwork trip, I concentrated on conducting archival and collections research at the Fiji Museum systematically analysing and photographing their masi collection. Its examination provided a better understanding of both historical and contemporary masi use and significance. It also allowed comparisons of design motif with well-documented examples in Kooijman (1972, 1977) and those housed in UK museum collections. I also began interviews with Fijian fashion designers who I worked with during the London Pacific Fashion Show's multiple events (29 September-6 October 2012), and became immersed in Fiji's fashion industry by participating in several fashion events. The resulting data drew on approaches pertaining to cloth, adornment and the body (Weiner & Schneider 1989; Gell 1993; Colchester 2003; Küchler & Were 2005) as well as considered scholarship focusing on diasporic Pacific fashion in Auckland (Raymond 2003; Colchester 2003; Wall 2010).

My second, third and fourth fieldwork trips focused exclusively on urban contemporary masi use and its role in the urban contemporary Suva, as well as in diasporic Fijian communities. I focused specifically on masi's role in the Suva market place, which allowed me to observe masi in a commercial setting as well as assessing the reactions to and repercussions of international controversies in which masi and its motifs were implicated. I studied several of Fiji's contemporary fashion designers, specifically Hupfeld Hoerder (male; Fijian, Rotuman, German heritage), Epeli Tuibeqa (male; Fijian heritage), Robert Kennedy (male; European heritage) and Anton Conway Wye (male; Fijian, Chinese, European heritage; paternal chiefly genealogy), and conducted research at different stages of their garment creation process. It was through this research that the contemporary notion of 'Fijianness' was explored. While previous studies have concentrated on masi made in traditional regions of manufacture in traditional types and styles (Kooijman 1972, 1977; Colchester 1999; Ewins 2009), my research takes the notion of urban contemporaneity into account and explores what that means to the future of masi, its design motifs and Fijian cultural identity. My 2013-2014 trip allowed me to work on a coinciding exhibition (Fiji Museum, see chapter 4) and workshop organized, curated and facilitated with two colleagues which assisted in helping me to gauge contemporary responses to both historical and contemporary examples of masi as well as work with

traditional and contemporary makers. Subsequent research trips also allowed me to assist with Fiji Museum exhibitions, staff training/professional development, collections management and public programming.

Another component of my fieldwork entailed site visits to museums in the Pacific and the United Kingdom that hold significant Fijian collections, including the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Cambridge), Auckland Museum (New Zealand) and the Australian Museum (Sydney). A corpus of masi housed in these museums has been assembled and complements the work of Kooijman (1972, 1977). Visits to Auckland Museum and the Australian Museum coincided with my second fieldwork trip (December 2013 – April 2014) while my employment on the AHRC-funded *Fijian Art* research project afforded me the time to conduct research in several UK museums. The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge deserves special mention because of its joint-heading of the *Fijian Art* research project and the almost unlimited access I was given to engage with their masi collection, which was only matched by Fiji Museum.

Lastly, the final component of my fieldwork concentrated on me following a practice-led methodology participating in various artistic as well as professional events in which I was involved in the urban contemporary activation of masi and its motifs. For this methodological perspective, which incorporated an open-space (= unprescribed) approach, I am indebted to Rosanna Raymond and her guidance in navigating the Pacific diaspora in the UK, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. Artistic events took place in areas where large Fijian diasporic communities are located, including Suva (Fiji), Vancouver (Canada), London (United Kingdom), Brisbane (Australia) and Auckland (New Zealand). Working with members of the communities, as well as members of the larger Urbanesia community (see chapter 4; the term Urbanesia is used to signify the urban contemporary self-unification of Pacific peoples), practice-led research was conceptualised and carried out producing adapted visual and performative modified modes of masi display. Professionally, I was fortunate to co-curate several exhibitions, and advise on others, in which masi was strongly featured. These exhibitions were mounted in both Fiji and the UK, further adding to research material concerning diasporic Fijian communities. In 2017, an unexpected professional opportunity arose for which I took a leave of absence from my doctoral studies to undertake a contract with the Fijian COP23 Presidency as a cultural adviser and the Culture Manager (Europe)/Fiji Pavilion Manager. Masi was an integral component of the presidency's message of cultural and national identity and contributed to an additional aspect of my research.

## **Contextualising the Study**

### ***Literature***

Most nineteenth century visitors to Fiji mention the use of barkcloth, either as men's loincloths or as festival clothing worn by dancers or given away in ceremonial exchanges. The first reference to Fijian masi in fact occurs in Tonga in 1777 during Cook's third voyage, when William Anderson met Fijians there and described the things they brought to Tonga as all having 'a cast of superiority in the workmanship', including 'their cloth which is beautifully checquer'd' (Anderson in Beaglehole 1967:958-59). The sources from the nineteenth and early twentieth century can give helpful detail about occasions when masi was seen or used, and several observers, such as Reverend Thomas Williams (1858; 1931), Anatole von Hügel (Roth and Hooper 1990) and Constance Gordon Cumming (1881) also provide descriptions of its manufacture. However, it was not until the 1930s that what might be called research was done when G.K. Roth made a study of masi-making at Navatusila in the Highlands of Viti Levu. The Dutch ethnographer Simon Kooijman became an expert in Pacific barkcloth and published a comprehensive study of Polynesian barkcloth, *Tapa in Polynesia*, in 1972, based on thorough examination of examples in museum collections. He then went to do fieldwork on the Fijian island of Moce in Lau in 1973 and published what is the first scholarly book dedicated to a Fijian masi-producing centre (1977). A general booklet had been published in Fiji by Troxler (1971), but this is a superficial survey which is not always reliable. Spicer and Me published another general book in 2004 in which they were assisted by Makereta Matemosi, a masi maker from Namuka Island in Lau. Research based on fieldwork in the places where masi is traditionally made has been published by Roderick Ewins (Vatulele; 1982, 1999, 2009, 2013), Mereise Tabualevu *et al.* (1997), Chloe Colchester (Cakaudrove/Natewa; 1999, 2003, 2005) and Jara Hulkenberg (Moce; 2009, 2015), and all these sources have been helpful in providing background information for the thesis. Simon Kooijman published a shorter general book on Polynesian tapa in 1988 and Roger Neich and Michael Pendergrast published a fully illustrated survey of Pacific barkcloth in 1997, based mainly on collections in Auckland Museum.

In barkcloth studies of the broader Western Polynesia region, for Samoa Mary Pritchard produced a book dedicated to Samoan siapo (1984) and Sean Mallon included a section on siapo in his book *Samoan Art and Artists* (2002). For Tonga, Adrienne Kaeppler has published articles (1978; 2005) and referred to Tongan ngatu regularly in her numerous

publications. Ping-Ann Addo (2004, 2013) has published on the recent role of ngatu in the Tongan diaspora, especially regarding the diaspora's revitalisation of gatu-making in California. Including cultivating the trees and beating the cloth, something which has not been accomplished yet by any Fijian diaspora, Addo's publications are relevant to the future of Fijian diaspora studies concerning masi production. Cresantia Frances Koya Vaka'uta's PhD thesis (2013) on the relationship between Samoan and Tongan barkcloth and tattooing compares the significance of the cloth and motifs from each culture and also looks at siapo/ngatu as important epistemological sites where knowing and learning occur. However, the most comprehensive study of historical and contemporary Tongan ngatu is by Wonu Veys (2017b).

This thesis mainly focuses on recent developments in the urban use of masi and masi motifs, so literature on dress/cloth/clothing, fashion, design and performance has proved essential to this study. Works by Weiner and Schneider (1989) and Weiner (1994) explore the notion that the term cloth includes fibre and barkcloth, and that cloth is a much wider and more inclusive category than textile. Most significant here is their work on cloth (including barkcloth) as adornment and the female power which it evokes. Susanne Küchler's work on dress and clothing (2003, 2005) pertains to material culture, cloth and clothing the human body. The research project *Clothing the Pacific* is particularly relevant as it, 'set out to examine the multiple histories of cloth and clothing in the contemporary Pacific and to investigate how cloth has facilitated both social innovation and resistance during the colonial and post-colonial period' (Küchler in Colchester 2003:xi). Karen Hansen (2004) provides a bridge between things that have been hard to connect: progressing the conversation from cloth to fashion and privileging non-Western dress as fashion. Her article *The World in Dress: Anthropological Perspectives on Clothing, Fashion, and Culture* looks at how literature on non-Western cloth and clothing has marginalised it, and instead examines its role as dress and fashion. Fashion and the body is significant to this study. Joanne Entwistle (2000, 2015) has highlighted the 'fashioned' body and the notion that while the term 'fashion' refers to a specific system of dress that originates in the West, all cultures 'dress' the body in the same way, which makes dress (and fashion) a crucial feature of social order. Finally, Pacific dress and fashion is included in the *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*. Edited by Eicher and Ross (2010), volume 7 is dedicated to Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific Islands and illuminates various aspects of dress and adornment. Of particular relevance to this study has been Feona Wall's (2010) contribution on the Pacific Sisters, a fashion activist

collective, and Roderick Ewins' (2010) chapter on Fijian dress and adornment. Graeme Were's (2005, 2010, 2013) extensive studies on design highlight the role that patterning and design plays on things/objects. He looks at how designs carry ideas and associations to things that may lie below the surface and explains that designs are responsible for making ideas visible by way of conceptual models. Archaeologist George Lau (2010) supports this concept through his work on surface theory in which he discusses that decorating surfaces with shared common designs helps to identify cultural significance. In his work, he has found that designs on surfaces can often be more significant than the objects on which they are found. Finally, Stephanie Nohelani Teves (2018) explores performance and cultural identity. Specifically looking at the concept of aloha (Hawai'ian; 'love', friendship), Teves refers to both staged performances and enactments in everyday life. Significant in her study is the commercialisation of aloha and how such an important component of indigenous Hawai'ian culture is used across different realms (cultural and commercial), including as both a cultural and national identifier.

Connected to fashion, design and performance is the existence of cultural diasporas around the world. Literature on diaspora studies is marked by Teresia Teaiwa's (2005) work on the discourse of diasporas, as well as by Gupta *et al.*'s (2007) study focused on how national boundaries have become more difficult to define because the borders of countries are no longer solely physical. Diasporas and migration see nationalism (and cultural identity) take root in multiple locations around the world. Stuart Hall's (1990) article *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* explores cultural identity and representation and the resulting new forms of cultural practice that emerge when communities form diasporas away from their homelands. Work combining non-Western fashion has also informed this research. Rovine (2009), Balasescu (2007) and Assmann (2008) look to the role of fashion in Africa, Tehran and Japan respectively, and also how fashion demands and informs the cultural identity of diasporic communities.

Masi in Fiji was intimately connected to women and to femaleness. Embodiment is a theme which underlies this thesis, and is a topic which has been discussed by Marshall Sahlins (1983; 1985), Marilyn Strathern (1988) and Alfred Gell (1998) in relation to the Pacific and Fiji. Sahlins (1985) has described how barkcloth pathways and body bindings have embodied female agency and power in channelling divine chiefly power during installation rituals in Lau. He has also (1983) suggested that Fijian iyau (valuables), of which masi is a crucial part, are a system of objects which parallel relationships between people. There has been much debate for a long time in Fiji about the conflict between

individualism and communalism, and this issue has become a big discussion point in relation to copyright issues for masi designs. This is examined in chapter 5 in the recent copyright controversies. Strathern's proposal (1988) that in Melanesian societies people should be understood as 'dividuals' or multiple persons and not individuals is relevant here, because although she has been criticised for over-generalising, the idea that people are composed of their relationships with others can be applied to the situation in Fiji, where kinship relations (*vakaveiwekani*) are fundamental and masi is used to embody the links between intermarrying groups which are formed by women (Hooper 1995). In this way masi can be considered to be the equivalent to, and substitutes for, women in the sense that Gell (1998) proposed; that it embodies their productive and reproductive power. This may be connected to the continuing dynamism of masi, which is a focus of this thesis. Rather than dying out as something redundant, it is finding new energy and new life in contemporary urban Fiji.

### ***Collections and Illustrations***

Numerous collections around the world, including Fiji Museum, hold historic Fijian masi from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Often the masi lacks clear provenance and no doubt much of it was acquired by gift or as souvenirs which the donors to museums did not record. The Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, has masi which was acquired by US traders during the first half of the nineteenth century. Some of it is immediately recognisable as being from Cakaudrove, because of the distinctive designs, but the provenance of other pieces is less sure. The Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC has masi collected during the 1840 visit to Fiji of the Wilkes US Exploring Expedition, and the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge has a substantial collection made in the 1870s by residents connected to the first colonial government. In the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum in Cologne is a rare large piece of masi for which information about its collection exists. It was given by Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi (and no doubt his wife Adi Maopa) to the German photographer John William Lindt during a visit to Ra in Fiji in 1892 (Hooper *et al.* 2015). It is a *gatu vakaviti* in style, with a combination of stencilled and rubbed designs not typical of Ra. It was most likely made in Lau, the homeland of Adi Maopa who as a chiefly lady from Lakeba would have had access to high-quality masi (figure 1.14). The wealth of masi in collections around the globe could be the subject of an important historical study – it has largely been neglected by scholars –

but as the main focus of this thesis is on recent and contemporary masi developments, there is no scope to discuss it further here.

Another potentially valuable source for the study of masi is nineteenth century illustrations, including drawings, paintings and photographs. Some well-known examples are used in this thesis, including the coloured drawing done by Theodor Kleinschmidt in 1877 of Tui Nadrau at Natuatuacoko loaded with masi prior to a ceremonial presentation (see figure 1.07). Drawings such as this are very useful to supplement written descriptions, although one always has to be cautious of artistic license or inaccuracies. Drawings by Anatole von Hügel of some of the masi housed in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge are highly detailed and in some cases give clues to what the masi looked like at the beginning of their museum life (figure 1.15). Von Hügel's masi drawings also proved useful in museum research when they were taken to Fiji in the mid twentieth century and used by G.K. Roth to identify masi types and motifs that were (at that time) falling into obscurity, possibly because of the influence of colonialism and already occurring urban drift. Photography, such as images showing Cakobau and other Fijians with gatu isulu in the 1870s (figure 1.16) can show the kinds of barkcloth being worn at that period. However, most photographs were staged studio shots and in some cases the barkcloth might have been a studio prop. Several museums have extensive photographic collections, including Fiji Museum, the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, and the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford. These again are a rich resource which can help to provide background for any study of Fijian masi.

### ***Working Definitions of Key Terms***

To further contextualise this study, a number of key terms will be defined here. Explaining these working definitions at this point will clarify information in the following chapters.

**Masi** is a term designating barkcloth made from the inner bark of the paper mulberry (*Broussonetia papyrifera*) and the tree itself. Masi will be the primary term used throughout this thesis, and although 'barkcloth' will occasionally be used interchangeably with it, barkcloth will refer only to Fijian masi unless otherwise stated. The term cloth will also reference masi in certain chapters and should not be confused with European cloth (unless otherwise stated), which is referred to as fabric or material.

Since the mid twentieth century, Fiji has become increasingly urban in nature. **Urban** refers to belonging to, relating to, characteristic of, or constituting a town or city. An

antonym to rural, urban living in Fiji is associated with heavy reliance on the cash economy and, in the case of this study, specifically refers to cities (of which there are only two in Fiji: Suva and Lautoka) and larger towns such as Nadi, Sigatoka and Ba. When discussing Suva, it is important to note that Suva's extensive suburbs are also included. While Suva does not have official suburbs, the built-up and urban areas surrounding it are increasingly referred to as the suburbs or outskirts of the capital city. If relevant to a specific point, the suburb or area will be mentioned by name. In direct relation to urban centres are Fijian diasporic communities, of which there are many around the world.

**Diasporas** are not defined here with the negative connotations of forced separation or being torn away from one's homeland (Teaiwa 1995:15), but instead as communities who (for whatever reason) are living away from their cultural homelands and are making concerted efforts to maintain their cultural, social and (sometimes) political affiliations. Being a member of a diasporic community can strengthen one's cultural identity in a way that may not have occurred otherwise, as effort has to be made to engage with cultural and national heritage.

When referring to tradition or being **traditional**, this study looks to the work of Alice Horner (1990) and Nelson Graburn (2001) which defines tradition as both the process of handing down from generation to generation, as well as a thing, custom or thought process that is passed on over time. Thus tradition or traditional is the 'name given to those cultural features which, in situations of change, were continue to be handed on, thought about, preserved and not lost' (Graburn 2001:6). Thus when referring to masi's traditional pathways or traditional ceremonial exchange presentations, the fact that these have been passed down and continue to be enacted, even during times of change – such as urban development – is what is highlighted.

**Contemporary**, on the other hand, is used in this context to describe two different things. The first is temporal – contemporary is current, constantly shifting, never static and often adaptable. For instance, rural practices or heritage art forms can be considered contemporary if they are being conducted now/today/in current time and space. Contemporary also increasingly refers to urban phenomena and concepts or things that are not rooted in tradition. An example in Fiji is contemporary visual and performance art. While there are many art forms (including performance) found in indigenous Fijian culture, genres such as painting or Western styles of dance (ballet, jazz, etc) are introduced. 'Today's contemporary art in the Asia-Pacific is undoubtedly a product of long

centuries of tradition, historical cultural encounters and, in more modern times, the confrontation and engagement with the West' (Turner 2017: 6).

Finally, the term **Fijian** is considered somewhat contentious in Fiji today. Currently, indigenous Fijians are referred to as 'iTaukei' by the Fijian Government as a means of distinguishing them as a distinct ethnic group, while all Fiji citizens are called 'Fijian'. For the purpose of this study the term Fijian will be used for indigenous Fijian people, cultural heritage and things. If the term is used in a different way, this will be explicitly noted. This decision has been made in part because of masi's twenty-first century urban adaptability and its role in crafting Fiji's national identity (which includes Fijians of all ethnicities). Throughout the thesis indigenous Fijian terms will not be italicised because of their frequency, but also to reflect the normalcy of using Fijian words in urban contexts. Terms in other Pacific vernacular languages such as Tongan, Hawai'ian and Samoan will also remain in roman typology, as will the French terms haute couture and couture. Italics will, however, remain for other terms written in French as well as those in Latin.

### **Structure of the Thesis**

This first chapter has provided an introduction to the historical and cultural contexts of masi manufacture and use in Fiji. It has been included to set the scene and provide a platform for the discussion of recent urban and contemporary developments, both in Fiji and in diasporic Fijian communities. A female iyau, masi was used for varying purposes: as clothing, screens, burial shrouds and ceremonial gift exchange offerings. It acted as both presentation/exchange objects and as a means of protecting and containing people and things. Its wide display and distribution, evident from its use in such contexts, signalled its encompassing cultural significance and dependence, one which has continued to the present.

Chapter 2, *Fashion: masi's newest urban pathway*, examines Western systems of fashion, the fashion industry and the origins of haute couture. It explores Fiji's relationship with fashion and the journey that Fiji and its fashion industry has taken from its roots in the mid-twentieth century to the present, including a case study of Fiji's 'first' masi gown. This masi wedding dress, worn by Adi Litia Mara Dugdale in 1991, is an example of Fiji's first fusion of Western fashion and Fijian indigeneity and potentially marks an artistic (in the Western convention) entrance into urban contemporary adaptability.

Continuing with fashion and introducing the performative aspect of masi and culture, chapter 3, *Fashion in Fiji: designers, gender and performance*, looks at notions of gender,

materiality, cloth and wrapping via a flourishing trend in twenty-first century Fiji: masi haute couture. Here, the female traditional land-based economy is juxtaposed with the Western notion of fashion. International fashion attention is relatively new in Fiji, and while the Fijian fashion industry was established in the decade prior to independence in 1970, masi has been ‘fashionable’ for centuries. It has been performed and theatrical since at least the nineteenth century. Fiji’s fashion vocabulary is also examined here.

Chapter 4, *Urban-Fiji: masi, modified modes of display and twenty-first century creative adaptability*, highlights the displaying of Fiji in urban and diasporic contexts. The title of this chapter plays on the term ‘Urbanesia’. Masi’s urban contemporary reach includes not only fashion, but also displays, exhibitions, productions and installations. The notion of the materiality of masi and the significance of its designs is explored, as well as the proposed conscious separation of masi as a material and as designs (reminiscent of nineteenth-century collecting). Furthermore, urban contemporary art and performance is highlighted as being driven and dictated by the art of clothing and the influence and presence of the body. Looking at masi’s modified modes of display – meaning developed outside of the ceremonial and traditional context – celebrates the creative adaptability of twenty-first century masi, Fijians, and the diverse communities where both are found.

With modified modes of display occurring in Fiji and in diasporic communities alike, implications surrounding ownership and cultural property are likely to arise, potentially causing issues for masi makers and the masi-making industry. In chapter 5, *Global Pathways: masi on the world stage*, masi’s global footprint will be explored by looking at the international attention it has received in recent years. Beginning immediately post-independence, one of the first instances of global interest occurred in 1971 when the UK and US editions of *Vogue* magazine published editorial spreads featuring masi. Masi motifs have been synonymous with Fiji since the middle of the twentieth century. Two recent case studies, Fiji Airways and Nanette Lepore’s Aztec Dress, reflect on masi design motifs and engage with notions of indigenous ownership, copyright and intellectual property, both in Fiji and in diasporic communities. What made these two incidents significant, when there is already a history of appropriation of masi designs which has not received the same attention?

The conclusions, *Always Traditional, Always Contemporary*, summarises the findings of this study, revisiting the original research questions. After identifying and reflecting on these two apparently opposed categories, recommendations are made for future research.

## 2 Fashion & Fiji: Masi's Newest Urban Pathway

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What has come to be called ‘masi couture’, including masi wedding gowns, is now popular in Fiji, but this was not always the case. As will become clear in this chapter, developments in fashion in Fiji have often been triggered by specific events and creative personalities, opening up new channels of opportunity for artistic expression in modern Fijian urban life. These opportunities have often embraced materials and motifs from Fiji’s past, leading to a distinctively Fijian fashion scene in which designers, promoters and customers set high value on ‘traditional’ materials which have been adapted to new styles and new purposes. As we will see, creative adaptability is nothing new in Fiji. It has been a feature of Fijian culture for many centuries. Recently, Fiji-based practitioners have embraced ‘fashion’ in its global sense to create distinctive garments which combine international trends with locally inspired features, both material and iconographic. Suva is now the fashion capital of the islands. However, the emergence of masi in high fashion in Fiji in fact resulted from a design commissioned by Fijians from a non-Fijian designer living outside Fiji.

### **Adi Litia Mara Dugdale’s wedding gown**

The moment when a shift took place from traditional 3-piece wrap-around masi wedding attire can be pinpointed to September 1991, when the marriage of Adi Litia Cakobau Mara to Mr Henry Stratford Dugdale featured the first Western-style wedding dress made entirely from masi (figure 2.01). Adi Litia is the daughter of two paramount chiefs. Her father was Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, paramount chief of Lau, holder of the titles Tui Nayau, Sau ni Vanua and Tui Lau, and also a former Prime Minister and President of Fiji. Her mother was Ro Lady Lala Mara, paramount chief of Rewa and holder of the title Roko Tui Dreketi. Adi Litia and her mother conceptualised the dress as a way to celebrate, embrace and acknowledge her Fijian heritage while also acknowledging the heritage of her English husband. As an integral component of all ceremonial exchanges and life-cycle events, masi has commonly been worn as both male and female wedding attire since at least the early twentieth century. The sulu ni vakamau or mataisulu tolu, a three-piece outfit, had become standard wear in a traditional Fijian wedding: ‘What is most curious is

that this has become unisex. Men's exclusive use of masi and their proud malo have vanished, and their ceremonial masi is virtually indistinguishable from the evolved female form' (Ewins 2010:442). It consists of an underskirt, an overskirt and a sash or bodice. The attire was not tailored or sewn, instead it was wrapped around the body and secured with fibre ties, with the longer bodice section tied to create elaborate bows. While Adi Litia and her husband wore this attire for the celebration of their wedding on Lakeba, her father's island home, she wanted to have a gown that captured both her and her husband's cultures for their church ceremony at Suva's Sacred Heart Cathedral. More than that, she wanted to express her own cultural heritage while marrying into a culture other than her own, and she wanted it displayed in a unique and fashionable way. When making the decision to wear a masi gown, she noted that it wasn't her original intention to commission a masi dress:

It was through discussions with my mother and a family friend on where and who was going to design and make up the dress. I also wanted something uniquely different and representing my homeland, as I was marrying someone from a different culture I wanted to blend the Western and traditional [three-piece] wedding dress. Masi was suggested and so through connections in the fashion world in New Zealand via Maysie Bestall-Cohen we were introduced to Annie Bonza, who at the time was New Zealand Designer of the Year. She worked and lived in the Cook Islands and was prepared to take up the challenge of making up the dress in masi, which she hadn't ever done before. (Dugdale, interview 30/6/09)

Aotearoa New Zealand designer Annie Bonza was one of the first Western designers in the region to work with indigenous materials, although masi was not one of them. As a school girl, she was trained in Maori weaving by Dame Rangimarie Hetet, a renowned weaver. That experience gave her an appreciation for cultural skill and practice and contributed to her reputation for creating elaborate pieces using seemingly simple materials and techniques. In what would now probably be considered cultural appropriation, her early use of indigenous materials and Cook Islands motifs set her apart from other Western designers in the region and put her ahead of the Pacific revival of the mid 1990s.

Subtle details were chosen to honour Adi Litia's maternal and paternal lineages in the gown (figure 2.02), while still keeping with the Western fashion systems of the early 1990s (Dugdale, interview 30/6/09). Beaten and produced by her mother's relatives on Vanua Balavu, the masi used to make the gown consisted of two different types. The main sections of the dress, including the bodice, sleeves and bustle/train, were made from heavy

masi. More pragmatic than symbolic, the tailoring required to create the Western-style pattern meant that high-quality finer masi could not be used. The material had to be durable enough to accommodate machine-sewn seams. The second type of masi was made from young paper mulberry trees and beaten so finely that it was gauze-like in appearance. Called seavu and reserved for chiefly lineages, it was attached around the entire neckline of the dress. Too delicate for machine-sewing, the hand-sewn neckline was a tribute to Adi Litia's paternal village of Tubou. Referencing the sisi, a type of salusalu (garland) particular to Tubou, the embellished neckline showcased voluminous seavu accented with flowers made of masi and pearls, handcrafted by Liebling Marlowe (figure 2.03). Finally, symbolic of her chiefly status, the bustle and long train combined both types of masi and represented a masi yarabalavu. The train is significant in Fijian culture; the longer the train, the higher the status of the individual (Ewins 1999:222). While the train on Adi Litia's gown was only a few metres long, the yara worn during her celebration at Tubou was a great barkcloth several metres wide and 100 lalaga long – over 60 metres (Dugdale interview 30/6/09). Perhaps a significant difference between her Western-style gown and her three-piece sulu ni vakamau (figure 2.04) was that the former was white unadorned masi and the latter was patterned. She chose to keep with the Western fashion of white for her gown; this was significant to her not only because of her family's strong Christian faith, but also because white masi signifies chiefly mana.<sup>13</sup> She explained that her sulu was also significant as it was decorated with stencilled motifs unique to the holder of the title Tui Nayau, her father. These motifs are only worn by him and his immediate family on ceremonial occasions (Dugdale, pers. comm. 3/8/16).

The widespread publicity and photographs of the wedding led to Adi Litia's gown becoming an iconic fashion statement. It sparked a fashion trend in the country and within Fiji's diasporic communities. Never before had masi alone been used in Fiji to create Western-style clothing that could be classified as high fashion. Adi Litia and her gown became symbolic of Fiji's evolving cultural identity, showing that indigenous materials were valuable as more than just heritage art forms. A select group of Fijian designers in Suva soon began creating custom-made and couture wedding gowns, and continue to do so.

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<sup>13</sup> Mana has many culturally specific definitions; however for the sake of this work, it will be defined in its most general form as divine power or effectiveness (Roth and Hooper 1990:xxvii).

## Fashion

This thesis is partly concerned with recent developments in fashion in Fiji, so the concept of fashion, both academic and popular, will be reviewed. What is fashion? Joanne Entwistle (2015:648) considers that ‘Fashion and dress articulate the body in culture: fashion produces discourses on the body and how to adorn it, dress is the translation of fashion into everyday practice.’

Used broadly across many different platforms and contexts, fashion can be considered a constantly shifting and changing cultural expression. According to the Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology (1988), it was probably around 1300 that a term describing a sense of style, fashion and manner of dress was first recorded. The French word for fashion, which was defined as the collective manner of dressing, first appeared in written form in 1482. Etymologically, ‘fashion’ comes from *facio* or *factio* meaning ‘making or doing’ in Latin. In old French *fazon* came into use and later became *facon* in middle French. The latter term morphed into *façon* and *façonner* and subsequently turned into ‘fashion’ in middle English. Not necessarily relating to physical items of dress or clothing, this form of the word was a denotation of the process of making or a particular make or shape of something. By 1489, the meaning of the word shifted to ‘a current usage or a conventional usage in dress or lifestyle, especially observed in upper classes of society’. As a result, a predominantly social notion of fashion arose early in the sixteenth century, connected to assessments which predicated that class and status guaranteed a special manner of making clothes (Brenninkmeyer 1963:2). Synonyms for fashion include ‘style’, ‘mode’, ‘trend’, ‘*en vogue*’ and ‘look’ (Kawamura 2005). Such terms are suitable because of their dynamic nature and their fluidity in definition, which lend themselves both to current understandings of fashion and its different connotations throughout history. For example, fifteenth-century fashion was primarily an indicator of class status, a court privilege that was monopolised by the aristocracy. Nineteenth-century fashion did not reflect this as the aristocracy were no longer uniquely privileged. Wealthy people with material means were invading that socio-political space and could afford a more lavish lifestyle. The term *la mode* emerged in the 1840s as a feminine noun used exclusively in reference to fashion. Replacing the masculine *le mode* derived from the Latin *modus* which had previously been the common term for style or lifestyle in earlier European history, the feminine form became closely associated with fashion and, more importantly, haute couture. *La mode* came to represent the concept of modernity and a particular temporal experience associated with modern urban life, especially when concerned with the fleeting

ephemerality of being ‘in fashion’ (Eicher 2010:12). By the twentieth century, it had become increasingly accessible; regardless of rank or status, anyone could be fashionable. Now, in the twenty-first century, placing a question mark after the word fashion (eg. fashion?) is becoming more commonplace and indicates a questioning of ownership of styles, trends and symbols being utilized in the global fashion world.

Fashion theorist Carol Tulloch (2010) has coined a joint system of concepts which proves useful here: style-fashion-dress. Hyphens are used between each term because one cannot function without the other – they form a whole-and-part relationship and also reference the breadth of dress/clothing studies (2010:274). She observes that ‘Often the terms style, fashion, and dress are mixed, used in place of one another. In such instances, reference is being made to the culture and/or associated processes of clothes, garments, and accessories, but without the delineation of the meanings of “style,” “fashion” or “dress” within a given context’ (Tulloch 2010:275). She elaborates that instead of needing a delineation for each term, what needs unpacking is how, when and why such terms come into play individually and that their hyphenated existence achieves this by encompassing bodies, routes, connections, flows and tensions that derive from sometimes unhelpful analytical frameworks.

But how will fashion be defined in relation to urban contemporary masi? I will adopt and adapt the views of Kaiser (2011:1) and Tulloch (2010), above, when describing fashion as a social process of negotiation and navigation which materialises with bodies moving through time and space. Fashion crosses all types of boundaries and changes with both a society’s interpretation of who/what it is, as well as an individual’s own visual and material self-perception. Considering Tulloch’s hyphenated system of concepts, where do ‘dress’ and ‘style’ fit into the picture? Being treated as a synonym of fashion, style will not be further defined separately here. As with Tulloch, its presence will instead serve as a component of a cohesive understanding. While the terms fashion and dress are often used interchangeably, Entwistle (2015:26) notes a clear distinction between the two.<sup>14</sup> Fashion is a system, idea or an aesthetic; it is not a singular thing, but a set of principles according to which social actors view the body and dress. Dress, on the other hand, highlights meanings that are given to particular practices of adornment and clothing. Entwistle asserts that from a Western perspective ‘human bodies are *dressed* bodies’ (original emphasis;

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<sup>14</sup> Documented in the history and root of the word is the assertion that fashion and dress/clothing are not interchangeable terms, as one (dress) implies a fixed physical object and the other (fashion) depicts a system that is never stationary, not fixed and ever changing.

2015:29). To be dressed means that one's body is adorned, but not necessarily using garments. This means that being 'dressed' also extends to body modifications such as tattooing, wrapping, body painting and hair coiffuring. Following Entwistle, for Kawamura (2005:1) the term fashion is not synonymous with 'dress' or 'clothing'.<sup>15</sup> Dress, in all of its forms, is the physical and raw material from which fashion is formed. Hence, fashion as a system is manifested through dress and clothing and is the intangible form of the tangible; fashion is a system of concepts and ideas while dress and clothing are practices. Though strongly delineated from one another, dress and fashion serve one another in that they are imperative to societal and cultural significance/value.

Thus, fashion is primarily rooted in and about bodies. Without the body, there is nothing to dress or clothe. In contrast to Kawamura and Entwistle, Kaiser (2011:14) notes that 'Like the body itself, fashion is material...Fashion's materials (e.g. fibers, fabrics, garments) flow, and they are produced by and for bodies...For more than 20,000 years, human beings around the world have fashioned their bodies with textiles and other materials'. Although contradictive arguments, discussing fashion involves understanding both physical bodies (and their embodiments) as well as figurative or metaphoric bodies and their relationships within the fashion system (Entwistle 2015:77).

Bringing fashion and bodies, which have generally been separated in scholarship (Entwistle 2015:651), together is to look at how fashion and dress create group identities and how those identities make distinctions between (and within) people, societies and cultures. Fashion literature such as Leopold (1992), Fine and Leopold (1993) and Braham (1997) has too often 'abstracted fashion from embodiment and the complex social world in which bodies operate.' As the bearer of social status, the body is vital in the definition of fashion as well as in its future trajectories. So, rather than separating fashion and bodies, the 'fashioned body' has emerged in an attempt to deconstruct the artificial divide between the two. Fashioned bodies encompass both the bodies that make fashion and the bodies that wear it, because it is important to make connections between production and consumption at the same time as linking fashion with practices of dress (Entwistle 2015:651). The fashion industry, which includes production and consumption, is comprised of makers, doers and bodies. To unpack the history of the fashion industry is not of relevance here. However, pertinent is Entwistle's (2015:567) significant observation that fashion has

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<sup>15</sup> Much debate surrounds fashion/dress/clothing literature and its study. The majority of scholarship comes from historians, sociologists, economists and anthropologists. For an in-depth discussion see Davis (1992), Kawamura (2005), Entwistle (2000, 2006, 2008, 2014, 2015) and Barnard (1996, 2001).

always played a significant role in global relations, inextricably linked with the West's colonial exploitation of resources and bodies abroad, as well as the interconnections between class, gender, ethnicity and race. With transnational and diasporic fashion systems/centres rising in numbers and acting as tangible markers of identity,<sup>16</sup> and studies examining perceptions of body image and identity in transnational communities,<sup>17</sup> the conversation about and connection between fashion, dress and bodies matters even more; 'In other words, our body is not just the place from which we come to experience the world; it is through our bodies that we come to see and be seen in the world' (Entwistle 2000:334).

### **Haute Couture, 'Western' Fashion Systems, and 'Non-Western' Fashion Centres**

Fashion as a system cannot be created by a single designer; it is the work of every person involved in its production. It is a collective activity and can only remain a system if the collective activity is continuously maintained (Kawamura 2005:1). With the earliest descriptions of fashion coming from the French language, also from France comes the birth of the Western fashion system. In this system, for which Paris was one of the earliest centres, people who made clothing were called couturiers. Translated from French as 'dressmaker', the term comes from the word *couture* (dressmaking) and refers to fashion, sewing and needlework. In the late nineteenth century, *couture* became exclusively associated with made-to-measure clothing and soon became an abbreviation for the lavish genre of fashion now known as *haute couture*. Translated in English as 'high fashion', *haute couture*<sup>18</sup> is a type of high-end dressmaking that is constructed specifically for an individual client's own measurements and stance and often made completely by hand using expensive or unusual fabrics. An elite type of feminine fashion, *haute couture* was (and still is) synonymous with Paris. Englishman Charles Frederick Worth is referred to as

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<sup>16</sup> Balasescu (2007), Assmann (2008), Rovine (2009), Tolloch (2010), Skov (2011); see also chapter 4 for Pacific fashion centres.

<sup>17</sup> Scholarship on the body is vast, but in relation to fashion and with direct connection to the Pacific/Fiji and fashion, the following sources are useful: Becker (2004); Becker *et al* (2007); Swami *et al* (2007). The first looks at the effects of Westernisation on indigenous Fijian adolescent female body perception and identity; the second explores transnationalism and urbanisation in relation to Fiji body shape; Swami and colleagues discuss bodies, body size and fashion perceptions between the Pacific and Great Britain.

<sup>18</sup> In France, the term *haute couture* is defined and protected by law. The *Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Paris* was established in 1868; it regulates and determines which fashion houses are eligible to be called *haute couture* fashion houses. There are currently only 19 houses in the *Chambre*, whereas in the mid-twentieth century there were over one hundred. For the purposes of this work, the term *haute couture* will be used to define high-end fashion in general, and not the protected use of the term.

the father of haute couture in Paris, establishing Paris' first couture house in 1858 (see section 3.3.1). Although one of the earliest references to this type of bespoke and ostentatious fashion dates to the seventeenth century, Worth revolutionized how dress making had previously been perceived. Haute couture fashion functioned in multiple ways; it was a status symbol, an outward expression of wealth and prestige, and a mark of personal identity. With no expense spared, for many it represents the pinnacle of societal standing and taste. 'The haute couture persists in providing us with a paragon of the most beautiful clothing that can be envisioned and made in any time' (Martin & Hoda 1995:13). Worth made it so that the dressmaker became an artist of embellishment and ornamentation: a fashion designer. While Worth is known for his one-of-a-kind, made-to-measure designs for titled and wealthy customers, later in his career he is best known for creating a portfolio of designs that were shown on live models at the House of Worth. Opposite of made-to-measure, these *prêt-a-porter* or ready-to-wear designs were a combination of individual tailoring and the standardization of sizes which was also developing during this period.

Skov (2011) observes that 'fashion cities' around the world have developed for many reasons, mainly globalisation. In the fashion industry, there are four classic fashion cities: London, Paris, Milan and New York. Recently a fifth and sixth, Tokyo and Shanghai (which is also referred to as 'the Paris of the East'), have been debated about being added (Steele 2017:1); however, this is acknowledged only when a non-Eurocentric view of fashion is being employed. While the difference between fashion and dress was introduced above, and race and ethnicity mentioned briefly, reasons for the debate surrounding them will be teased out in more detail in the following pages. Historically, there has been a tendency to only count Western societies as having fashion or being fashionable (Skov 2011:149). Scholarly reference to and study of non-Western clothing has relegated it to 'dress' and 'adornment', as if to state that those societies are not capable of being fashionable (e.g. participating in systems of fashion) because they do not possess, or cannot support, a competitive labour intensive sector such as the clothing industry (Skov 2011) or that 'primitive' societies are not developed enough socially to encourage both the need for uniformity and differentiation amongst themselves (Simmel 1957:545-546).

While Skov observes that infrastructure in non-Western societies may not be adequate, she refutes Simmel's claim and notes that local designer fashion sectors are more significant within the fashion industry than large clothing and textile producing cities or countries. Often becoming self-proclaimed fashion cities, non-Western fashion inside these

new cities takes on national significance because they regularly engage with cultural references that fall outside of the field of fashion. Directly connecting with place and nation, ‘what fashion designers can do for the nation today is not so much dress it...but they can represent it’ (Skov 2011:138).

Following this, explosions of new fashion cities and centres from the 1980s to the present demonstrate that countries which were once content in the past to see themselves as recipients of cosmopolitan and global clothing styles now desire to be style arbiters and creators of systems of fashion in their own right. The establishment of ‘fashion weeks’ all over the world has increased the cultural and geographical variety of content for those who follow and study fashion and clothing trends (Skov 2011). Particularly Eurocentric in its delivery was a September 2008 headline in the *New York Times* which discussed the increase in fashion weeks and events globally. Reading ‘the sun never sets on the catwalk’, it echoed the imperial saying that the sun never sets on the British Empire. Entwistle (2015:59-60) engages with colonialism’s history in global fashion and new fashion cities stating:

While faster movements around the globe of people, images, things is evident today, these trends can be traced back to earlier colonial expansions, which began to tie countries together through enduring trade and other relationships. Fashion sits firmly within this narrative of globalisation and modernity and is therefore implied in some of my analysis: demands for cotton and silk, for example, hooked up Britain to the colonies in India, while later developments in ‘fast’ fashion – cheap high-street clothing – has moved much of the labour of fashion to developing countries and connects our consumption practices to communities far away. More recently, expanding new digital communications flash images of fashion weeks from around the world, as do blogs and other online forums.

Although called centres, they are not centres in any strict sense of the word; they may not be cosmopolitan areas or they may only contain a small group of fashion designers. Yet classification as a centre rests on their orientation towards international validation rather than domestic power. Thus, an alternate definition of fashion dictates that something is not fashion or fashionable until a large group of people recognise it and start using it (Simmel 1957; Assmann 2008; Entwistle & Slater 2014). In relation to Fiji and urban contemporary masi, this can be extended and interpreted slightly differently when examined in terms of cultural identity. For if a large group of people recognise dress or clothing as a marker of cultural identity which has been capitalised on by local designers,

then this too moulds itself into fashion's belief system. Skov (2011:140) goes on to note that fashion and the fashion industry cannot be adequately understood through industry analysis alone, which is why the presence of new fashion cities and clusters is so central to the inclusion of non-Western societies as 'fashion' producers. There must be interpretation through culturally sensitive frameworks because of continuous engagement with cultural sources outside of the industry and as substitutes for the industry. As global fashion names have picked up on this trend, they have begun to employ and support localised designers who could match international trends with culturally distinct styles. It was research and creative engagement with national and traditional aesthetics that allowed Eurocentric designers to produce multiple versions of styles that were simultaneously cosmopolitan, non-Western and consumable.<sup>19</sup>

However slow to pick up on culturally driven designing, it must be noted that while Western fashion has no qualms about using culture to sell fashion by exoticising the 'other', the push was made to begin doing so because Eurocentric self-exoticisation made designers feel uncomfortable – that is to say that exploiting their own cultural heritage provoked unease, but appropriating others' cultural designs, values and national identity did not. Skov (2011:149) uses the example of folk culture to illustrate this design dilemma; 'soaked in nationalism', 'static' and 'backwards,' according to European fashion designers, folk culture represented to them the fear of overdoing cultural stereotypes and having to confront common perceptions that folk culture is not fashion at all and is actually the antithesis of it. More ironic than can be described, this highlights the Western construction of high and low culture, and the Eurocentric view that their own 'low' culture could not be fashion, but that profiting from a 'low' culture other than their own was permitted because the resulting product would be labelled as contemporary fashion and not culture. Justified as revitalization, this practice has been defined as 'recreating a phenomenon of the past in relation to the conditions of the present [in order] to understand the difference between the traditional...and the symbolic role national dress has had in the modern period' (Skov 2011:149). In other words, it was a means to take the traditional out of ceremonial use, and out of the national/cultural community, and use it in a way that 'symbolise[d] a cosmopolitan appreciation of different cultures' (Skov 2011:149).

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<sup>19</sup> Such practices can be dangerous because of risks associated with cultural appropriation and intellectual property rights. This is further discussed in chapter 5.

Yet, what happens when the exoticised begin to exoticise themselves? Eschewing Western media and turning to indigenous materials, can 'fashion' emerge from this? Is the objective to create clothing for the masses or is it to invest in intangible systems of belief? Or does an objective need to be present at all? By using indigenous materials in which the body and the dressed/fashioned body (Entwistle & Wilson 2001; Entwistle 2015) are paramount in their role and use, the body, its adornment and presentation take on that same significance. Although slightly different, Japanese culture has been facing this in the last decade; exoticizing themselves has equated to a cultural resurgence and a stronger sense of self. 'Outside Japan, the kimono is still associated with the geisha and reinforces the exotic cliché of the demure and graceful woman' (Assmann 2008:362), but within Japan it is a form of cultural significance and resurgence. 'The activities performed by Kimono de Ginza [a Japanese culture organisation] suggest a new form of collective individualism. Related to a sense of innovation is a desire to express individualism, but to do so within a group setting that promises a sense of belonging, protection, and stability. A striking characteristic is the fact that the kimono as the national garment is chosen in order to express this kind of group-based individualism. Kimonos used to be the norm before the encounter with foreign clothes, but the kimono is now confined to official occasions and is often perceived as an anachronism accompanied by restrictive conventions' (Assmann 2008:366).

To this extent, furthering this discussion means first travelling back to Paris. During the height of colonial exploration and administration, France was seen as the desired model for fashionable dressing, even in the Pacific where various other colonial powers had settled. Imported textiles, fabrics, accessories and adornments became important status symbols (Maynard 2010:7) to the people of the land through trade and exchange; however, indigenous materials and designs began to rival imported goods in the second half of the twentieth century - but still only when used in a Western fashion aesthetic.

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw large Pacific urban centres, such as Auckland and Sydney, as catalysts in the Pasifika fashion movement where indigeneity and genealogy were being reclaimed and rebirthed by Pacific artists (Raymond 2003). Fashion was a term used loosely by some of these artists so as not to be misconstrued with Western concepts of clothing and its study. In these contexts, 'fashion' involved employing indigenous materials and culturally specific concepts to reimagine and challenge enduring negative views of Pacific people and their culture. These materials - including barkcloth - were

often witnessed only in ceremonial or institutional settings, especially in diasporic communities; reawakening their potency, efficacy and spirit in a cultural context was (and still is) an essential component of the movement. Leading the way was the Pacific Sisters (figure 2.05),<sup>20</sup> a collective founded by a group of women of Maori and Pacific Island heritage, whose ‘use of traditional Pacific materials is a direct reference to the value of this role and upholds the strong binding force of women throughout all societies’ (Wall 2010:353). Home to the largest Pacific diaspora in the world, Auckland was electrified by the Pacific Sisters and their ground-breaking urban and innovative style. A multi-Pacificultural New Zealand-born generation who overturned stereotypes and showcased their culture in the mainstream spotlight, while they may have begun on the fringes, their work is a reflection of their connection to their stories, land, people, and one another. With a constantly growing membership, the Pacific Sisters was a safe place to push boundaries and revisit the term ‘fashion?’ – now with a question mark at the end to address the challenge of Western stereotypes and the reclamation of bodies, adornments and culture – allowing them to break barriers that were once considered unbreakable (Raymond & O’Neill, pers. comm. 21/11/15). Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia have led the way for indigenous designers demonstrating their communities’ reactions to the acceptance, transformation and also rejection of Western clothing through this new genre of Pacific Island fashion activism (Wall 2010:350). This type of fashion developed with the Pacific Sisters in the early 1990s out of the lack of Pacific Islanders’ involvement in New Zealand’s mainstream fashion industry, a Westernised industry whose European gaze exoticized and sexualized both Pacific men and women. Staying connected to Pacific ancestry within a Western environment was of huge significance to fashion activism (Wall 2010; Raymond 2016:23-24). From these early forms of fashion activism, Pacific designers have taken control of their own brand of fashion. Several indigenously run fashion shows and/or festivals are in existence and show the works of designers from all over the Pacific: Pacific Runway @ CarriageWorks (Sydney), Pacific Fusion Fashion Show (Auckland), Pacific Fashion Festival (Brisbane), Indigenous Fashion Unearthed (Melbourne) and Pasifika (Auckland).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The Pacific Sisters recently mounted their first major retrospective exhibition called *Pacific Sisters: He Toa Tāera | Fashion Activists*. Curated by Nina Tonga, it showed at Te Papa Tongarewa National Museum of New Zealand (Wellington) from 17 March – 15 July 2018 and Auckland Art Gallery from 23 February – 14 July 2019.

<sup>21</sup> There are also ‘Western’ fashion weeks in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, notably Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week (Sydney), Virgin Australia Melbourne Fashion Festival and New Zealand Fashion Week (Auckland). Hawai’i also runs both ‘Western’-style (Hawai’i Fashion Week, Honolulu Fashion Week) and

Significant to this work, as Pacific Islanders took control of urban Pacific Island fashion, a new form of indigenous fashion was birthed: Pacific couture. A form of haute couture which emphasises culture, indigeneity and traditional means of production, Pacific couture also engages world audiences, through bespoke and exclusive creations (Wall 2010; Lepou, pers. comm. 1-6/10/12; Tawhiao, pers. comm. 1/10/12, 9/3/14; Raymond, pers. comm. 5/7/14). Pacific couture saw ‘the use of indigenous materials elevated beyond the street styles that the Pacific Sisters and fashion activism were known for’ (Raymond, pers. comm. 5/7/14) and put them on a par with the European styles and materials used by Western fashion houses. Breaking the remaining boundaries that fashion activism could not, Pacific couture shattered the Eurocentric belief that non-Western cultures could not participate in, or create, systems of fashion. Rather, Pacific couture emphasized indigeneity’s role in exposing the Pacific’s wealth of ‘fashionable’ practices that had been borrowed by the west (Lepou, pers. comm. 1-6/10/12). While not unequivocally proven, Samoan fashion designer Linda Lepou is credited with coining the term ‘Pacific couture’. Staunchly proud of both her Samoan and Scottish heritage, Lepou’s use of siapo (Samoan; barkcloth) and other materials such as coconut (shell and fibre), flax and shells tells the story of her family’s gafa (genealogy) in uniquely contemporary ways. A creator of ‘lineage art’ through natural and indigenous fibres by way of innovative techniques, Lepou’s most noted work is that which she created for the Victoria & Albert Museum’s *Unveiled* exhibition (figure 2.06); this piece was a wedding dress made entirely from siapo and told the story of her grandmother, and grandmothers before her, extending back to her ancestor Nafanua who is the Samoan goddess of war (Lepou, pers. comm. 1-6/10/12). As a member of the *Fijian Art* research project, I had the opportunity to work with Lepou while facilitating a workshop called *Fabricating Fashion?* (see chapter 4). Also attending the workshop was Shona Tawhiao (Ngai Te Rangi, Whakatōhea, Te Whanau Āpanui), a fashion designer who was trained in traditional Maori weaving by the renowned weaver Diggeress Te Kanawa at Unitec Institute of Technology. Tawhiao’s Maori heritage has provided her with the knowledge of traditional techniques and practices, allowing her to use traditional materials such as harakeke (Maori; flax, *Phorium tenax*) to create designs that are reminiscent of Victorian corset gowns. She regularly infuses her works with contemporary Maori spoken word, music and rap to acknowledge the multi-faceted level

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indigenous-led fashion weeks (MAMo Wearable Art Show) but are not included in this study because of its position as a US state and, therefore, not part of the Pacific Islands as defined by the United Nation’s classificatory system of Pacific Small Islands Developing States (PSIDS).

of cultural interactivity found in everyday life, both in Maori culture but also in the Pacific as a whole (figure 2.07).

Published in 2010, the *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion* attempts to discuss various aspects of fashion, but interestingly still subjugates non-Western fashion as cultural dress. Volume 7 is dedicated to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands, providing varying analyses of fashion in those regions, while Volume 10 examines global fashion perspectives. Of interest to this work is the overall perspective taken of fashion versus dress, and the subsequent separation of Western and non-Western situations. Disappointingly, the scope of the study implies that the resulting segregation of Western and non-Western is unintentional, but it does a disservice to the Pacific Islands especially by ignoring the growing fashion industries in the Pacific. Instead it favours European notions of fashion within Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, ignoring the rich and relevant material regarding indigenous fashion in both locales. Fashion centres in the Pacific are completely discounted, leaving any mention of them as markers of the dated notions of dress and clothing. Ewins' report on Fiji is informative and interesting but does not shed light on the ingenuity occurring in urban Suva where traditional and contemporary have merged, especially when masi is involved.

Thus, borrowing from Tulloch's coined system of style-dress-fashion, as this chapter continues an adapted relational trio of terms will also be considered: masi-fashion-haute couture (masi couture). It is important for this hyphenated term to be acknowledged because urban contemporary Fiji actively embodies the whole-in-part relationship between these three terms. Intentionally or not, they have gradually become synonymous, though each distinct in their own right, and this trifecta deserves to be recognised in order to account for the continuing significance of masi for Fijians, both in Fiji and in the many diasporic communities which value masi as a marker of Fijianess, and to acknowledge the Fijian fashion industry and its designers as valuable and viable members of the study of global fashion.

### **Fiji's Fashion Industry, 1960s to present**

In much the same way that fashion centres in the second half of the twentieth century in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand slowly began celebrating indigenous people, materials and designs, 'fashion' began making an impact in the lives and minds of the Fijian people. Suva, as Fiji's urban diaspora and the largest urban centre in the Pacific Islands region, was the ideal place to bring people and ideas together.

It is therefore not surprising that it was in Suva that what is considered the first fashion house in Fiji, Tiki Togs, was formally established in 1961 by Cherie Alofa Whiteside (nee Wright), employing local artist Frederick Whippy (Vaka'uta 2014).<sup>22</sup> A Suva resident, Whiteside founded the company a year after the general public showed interest in the hand-painted designs with which she adorned her father's neckties and the clothing she made for her sisters and other family members. The first Tiki Togs shop opened on Victoria Parade, the 'high street' of Suva, across from the old Town Hall. As the fashion house grew, Whiteside quickly realized that hand-painting was too tedious a process; a cousin introduced her to screen-printing which meant that she could have 'full control over [her] designs and the whole design process' (figure 2.08; Whiteside, interview 6/12/15). Over time she learned the method via trial and error and experimented with printing fabric dyes on cloth, also learning block printing and batik printing at the same time. With her mother as chief seamstress, and her husband Lawrie becoming Tiki Togs' business manager, Whiteside employed two other block printers and nine junior seamstresses by the time of Fiji's independence from Britain in 1970.

While the textile and garment manufacture trade was a significant aspect of the Fijian economy during this time, there were no companies that specialized in the fashion market for Fiji residents. Fabrics made in the country, as well as footwear, were made solely for export purposes. Popular fashions were imported, most often purchased by Europeans living in the country. However, many of Fiji's colonial wives also increasingly 'supported local industries so that [their] husbands would appear favourable in society' (Wesney, pers. comm. 6/5/19). Fashion houses were brand new initiatives in Suva, which had only become a city in 1952, but were familiar to the families who arrived in Fiji from Britain, America, Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia. *The Gadsden Times* featured an article written by the *New York Times* Women's Editor stating that, thanks to Whiteside and Tiki Togs, 'now comes proof that good fashion comes from Fiji too' (*Gadsden Times*, 8 December 1969, page 10). Whiteside's business success with both Fiji citizens and visitors alike was evident in their praise of the bold and colourful fabrics she designed and the glamorous and dramatic fashions created out of them.

Key to Tiki Togs' success was Whiteside's ingenuity in pattern and motif choices. She was the first 'fashion designer' in Fiji and she used the art and culture of her Fijian and

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<sup>22</sup> Whippy was the first Fijian artist to exhibit his works (paintings) overseas and was encouraged by Whiteside and family to continue his artistic practice. Whippy is considered by Fiji's artistic community as one of the first contemporary artists in the country (Vaka'uta 2014:92).

Pacific heritage, as well as things found in the natural environment around her, in her designs (figure 2.09). Masi symbols, representations of *kalou vu*,<sup>23</sup> flora, fauna and sea creatures were heavily featured. Because the designs were original compositions created by the Tiki Togs staff, which were transferred to cloth using screen and block printing – a process that was not employed anywhere else in Fiji – they were distinctive. While the techniques pioneered by Whiteside are still in popular use in Fiji today, ‘no Pacific fashion designer has ever been able to copy the same feeling or look that was Tiki Togs’ signature style’ (Whippy-Knight, interview 18/3/14).

Tiki Togs was taken over by Whiteside’s daughter Tanya in 1974. However, it closed down fifteen years later when she moved to Australia to further her own independent fashion design career. As the only commercial Fijian fashion house closed, a new group of fashion designers emerged in the late 1980s, mimicking the fashion movement that had begun in other areas of the Pacific. Rather than turning to machine-manufactured and printed materials to create garments, fashion in Fiji began to reject previously produced ready-to-wear resort and beach fashions. While Tiki Togs’ took advantage of Fiji’s rich cultural history as inspiration for design patterns and motifs, this new generation of designers followed the lead of other Pacific Islander artists and used local material culture and raw materials to realise their visions. Originally referred to as wearable art, designers started to create works out of *magimagi* (coir cord), *voivoi* (pandanus leaf), *vau* (hibiscus fibre) and *masi* (or *gatu* – Fijian barkcloth made in the Tongan style).

Although subject to repeated political disturbances in its short history, the Fijian fashion industry has grown steadily to include full-time designers, tailors and seamstresses, photographers and models. Sustained growth, supported mainly by higher education institutions and cultural policy organisations, is ‘perhaps what is most promising is the development of the market – it is not a stretch to say that our major population centres house the most fashion-conscious people in the Pacific. Tastes are evolving to form a uniquely Fijian contemporary fashion understanding. Naturally, without this it is impossible to develop an industry – the market dictates our growth’ (Ali 2016). The industry has seen a renaissance in the retail sector with the emergence of designer boutiques and a booming wedding dress market and, most significantly, with the use of *masi* and *masi*-related motifs in designs/collections (as well as in branding).

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<sup>23</sup> *Kalou vu* can be defined as a ‘deified original ancestor of a group of Fijians, having his temple (*bure kalou*) and priests (*bete*)’ (Capell 1991:82). *Kalou vu* are vanua-specific and each *vu* is different.

In the three decades since wearable art began being designed in Fiji, masi has emerged as probably the most favoured alternative material by both designers and consumers. By the mid-1990s, ‘fashion and masi were synonymous’ (Hoerder, interview 18/2/13). Used sparingly and mixed with other media in the early years, masi soon became the principal medium used in designers’ creations (Hoerder, interview 18/10/12, 18/2/13). In Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, pacific couture had arrived in Fiji. Since then, the realm of pacific couture has become the trademark of Fiji’s elite creators and consumers, with masi now the most popular medium used to create elaborate works of art. Because of masi’s cultural significance and value, and its status as a marker of identity, pacific couture has developed and been extended; couture made from masi has been rebranded as masi couture, making it distinctly Fijian. The term masi couture came into popular use in 2012 when Hupfeld Hoerder began to gain international attention for his masi creations. However, as will be explored later, the beginnings of masi couture are found much earlier. In a tropical climate, masi is malleable and durable, thus when the correct thickness is utilised in fashion creations, designers are able to produce fine and intricate gowns, shirts, dresses and specialised pieces. To ensure this, designers have their favoured suppliers of masi, often from the island of Vatulele where masi is not beaten as finely as in other masi producing regions (Hoerder, interview 18/10/12). Masi made and decorated on Vatulele is also favoured by some designers because of the design motifs found on its pieces.<sup>24</sup> As discussed in chapter 1, Vatulele masi represents an amalgamation of design motifs from different areas of Fiji; this type of masi is largely produced for commercial purposes and has come to represent both historical and contemporary Fijian cultural identity (Ewins 2013). Additionally, because it outwardly portrays ‘Fijianness’ on an international level, it has also come to do so within urban centres in Fiji and is purchased when one cannot obtain masi from one’s own region. Thus, using it as a fashion statement speaks to both Fijians and the global population.

Important national and international outlets for fashion in Fiji are the large-scale fashion shows which take place every September (coinciding with global fashion weeks such as those in London, Paris and New York), May (Sydney, Hong Kong) and November. The country has two main fashion shows, Fiji Fashion Week (FJFW) and the Bottega Fiji Fashion Festival (BFFF, which began as the Masi Gala), as well as the charitably driven Style Fiji (SF). The remainder of this chapter will expand on the organisations which

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<sup>24</sup> For more information on Vatulele masi, see chapter 1 and Ewins (2009:118-167).

comprise Fiji's fashion industry and the major fashion show events which occur yearly. A fast-moving, constantly adapting and sometimes complex, story with numerous organisations involved (each with their own acronym), the following narrative demonstrates the dynamism of Fiji's fashion scene by beginning with the industry's organisations (Fiji Fashion Week Ltd – FWL; Fashion Council of Fiji – FCF; Fashion Designers Alliance of Fiji – FDAF). Continuing the story with Fiji's major annual fashion events (Fiji Fashion Week – FJFW; Style Fiji – SF; Bottega Fijian Fashion Festival – BFFF), the chapter concludes by opening up a discussion to compare them.

### ***Fiji Fashion Week Ltd (FWL)***

Fiji Fashion Week Ltd (FWL) is a limited liability company incorporated in January 2009. The company's primary objective is to create a world class fashion week event in Fiji (and around the Pacific) which helps to nurture, develop and promote individual stakeholders in Fiji's fashion industry. Owned by Ellen Whippy-Knight, it is the parent company of Fiji Fashion Week and runs its associated operations and workshops. Whippy-Knight's original vision for getting formally involved in fashion, as reported in Fiji's *MaiLife Magazine*, besides her love for fashion was supporting the future generations and the industry:

[We] have a lot of natural talent, but it can only be matured with fashion education – which was something I had hoped the Fiji Fashion Week events[s] would help propel...Fijians have a natural aptitude in designing, it's in our DNA – we built magnificent canoes, we made tapa designs, tattoos and built magnificent bures and temples with those unique shapes and sizes, and even our traditional clothing was unique. But to tap into that flair we needed a platform and that was Fiji Fashion Week. (Kalouniviti 2017)

In the ten years that FWL has been in existence, it has worked to promote fashion as a viable and valuable industry; in doing so, much like Fashion Council of Fiji, Whippy-Knight realised that in order for the industry to succeed, there needed to be infrastructure for designing (rather than only manufacture) in place (interview 18/3/14). With FWL's efforts, the Australia Pacific Training Collation (APTC)<sup>25</sup> began a fashion programme in Fiji in March 2014. The pilot programme was seven months in duration and focused on

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<sup>25</sup> APTC is an innovative development project funded by the Australian Government, delivering Australian-standard skills and qualifications for a wide range of vocational careers for skilled workers across the Pacific.

design, pattern making, sewing and quality assurance practices. Programme trainer Jodie Araya commended the students and the industry:

Fiji has the infrastructure to manufacture but designing is still in its early stages. The idea of Made-in-Fiji [FijianMade] is brilliant, and Fiji has a wonderful atmosphere for creativity, and this is an opportunity...to seize. There is a very big market for fashion design, especially with the increased enthusiasm around and recognition of Fiji Fashion Week as a key event in Fiji's social scene. (APTC 2014)

The APTC programme is now permanent and there are several different levels of courses available, each being offered at a diploma certificate level. Additionally, APTC began a partnership with the Fiji National University in 2016 in order to be able to offer higher levels of education in fashion design and textile manufacture. Nicholas Huxley, Australian fashion designer and former head of The Fashion Design Studio (TAFE, Sydney, New South Wales), has noted that while this programme is vital in the progression of Fiji's fashion industry, it is still not formal fashion design education (pattern-making and sewing are not fashion design) and that FWL has been bridging this gap by bringing industry professionals to Fiji for workshops in which Fiji's designers would benefit from 'a more defined knowledge of interesting, innovative [and] yet commercially viable designs. There is nobody in Fiji with this knowledge' (Huxley, pers. comm. 6/6/19). Thus, through Huxley's mentorship, FWL also assists in finding the resources to annually send an emerging designer to study at The Fashion Design Studio.

In February 2018, Fiji Fashion Week Ltd joined the Executive Board of the Commonwealth Fashion Council. The council has worked with partners to establish the Commonwealth Fashion Exchange project in order to support sustainable designers and artisans by engaging with fashion as a common language between the fifty-three Commonwealth nations. Through FWL, Fiji was represented at the Commonwealth Fashion Exchange exhibition. Hupfeld Hoerder collaborated with designers from Vanuatu and the Seychelles to create a one-of-a-kind masi couture gown. Whippy-Knight attended the opening of the exhibition at Buckingham Palace and discussed avenues for further education and development with other participants.

### ***Fashion Council of Fiji (FCF)***

The Fashion Council of Fiji (figure 2.10) is an association formed in Suva in 2010 by a group of industry experts, including designers and stylists, who shared a common vision to create and nurture a world-class and inclusive fashion industry in Fiji. The council has seven main objectives and all endeavour to provide further and more concrete opportunities to Fijian fashion. Since its inception the council has aimed to develop a sustainable fashion industry as well as develop practical skills associated with the industry, including setting up incubators for aspiring designers and facilitating workshops for the fashion industry. The council also endeavours ‘to promote, support or provide advice on legislation, regulations, by-laws, rules or amendments thereof governing the control of the fashion industry in Fiji or other measures affecting the rights and interests of its members’ (Fashion Council of Fiji 2014). In addition, the council takes responsibility for making representation on all matters and policies affecting the interests of its members. Furthermore, the Fashion Council of Fiji continuously takes steps to make recommendations, suggestions and proposals for improving the fashion industry. As demonstrated in the Council’s mission statement, it ‘has also networked with national and international professional educational institutions to develop skills required for the industry as well as fashion industry representatives overseas to develop commercial partnerships’ (2014).

Membership of the council falls under three categories: Student/Friends of the Fashion Industry (\$10 FJD per year), FCF Premium/Individual Designer (\$30 FJD per year), and FCF Corporate (\$200 FJD per year). Each category allows members varied benefits, with experience and exposure to fashion and industry events being the most emphasised. Students will receive assistance in securing internships and discounts on classes/training; individual designers will receive exclusive training with FCF mentors, have opportunities to be featured in marketing campaigns and participate in fashion events, participate in exclusive workshops and networking events, as well as have their portfolio listed in the FCF Directory. The directory is a publicly available database of professionals in the Fijian fashion industry and serves not only to provide information but gives access to business ventures by providing relevant details on brands and products/services offered. Lastly, corporate membership is designated for companies or organisations in fashion-related fields such as apparel/accessory design, photography, styling, production, modeling and blogging. Corporate members receive the same benefits as the individual designers. Under the leadership of Chairman Faraz Ali, who was first elected to the position in 2014, the

fashion sector has slowly grown in the nine years since the association was formed. This growth has occurred through the FCF working with other sector leaders such as Fiji Fashion Week Ltd and through establishing partnerships with both public and private corporations. They have also strived to network with national and international professional educational institutions, fashion industry representatives, and commercial opportunities.

Concerned with the future of the industry, ‘The Council is of the opinion that Suva is the fashion capital, not just of Fiji, but also of the Pacific...The future is Suva, and in time the Fashion Council of Fiji will come to represent all designers from our region, as the largest production centre is and will continue to be Fiji’ (Ali 2016). The Fashion Council of Fiji has prioritized the promotion of the industry because the textile, garment and footwear industries remaining in Fiji are focused on export and their products are branded with international company logos, not Fijian ones. The Fashion Council of Fiji maintains that while international orders and exports are important to the economy, the fashion industry is valuable to Fiji because of its ability to develop and create recognizable brands prior to export (Ali, pers. comm. 29/11/15). A supporter of the Fijian Government’s ‘FijianMade’ initiative<sup>26</sup> which promotes and raises the profile of Fijian made products in order to bolster the Fijian economy and discourage reliance on imports, FCF recognizes the need for proper training in the industry.

Of the workshops and initiatives that the Fashion Council of Fiji has introduced since 2010, there are four that have been significant to the promotion of masi’s urban contemporary adaptation. The first is FCF’s partnership with ANZ (Australia and New Zealand Banking Group Ltd). ANZ’s ‘Fashion ATM’s’ debuted in February 2017 and showcased four selected designers on ATM cash machines in Nadi and another four designers in Suva. The initiative only occurs for a limited time period each year and was established to bring fashion, in particular textile design and artistry, directly to consumers. Applied in vinyl across the entire surface area of the machines, the designers’ work was visible in a larger and more permanent way than occurs during fashion shows and events. A showcase of some of Fiji’s most established designers, the inaugural ATMs did not feature masi designs. However, Epeli Tuibeqa’s fusion of Pacific (Fiji, Samoa, Tonga) tapa

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<sup>26</sup> Introduced by the Fijian Government’s Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism in 2009, this initiative has positively contributed to the economy including in the arts and culture sector. Masi makers are eligible to apply for a ‘FijianCrafted’ license, which allows them to have their skill and crafts differentiated from imported material and promotes Fijian craftsmanship. In the fashion industry, ‘FijianDesigned’ has been designated specifically to acknowledge the contributions made by fashion to the economy.

was displayed on the ATM in Flagstaff, while others featured indigenous Fijian imagery found on carvings and in basketry such as Samson Lee Fiji's 'Ika' design and Zuber's 'Iri' motif (figure 2.11). Hoerder's iconic swirled motif was also applied to ANZ's main street branch ATMs in Nadi (figure 2.11). In 2018, two of the ATMs featured contemporary masi designs; Su Samuels's motifs, under the brand Lavalani Designs, were featured on the Tappoo City (figure 2.12) machine and Samson Lee Fiji's line called 'Vanua' was applied on ANZ's machines at their downtown Nadi branch (figure 2.13).

At the end of 2017, FCF conducted a one-day workshop on cultural and intellectual property in the fashion industry. Funded by British Council's *Valuing Voices* initiative, it was an opportunity to discuss rights and responsibilities, especially concerning prints and textile design. Indigenous (masi) prints and cultural knowledge have been at the forefront of discussions since 2013 when the Fiji Airways and Nanette Lepore controversies came to light (see chapter 5), but no formal discussions had taken place in the fashion community prior to FCF's workshop. Creating awareness and learning how to register and trademark their own designs was focused on by thirty participants including high school students. Following on from the work done with the students at the workshop, *Valuing Voices* funded the council's Student Designer Show in which thirty student designers gained experience in creating looks to showcase in a professionally produced show.

The third and fourth initiatives are connected because one was the stepping stone to the other. The Fashion Council of Fiji's 'Masi Gala' took place on 12 March 2016 and was conceived as a celebration of indigenous Fijian ingenuity and skill (figure 2.14).<sup>27</sup> Announced as the fashion event of the year (Fashion Council Fiji 2016), the gala was curated by Adi Litia Nailatikau, daughter of former President of Fiji Ratu Epeli Nailatikau and former First Lady Adi Koila Mara Nailatikau, and featured both traditional masi and haute couture (masi couture) creations from Fiji's established fashion designers. Masi couture was not only limited to the catwalk; attendees also arrived wearing custom masi couture pieces, mainly real masi but also masi-printed cloth (figure 2.15). Performance, participation, presentation and theatre were the focus of the night, echoing historical large-scale events (see chapter 4). The gala was a first for Fiji and for masi in the fashion industry. Never before had an event been solely dedicated to masi, nor had the focus of an

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<sup>27</sup> Originally planned for 27 February 2016, the Masi Gala was postponed because of Tropical Cyclone Winston, which hit Fiji on 20 February. Although I meant to attend on 27 February, I could not go to the rescheduled event because of the Pasifika Festival and Pacific Arts Association Conference that was being held in Auckland between 12-18 March. Therefore, accounts of the Masi Gala have been acquired through interviews with organisers and attendees.

event been to celebrate masi from both the traditional and historical standpoint to the urban and contemporary adaptation of the material as a frontrunner in Fiji's fashion evolution (Nacola, pers. comm. 21/3/16; Ali, Tuibeqa, pers. comm. 22/3/16).

While the inaugural Masi Gala was the only gala presented by the council, it led the FCF's executive board to think about establishing something larger, more permanent and that would further advance the fashion industry in general. In June 2018 the first annual Fijian Fashion Festival took place. The festival is Fiji's first independent, not-for-profit, industry-owned, trade and consumer fashion platform. In accordance with their goal to establish Suva as the global centre for Pacific fashion, the council's website states that 'The Fijian Fashion Festival is the driver of our industry's future, through the Fashion Council of Fiji'. Self-proclaimed as proudly one-hundred percent Fijian, the festival celebrates not only Fijian fashion designers, but Fijian stylists, media personnel, models, marketing managers and photographers. The goal of the festival is to support the growth of small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in Fiji's fashion industry and to use itself as one of the central catalysts for making Suva the global centre of the Pacific fashion industry.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Fashion Designers Alliance Fiji (FDAF)***

The Fashion Designers Alliance Fiji (FDAF; figure 2.16) was established in 2012, under the leadership of Naziah Ali and with the assistance of Ellen Whippy-Knight, Managing Director of Fiji Fashion Week Ltd (see above). Its mission was to grow the regional fashion industry by creating awareness in the industry and providing support and resources to Fiji's designers. Envisaged as an 'alliance' in every sense of the word, one of the objectives of its creation was to acknowledge that banding together as a collective group would accomplish more and benefit a wider range of designers than would be the case if each worked individually. The ultimate vision of the alliance is to build a thriving and lasting fashion industry in Fiji and the Pacific region. The organisation was established with no external financing and was maintained by the designers' themselves using their own resources, time and commitment. Current annual membership fees are \$5 FJD for emerging/student designers and \$10 FJD for established designers.

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<sup>28</sup> For the purposes of this work, when referring to the Pacific, Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia are not included. Both Auckland and Sydney have large fashion centres in which Pacific diasporas take part; however, the Fashion Council of Fiji's mandate only considers smaller Pacific Island nations, notably those which are PSIDS (Pacific Small Island Developing States).

In 2018, the alliance officially entered into a partnership with Fiji Fashion Week Ltd, creating a three-year (2018-2020) Memorandum of Understanding in which designers will slowly begin to assist in the organisation of Fiji Fashion Week's<sup>29</sup> annual events with the vision of taking over full control of the event in the final year. Designer and former Secretary-General Jo Mesake Nacola has applauded Whippy-Knight for being 'a beacon of light to designers' in her development of Fiji Fashion Week (pers. comm. 16/1/15). FDAF envisages that the partnership will lead to the alliance, and in turn the fashion designers themselves, owning Fiji Fashion Week Ltd. The partnership is a milestone in the alliance's development and establishment, especially given the little external support that they feel they have received, and celebrates its new executive team of Adi Koila Ganilau Lee (President), Robert Verebasaga, Epeli Tuibeqa, Michael Mausio and Rosie Isaacs. Not exclusive to any type of designer, Ganilau Lee states that 'as long as an individual is a designer of fashion wear they are welcome to join the alliance' (23/10/18).

As a means of providing support and resources to Fiji's designers, multiple workshops have been conducted for members. Often focusing on garment production components such as pattern making and design visualisation, the workshops also act as membership drives. Significant to this research is the FDAF's awareness of design and issues surrounding cultural ownership and intellectual property. On 17 February 2018, the FDAF hosted a capacity building workshop in which one of the sessions was led by intellectual property solicitor Pita Niubalavu; Mr Niubalavu spoke about issues of copyright and intellectual property, which was significant given ownership issues in fashion faced by other Pacific cultures and communities in previous years.

Such a fast-moving series of initiatives and events has shaped the last decade of Fiji's growing fashion industry. Often involving overlapping personnel, with the various organisations' memberships hosting the same fashion designers and industry professionals, Fiji's main fashion show events welcome both Fijian fashion designers and international designers. The relationship between the different organisations and events is complex, but there is a clearly defined relationship between them. Because of the dynamism of the fashion industry and the overlap of associated show events, for ease of reading, the fashion show events will be discussed in chronological order.

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<sup>29</sup> The difference between Fiji Fashion Week Ltd and Fiji Fashion Week, the annual fashion show, will be explained in greater detail below.

### ***Fiji Fashion Week (FJFW)***

Fiji Fashion Week (figure 2.17) was established in 2008 in an effort to recognize the creative ingenuity of Fijian designers and an attempt to create a cohesive body of designers who would work together to revitalize the fashion industry in Fiji. While the country's first fashion industry was dominated by one or two companies, this reincarnation endeavoured to focus on bringing together individual designers, most of whom were not full-time fashion designers, and assist them in showing their work to large audiences. Founded under the directorship of Donnalesi Whippy, an emerging fashion designer herself, the inaugural 4-day event took place at the Hilton Hotel at Denarau in Nadi. The west of Viti Levu was chosen to take advantage of the large tourist and expatriate communities found there. In 2009, Whippy was replaced by her business-management experienced family member Ellen Whippy-Knight. Whippy-Knight envisaged that FJFW would provide the building blocks to create the beginnings of the rebirth of an internationally recognised fashion industry in Fiji and accordingly moved the event to Suva that same year.

Following fashion events held in Western cities, and especially mimicking those of the classic fashion cities, Fiji Fashion Week's annual May event follows the traditional runway/catwalk format of presentation with expressionless and thin models showing multiple looks per designer. Designers have to apply to showcase at FJFW and must have the approval of the Managing Director Whippy-Knight to be accepted. They also must have the funds to pay the application/participation fee. Subsequently they are put into categories determined by their experience, design genre and 'sale-ability'. After Whippy-Knight took over the management of the event, a stronger focus was given to her concept of 'it is only fashion if it sells' (Whippy-Knight, interview 18/3/14). Anything remotely indigenously minded – in medium, not concept – was relegated to a special night of fashion week. This themed night, 'Echoes of the Pacific', was created to highlight designers who use indigenous materials. The format of the night followed that of the others. However, Fijian dancing (traditional and contemporary) was included in the show as well as music and song. In contrast to the minimalist and sombre air of the rest of Fiji Fashion Week, being labelled as 'tribal' and providing entertainment with the show gave off the impression that perhaps the organisers did not consider these pieces to be 'fashion' or their creators 'fashion' designers.

Announcing its cessation and the retirement of Managing Director Ellen Whippy-Knight in late 2016, FJFW held its 10th event in May 2017, the final night celebrating 'gold couture' and featuring the finest of Fijian and Pacific fashion. Originally

intent on retiring to spend more time with family in Australia where she resides, Whippy-Knight felt that it was time to step aside because the industry had been (re)established and now had firm roots. Finding sponsorship and government support was also difficult and proved taxing in the first seven years. Perhaps inadvertently, the establishment of the industry also brought in other stakeholders, and tension was evident among the strong personalities spearheading the future of Fijian fashion. However, both FJFW and Whippy-Knight came back, with the addition of the FDAF, in 2018. Focusing exclusively on ‘resort wear,’ a genre that FJFW refers to as the global fashion industry’s fastest growing trend, the two 2018 shows were themed as Resort Lifestyle (relaxed resort wear) and Luxe Resort (high-end, luxury resort wear). While practical on a sales level, this decision limits designers and pigeonholes the creative industry into producing a single genre of fashion. FJFW’s 2019 event saw resort wear again as the focus of the show – and possibly now the only objective of Fiji Fashion Week Ltd – with the themes being Cruise Resort and Luxe Resort. While 2018 saw zero designers using masi in their collections, 2019 saw Epeli Tuibeqa showcase an elaborately created masi couture line in the Luxe Resort show. Prior to this, and as discussed above, FJFW had infrequently featured masi couture in its mainstream shows. Hoerder had repeatedly used masi in his works since FJFW had begun, yet it was plain masi to which he had applied his own signature designs or which did not bear culturally significant motifs. However, Tuibeqa’s works are all crafted from masi kesa (with stencilled designs) and he has succeeded in doing so in 2015, 2016 and 2019. One reason for the shift in mindset to allow masi be included in the mainstream show, instead of relegating it to a ‘Pacific’ or tribal show, may stem from the events of 2013 when numerous cultural motifs became internationally recognised because of cultural ownership and intellectual property controversies. Suddenly, masi was seen as sellable because an American fashion designer had created a line from it, masi motifs were in high demand because Fiji’s national airline wanted to trademark them, and Samoan tatau (tattoo) was being discussed widely because a global conglomerate had made it into sporting merchandise (see chapter 5).

In association with the alliance, FJFW has also begun discussions for satellite fashion weeks to occur elsewhere in Fiji. While still in conversation with the Soqosoqo Vakamarama,<sup>30</sup> it is likely that future programmes of events will include Savusavu Fashion

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<sup>30</sup> The Soqosoqo Vakamarama is an organisation that was formed in 1924 by Mrs Ronald Derrick. Originally the Women’s Association of the Methodist Church, it is now non-sectarian and is formed by women of Fiji’s

Week, Labasa Fashion Week and Lautoka Fashion Week (Whippy-Knight, pers. comm. 3/9/18). Through Fiji Fashion Week Ltd., and the show's commitment to engaging with designers from the Pacific Islands, FJFW has assisted in launching fashion weeks around the Pacific. Papua New Guinea Fashion Week was launched in 2012 and endeavours to push its designers beyond conventional molds to tell a story that is uniquely Papua New Guinean. Solomon Islands Fashion Week held its first event in 2013, while Tonga Fashion Week has been in discussion for a number of years, accompanied by capacity building workshops hosted by FJFW. In addition to Pacific-based events, FJFW has taken part in off-show opportunities at Mercedes Benz Fashion Week (Sydney, 2015), Sydney Pacific Island Fashion Week (2018), London Fashion Week (2018), and Los Angeles Fashion Week (2015, 2018).

### ***Style Fiji***

Style Fiji (figure 2.18) is an annual event established in 2011 under the auspice of Project Bula Mai, a Charitable Trust benefitting health services in Western Fiji by raising funds through annual events. Managed by three of Fiji's top models of the 1990s (Zelda Thomas Paige, Ema Volavola and Marlene Vuniwaqa Blake), the first Style Fiji saw Fiji's established designers of the 1990s showcasing their work alongside emerging Fijian designers, as well as international fashion houses. The show was instantly successful, raising cash and in-kind funds; Style Fiji is now the main annual event that Project Bula Mai hosts. Taking place on Denarau, Style Fiji also caters to the tourist and expatriate demographic, but draws large crowds from fashion conscious Suva. Masi couture has been showcased annually, with masi motif material fashion appearing for the first time in 2015 in Samson Lee's inaugural line (see chapter 4). Unlike Fiji's other fashion events, Style Fiji does not sit within the fashion industry's framework. Not strictly a 'Western'-style fashion show, Style Fiji is organised to raise funds for Fiji's healthcare services. Donations and giving is focused on during the evening; while the show's consumers are interested in fashion and being fashionable, the target market for Style Fiji is not solely based on the fashion industry or its invested stakeholders.

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14 provinces. In comparison, soqosoqo ni marama are women's collectives found in regions around the country.

### ***Bottega Fijian Fashion Festival (BFFF)***<sup>31</sup>

Officially launched on 9 December 2017, the Bottega Fijian Fashion Festival's (figure 2.19) inaugural 2018 event (1-2 June; Grand Pacific Hotel, Suva) consisted of two shows featuring a total of twenty-three designers. Fifteen of these designers showed exclusively with the festival and three others also had their own solo shows during the event, which was a first in the region's fashion scene. No other fashion platform at that time had allowed solo shows for established designers' fashion brands. Hupfeld Hoerder Designs, Hefrani and AZA transformed the runway for each of their shows to reflect their visions for new and exclusive collections to the Festival. In group shows, all designers utilise the same décor and ambience chosen by the event organisers to show their works, with the exception of a projection screen to show images and branding; allowing solo shows to change the décor created a new dynamic. Two out of three of these solo show designers actively use masi in their creations; Hoerder (Hupfeld Hoerder Designs) uses white masi and applies his own decoration, while Konrote (Hefrani) uses masi kesa. The festival, an initiative of the Fashion Council of Fiji, is not themed, which gives greater access to masi being showcased alongside mainstream fashion. In addition to corporate sponsors, the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts (specifically the Department of Heritage and Arts) put their support behind the festival providing resources and logistical assistance. This support is symbolic because it demonstrates and confirms that fashion – possibly in part because of the emergence of masi as a significant presence in fashion – is coming to be seen as a valid art form in Fiji's arts and cultural heritage sector. The Council and Festival highlight masi as the original fashion platform in Fiji, pointing to historical examples of masi use and wear as 'fashion'. Of the designers who chose to show their collections at the Festival's inaugural event, the majority use masi in their artistic practice. This development will be discussed in chapter 4. However, it is significant to note that the support of the Department of Heritage and Arts, and the focus of the 2018 inaugural event on contemporary adaptations of masi use and wear, does not seem to be a coincidence.

Faraz Ali, chairman of the Fashion Council of Fiji and BFFF Show Director, signalled the inclusion of photographs, marketing material, fabric, art installations and cultural

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<sup>31</sup> It began as the Bottega Gold Fijian Fashion Festival but has since become the Bottega Fijian Fashion Festival, for consistency it will be called by its current name throughout. Victoria Wines has premium naming rights for the Fijian Fashion Festival. As Bottega Prosecco is exclusively sold by Victoria Wines in Fiji, it was considered appropriate for it to lend its name to the festival. The Bottega brand prides its commitment to quality, elegance and emphasises freshness, which mirrors the BFFF's vision and commitment to creating a fashion platform of the highest calibre.

heritage in a special exhibition on the day preceding the first show of the 2018 Bottega Fijian Fashion Festival as a means of celebrating Fiji's proud heritage as well as connecting industry players in ways that they may not have been previously connected. A highlight of the exhibition was a gala dinner 'where [the festival] will be presenting a traditional showcase of masi from the 14 provinces [of Fiji] to take people back to the origins of fashion in Fiji which is embedded in our beautiful culture' (Ali, interview 6/4/18). Similar to the original Masi Gala in both content and vision, there was one difference. Because the festival is sponsored by the Fiji business Victoria Wines, and because Victoria Wines-distributed Bottega Prosecco has premium naming rights of the Fijian Fashion Festival, it inadvertently brings business and the arts and cultural heritage sector even deeper into the fold, consequently further blurring the vakavanua/vakabisinisi boundaries of Fijian cultural life. Kate Vusoniwailala, Director of Victoria Wines, is passionate about focussing the company's sponsorships and partnerships on culture and the arts as she has a background in the cultural sector, including being a former director of Fiji Museum (1991–2000). As of 2017, she has served as the Chair of the Fiji Museum Board of Trustees and works closely with the museum to oversee its future development.

Bottega Fijian Fashion Festival's 2019 event (6-9 June; Grand Pacific Hotel, Suva) was different from its inaugural year, in that its primary objective was not to focus solely on the fashion shows, but to concentrate on the development of Fiji's fashion designers and industry. Not wanting to perpetuate only one style of show, following the notion that group shows eclipse the individual designers and highlight the complexity of the evening rather than the designers' collections - the 'show should never overshadow the designer or their talent' (Ali, interview 9/5/19) - only one group show took place with five designers. Subsequently, seven designer brands/fashion houses held solo shows over two days (Zuber/Ilai Jikoiono, Wallis & Futuna, Hupfeld Hoerder Designs/Hupfeld Hoerder, Lavalani/Su Samuels, Samson Lee Fiji/Samson Lee, AZA/Zulfikar Ali, and 8 Mountains/Moira Solvalu-John). During the solo shows, masi and masi motifs were featured by Hoerder, Samuels and Lee, with Jikoiono utilising generic Pacific motifs. The BFFF 2018 'exhibition' developed into the BFFF Mini Mall, also held at the Grand Pacific Hotel, which was open for the duration of the Festival's 2019 event. Following on from the FCF's commitment to developing all areas of the fashion industry and related fields, the Mini Mall was free to enter and comprised stalls featuring designer boutiques, jewellery and adornments, hair stylists, beauty care, food and drinks, as well as performances by contemporary Fijian dance troupe VOU. Envisaged as a meeting and mingling place for all

where connections could be made on a one-to-one commercial basis, it exercised the FCF's belief that everybody should be able to have access to fashion; 'fashion is broad and so too should be its access' (Ali, interview 9/5/19).

Promoting Fiji's fashion industry, particularly through the BFFF, answers one of the Fashion Council of Fiji's main objectives of celebrating the ethnic diversity of the nation's people. Ali considers that Fiji's national identity is an amalgamation of all of the country's cultural and ethnic identities but that it had been difficult to promote these globally during the colonial period, as well as post-independence, because of political instability and lingering ethnic tensions. The re-emergence of fashion as a viable industry in twenty-first century Fiji has allowed for a diverse cultural spectrum to be showcased. AZA's luxury Indian-inspired fashion line infuses contemporary aesthetics with traditional Indian dress styles using Indian-made fabrics. In a 2018 interview with the *Fiji Sun* newspaper, Faraz Ali stated that AZA 'holds the record for the most expensive Fijian fashion garment sold. In 2014 he sold a wedding outfit for \$15,000 [FJD]. He is living proof that high fashion design and high fashion spending exists right here in Fiji' (Vula 2018). Southeast Asian styles, as well as Banaban, Tongan and Rotuman inspired collections have been consistently showcased at fashion events by their own designers such as Rako Pasefika Designs and 8 Mountains. Cultural fashion fusion also exists and is a reflection of the nation's fast-moving urban and ethnic mixing of people and ideas. In 2016 Samson Lee Fiji debuted his 'Cevuga' line in which he fused indigenous Fijian and Indian styles creating a sari dress style using masi motif material (figure 2.20).<sup>32</sup> Fusion like this is not new in Suva. One of Hoerder's earlier bridal pieces from the 1990s, now in Fiji Museum's collection (figure 2.21), was created to represent all of Fiji's ethnic cultures:

The unique and classical design was inspired by the medieval period of history and recognises colonialism and the influence of Europeans. The veil, made from white sari material, represents the Indian community, the gold ribbons represent the Chinese community and the masi and shells represent the [indigenous] Fijian and Rotuman communities. (Fiji Museum, Masi Gallery object label, transcribed 26/2/13)

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<sup>32</sup> 'Masi motif material' is Western fabric that has been printed with masi motifs. It is not masi and the term is being used throughout this thesis to distinguish masi motifs on real masi from the presence of masi motifs on other mediums. Sometimes masi motif material will also be referred to as masi motif printed material; however, the point to note is that, in the instances where these terms are used, the material that motifs are appearing on is not masi.

However, indigenous Fijian culture and representation is still visually favoured on national, regional and international platforms – even by the Council itself – which may be a subconscious choice or unintentional coincidence. Ali (2016) claims that ‘understanding ourselves is something we have never done too well’ and this is demonstrated in the contradiction between his words and the iconography and cultural heritage promoted by the Council. The logos of both the Fashion Council of Fiji and the Bottega Fijian Fashion Festival exclusively feature indigenous Fijian motifs/cultural heritage. Aside from the designers themselves and their collections, there is no visible sign of other cultural or ethnic identities evident in either the Council’s or Festival’s public and professional presentation. Even more, in his profession as a stylist and creative director, Ali frequently utilises masi kesa as the key component and visual representation of his work, something that may appear unconventional given his absence of indigenous Fijian ancestry.

Paired with the Fashion Council of Fiji’s and the Bottega Fijian Fashion Festival’s vision of cultural diversity, ethnic inclusion and ‘fashion for all’, masi’s prominence in the vision of both entities speaks to a potentially disjointed message. Here, a disconnect between masi as a material, masi as motifs only, couture and fashion come to a head. Perhaps a distinction in Fiji’s fashion industry between ‘(masi) couture’ and ‘fashion’ needs to be made more explicit by its community’s members. In a Western context, the concept of ‘fashion’ includes fashion as a mainstream thing which was made accessible to the general population from the twentieth century (Eicher 2010:12), as well as haute couture, which remains shrouded in exclusivity and privilege. Thus, as an extrapolation: all types of couture are fashion but not all types of fashion are couture. Today, in Fiji and around the world, shops are trying to make fashion available to all at reasonable prices – which reflects Whippy-Knight’s 2014 statement that something is only ‘fashion’ if it sells – however, an inherent contradiction exists between fashion as on the one hand exclusive, and the notion of it being for all. From this study, in the Fiji and Suva context of fashion, ‘fashion for all’ relates more frequently to Fijians having the opportunity to be exposed to fashion as a viable art form and creative industry (through shows and events) rather than the physical ability to monetarily afford such pieces. Practically speaking, ‘fashion for all’ in terms of buyers/consumers is not possible because of masi couture’s inclusion as ‘fashion’ and is a slogan for the overarching fashion movement rather than a realistic aim.

## ***Comparing Current Fashion Events in Fiji - Rivalries and Controversies***

While concerted efforts have been repeatedly made to clarify that there is no competition between the various fashion platforms in Fiji, there are significant differences and divergences between them. The Bottega Fijian Fashion Festival promotes fashion in Fiji as a cultural development, stemming from the historical production and use of masi and other indigenous materials in ceremonial and chiefly occasions, while Fiji Fashion Week concentrates on fashion as a system and aesthetic that functions on trends and saleability. Limiting their event to resort wear is for them a strategic means of streamlining their platform and honing their clientele. However, it also sidelines masi's extending and adapting role in Fiji's fashion industry. Masi couture has been shown to have immense saleability when used in life-cycle event occasions such as weddings, birthdays and, rather than investitures, graduations. This in part challenges FJFW's reasoning for making resort wear their prime genre of fashion. A survey of social media platforms shows the prominence of masi couture in the lives of urban Fijians and the global Fijian diaspora. Masi couture appears to be a highly valued and adaptable product in Fiji's fashion industry, as well as in the global fashion industry. Nicholas Huxley considers that coming from cultural roots does not make a product any less significant:

I try to teach my students to, as much as possible, be creative and innovative and think on their own. When you focus on cultures, you never have to worry about themes because all countries, in one way or another, have typically wonderful detailing that makes them exclusively unique. Copying can reduce the quality of products. It's demeaning to the creativity and innovation of the person who did the original design. So it's good to still have your heritage, which is very important, but you do have to adapt these clothes so they could be functional in a Western way. (Mitchell 2018)

While undertaking this research has demonstrated that the above is not necessarily accurate and that adaptations to cultural 'clothes' do not have to be made to completely fit a Western fashion system, perhaps this is where the term couture is most significant. Historically, as described above, couture was a special and elite form of fashion made to be bespoke, a 'one-off', elaborately created. Masi couture can be considered haute couture in every sense of the term; the pieces are hand-made, unique and exclusive. On 1 June 2019, Ellen Whippy-Knight discussed the most recent Fiji Fashion Week (20-25 May 2019; FMF

National Gymnasium, Suva) on social media, praising Samoan designer Mata'afa Tahiano Wesche of the label Tahiano on their collection:

What a collection! I have waited 12 years for a Pacific Island Designer to create such extraordinary work – haute couture at our own doorstep! Congratulations, it was such a pleasure. See you over the next 12 years!!!! (Whippy-Knight 1/6/19)

Wesche's collection was shown during the Luxe Resort show and used only Western fabrics and conventions - no indigenous materials - to create the stunning pieces. Alongside Shona Tawhiao and Epeli Tuibeqa, both of whose works were couture but used indigenous materials as their basis, Wesche's collection was the only one categorized by FJFW as 'couture'. Looking to Huxley's statement regarding culture in fashion and FJFW's objectives, masi or indigenous materials are not couture, nor are they 'fashion' if they cannot be made into a Western aesthetic and sold. A valid argument is that masi is impractical as resort wear and, unless it is developed into a sustainable eco-friendly material much like bamboo and hemp have been, then masi in what FJFW has deemed 'mainstream' fashion will cease to exist. However, masi couture as a viable form of fashion does seem to have a place in Fiji's urban contemporary landscape.

Contention regarding Fiji Fashion Week's stance on Fijian fashion has also arisen out of logistical and infrastructural concerns. Much of Fiji Fashion Week's management team have Fiji connections, but are not Fiji-based professionals, making their vision of the Fijian fashion industry difficult to sustain on a longterm basis. Thus, as part of their memorandum of understanding, Fashion Designers Alliance of Fiji members have stepped into logistical roles in each management area in order to gain experience and ownership of the event. The exception is show production which sees Nicholas Huxley, FJFW's Australian Ambassador, working to shape designers' visions and collections with his experience in Australia's fashion industry and education system. As a mentor to all designers, Huxley has acted as the Show Producer for FJFW since 2018.

Faraz Ali has labelled the Bottega Fijian Fashion Festival as a way to show Fijians and the global fashion industry that the last decade of Fiji's fashion industry is not all that Fiji has to offer and that it can be nurtured and grown using Fijian ingenuity, creativity and skill. Fiji's fashion scene both has deep roots embedded in indigenous cultural heritage and may have the ability to move far beyond where it is now. It is the Festival and the Council's goal to cultivate, encourage, promote and continue to develop the industry. On

the opposite end of the spectrum is Style Fiji. It provides a different experience to BFFF and FJFW because it focuses less on the commerciality of fashion and more on its artistic merits (as a means to fundraise for charitable causes). It is here that fashion, in its Western sense, is eschewed and Fijianness is expressed through materials, song and performativity.

Although not directly or explicitly in competition with one another, Fiji's main fashion show events do experience implicit criticism which materialises out of insider tensions. Fashion designers and industry professionals often belong to multiple organisations and participate in multiple events; while not extremely advantageous for designers in such a small (but growing) industry, many are carving out niches for themselves in their creative continuity and adaptability of masi and its motifs. In engaging with supply and demand of the buyers' market, which is comprised of a mixture of working-class locals, wealthy locals (indigenous Fijian, Pacific and other Fiji-represented ethnicities), tourists, and the expatriate community, shifts in 'fashion' are evident in the yearly collections released by fashion designers and houses. In the last decade, there has been a pattern of making Pacific and indigenous Fijian motifs (masi and literal elements of cultural heritage such as fans, clubs, flora and fauna) more visible, which often reflects national and international current affairs. For example, when indigenous cultural ownership and intellectual property are relevant to the nation or Pacific region, it is mimicked in fashion choices.

Much like masi is a reflection of female agency and power in Fijian society, so too is fashion in relation to Fiji's cultural identity. This study's working definition of fashion describes it as a social process of negotiation and navigation which materialises with bodies moving through time and space. Masi's pervasive role in Fiji's social fabric illustrates fashion as a set of principles according to which social actors view the body and its adornment. Dress, on the other hand, emphasises meanings that are given to practices of adornment and clothing. When masi is used in a ceremonial context as adornment, it is a bespoke action. While previous or subsequent instances in which adornment is part may appear the same or similar, they cannot be considered as such because masi used in exchange settings would have been made specifically for each event. Couture is the same: bespoke, exclusive, valuable (monetarily), and handmade, couture fashion is specific to an exact context in time and space. Coming back to Tulloch's coined system of style-dress-fashion and this study's adapted version of masi-fashion-haute couture, masi couture is a form of haute couture which emphasises culture, indigeneity and creative adaptability beyond traditional means of production through bespoke and exclusive creations. With

Fiji's fashion designers increasingly engaging with masi in their works, masi couture and masi motifs are increasingly becoming synonymous with Fiji's urban contemporary narrative.



### **3 Fashion in Fiji: Designers, Gender and Performance**

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This chapter will continue the examination of developments in fashion in Fiji, firstly by considering the role of designers and then by reflecting on gender issues in urban contemporary masi couture and fashion, and discussing this in light of traditional gender roles in making and designing masi. Finally, the dynamic performative aspects of masi display will be assessed, both in traditional contexts of presentation and in more recent manifestations on the catwalk and elsewhere.

#### **Fiji's Established Fashion Designers**

Reflecting on my own Fijian ancestry and my experiences in Fiji as an adolescent, I do not remember Western fashion systems being of great importance to the general Fijian population, even those in the then rapidly urbanizing city of Suva. While fashion centres were being born in other, larger, areas of the Pacific, Fiji did not seem concerned with what was 'in fashion' and what was not. Prescribed Western systems of fashion appeared superfluous to Suva's working-class demographic, and certainly to Fiji's rural and outer island populations. However, fashion was seen as important to Europeans, government officials and some higher-ranking families. A paradigm shift occurred in the mid to late 1990s when, according to Becker (2004:541), Western notions of the body and body image began to be prevalent in Fiji. When television was introduced to the country in 1995, Fijians began to emulate the Western aesthetics that they saw being portrayed onscreen every day: 'I look for some clothes that fit me...which I can compare to the ones I see on television, you know, and I take them home and act like [the actors on television]' (Becker 2004:541). At first, there was only one television channel, but this increased to include multiple satellite channels, and Western ideals of body, dress and fashion began to permeate everyday life. Common in transnational or diasporic communities in which body image ideals are elevated because a Western-identified image is coveted for its perceived exclusivity (Becker 2004:537; Becker *et al.* 2007:42), this is relevant to Suva because of its role as Fiji's national diaspora. Bringing together different people and regional styles, there is more opportunity in Suva to work with different materials, patterns and ideas because of the diasporic nature of its population. Thus, although Western notions of beauty

were skewing traditional Fijian concepts of body image ideals from the mid 1990s, it allowed the fashion industry to blossom.

With the advent and expansion of Fiji's urban fashion industry, the term 'fashion designer' was formally introduced. Before large-scale fashion events became synonymous with Fiji's fashion industry, a select group of artists and fashion designers had begun using indigenous materials in their pieces, creating looks that differed from ready-to-wear and off the rack fashions. Visually less detailed and technically less complicated, these early pieces were a celebration of indigeneity and are representative of the birth of masi as couture.

Fashion designers in Fiji make up a diverse community. Men, women, young, old, indigenous Fijian, Indo-Fijian, Chinese-Fijian, Kailoma, Rotuman, European – the community is large, varied and constantly growing.<sup>33</sup> When fashion events started in the late 1980s, beginning with the first Southern Cross Fashion Show in 1988, there were only a handful of fashion designers practising. Designers or artists were not 'professional' in terms of generating enough revenue to make a living. Instead, fashion designing was seen as a hobby and designers moonlighted in creating their works, often holding day jobs to fund both their lives and hobbies and publicly showing their works when they could. Clientele was gained by word of mouth, with designers such as Hoerder gaining loyal customers. At a time when designer boutiques did not exist, as they do now, fashion designers relied on customer loyalty and having their clothes being seen on the streets and at corporate events. As Hupfeld Hoerder explained (interview 28/1/16):

I've done a lot of stuff for Bernadette [Rounds Ganilau, media personality and former politician]... [She] has always had that confidence in me and so I started making outfits for her. She would wear them to different events, like the Miss South Pacific pageant, overseas conferences and always promoted – and still promotes – my clothes anywhere she went. She is one person who has encouraged me so much. Having close friends who say 'Huppy, I believe in you', which she says all the time, it really gives you confidence. It makes you have the drive to excel.

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<sup>33</sup> The term 'Kailoma' originally referred to a person of mixed indigenous Fijian and European ancestry. It has become popular in use after terms such as half-caste and part-European began being considered as derogatory. Today, 'Kailoma' is increasingly beginning to refer to people who are of mixed indigenous and any other ethnicity.

At first considered as emerging artists in the early years of ‘Western’ fashion in Fiji, a core group of fashion designers were later singled out as Fiji’s established and elite designers by the time Fiji Fashion Week was established in 2008. It was this select group of designers who first began using indigenous materials in their looks and who paved the way for a newer generation of emerging designers, some of whom are now also regarded as established artists.<sup>34</sup> While the majority of the first designers in Suva were men, more and more women have become involved, yet it is still the male designers who are best known. The newer generation are based in Fiji’s urban centres such as Suva, Nadi and Lautoka, though the majority are still based in and around Suva. Ever since fashion courses were introduced at tertiary institutions in Suva, aspiring designers can choose fashion as a profession instead of a hobby. They can visit open days and enroll in programmes which enable them to follow their artistic passions (Nasinu 2017), something that was unavailable when the country’s established designers were starting their designing careers (Hoerder, interview 18/10/12; Kennedy, interview 1/10/12). Having the fashion industry become more visible and credible is just as important for fashion designers as it is for the industry itself:

Events like the Fiji Fashion Week and Style Fiji have played a major role in this. From my perspective, stakeholders need to build their confidence in designers... Young designers need support from stakeholders. For me this was a hobby that became a profession – young designers are starting out with fashion as a career instead of doing it on the side. And that’s amazing to see happen. (Hoerder, pers. comm. 10/3/16)

With indigenous materials being used in the resurgence of the fashion industry after Tiki Togs’ demise and masi being the favoured material, as discussed in chapter 3, masi motifs also emerged as popular patterns in fashion design. Using masi and its motifs is not always a straightforward choice, as there are potential ethical and cultural issues connected to who is considered to have the right to do so. For example, Robert Kennedy, a Fiji citizen of European descent whose family has been settled in Fiji for four generations, completed his secondary and tertiary education in Australia before returning to Fiji in the early 2000s. Equipped with a degree in textile design, he quietly began designing and printing masi

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<sup>34</sup> A socially-constructed category, the term ‘established’ has been defined in Fiji as a fashion designer having more than five years’ experience and who has a stable and established market base both in Fiji and overseas. Increasingly seen in Fiji, an established fashion designer also has a storefront, or supplies shops with their merchandise for commercial sale.

artworks for resorts and hotels. However, when he began fashion designing in 2009, he decided that he would not use indigenous motifs in his creations because they were not culturally his to engage with. When visiting the UK in October 2012 for London Pacific Fashion Week and the associated *Fabricating Fashion?* workshop (see chapter 4), he declared, ‘I do not use masi or masi motifs in my work because they are indigenous Fijian and I am not. They are not mine to use and I respect that’ (Kennedy, interview 1/10/12). Instead he chose to make use of Fiji’s natural and material culture creating bespoke designs inspired by fans, clubs, flora, fauna and the Pacific’s (specifically Melanesia) cultural diversity. However, in 2014 Kennedy started to use masi motifs in his work. His ‘Salusalu’ collection utilized Cakaudrove’s iconic walu motif, though he did not publicly call the motif by name or reference its significance to masi. Masi motifs appeared again in his 2017 ‘Henikai’ collection in which he labelled the design ‘Henikai Masi Tribal’ (figures 3.01-3.02).

In 2015 Cherie Whiteside’s granddaughter Jadeine Whiteside, of Kailoma and Chinese heritage, returned to Fiji to showcase her own designs in her inaugural collection called ‘Sotiana’. In a vast leap from her Tiki Togs familial legacy, the junior Whiteside had graduated from fashion school in China and was creating avant garde garments using a combination of masi and masi motif printed material. Readily available in China, where the majority of masi motif material is manufactured, her collection has been commercially successful in Asia where she has won numerous prizes for her designs (Fiji Fashion Week 2015). Although artistically divergent, Whiteside adopted the Tiki Togs name in conjunction with her collection; even now, Fiji’s first fashion house is remembered with great fondness in the country and vintage garments can be purchased online via collectors.<sup>35</sup>

As fashion in Fiji looks to the future, with the industry and the Fashion Council of Fiji particularly focused on sustainability and renewable resources, will masi become even more prevalent? During this study, Fijian designer Ratu Jo Mesake Nacola (Jnr) envisaged a fifteen-year plan which aimed to see the revival of masi making in the province of Ra. A multipurpose plan, he wanted to:

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<sup>35</sup> Jadeine Whiteside has since dropped the Tiki Togs reference in her fashion branding and creates off-the-rack fashion collections using a variety of materials, but not indigenous ones. Masi motifs remain a feature in her work but are printed on visibly synthetic fabrics, which do not lend themselves to the tropical environ of the Pacific region nor the sustainability nuances of masi as a cloth. She showcased her latest collection HANISI’OF at the 2018 Fiji Fashion Week (26 May 2018) as well as at the teaser show of the eighth London Pacific Fashion Week show (25 February 2018).

Establish a large masi plantation in my village [Soa, Nakorotubu, Ra]. This will allow women to contribute to the economy – it creates jobs – and also provides the raw materials to beat into masi for ceremonial use, for use in masi couture, and, my biggest dream, to develop into a sustainable and eco-friendly fabric much like [the company] BambooFiji has done in Savusavu. They use the hybrid bamboo and cotton material to make sustainable clothing for men and women. Can you imagine how good it will be for masi to be used like this too? My long-term plan is for the masi plantation to be grown in stages and replanted once harvested. With the help of elders and the museum [Fiji Museum], we will then look at reintroducing masi making to the girls and women, teaching them about the historical kinds of masi in our province and the importance it played for our people...like that old photo showed and how we adorned ourselves in huge amounts of pristine white masi to escort Bauan chiefs (figure 3.03) - I want my people to know that again and for it to be common knowledge. Most of us don't know it. Then, finally, once masi is re-established, then I will begin creating sustainable eco-fashion using the masi fabric that I have pioneered. It is a long project, but it will be worth it in the end. (Nacola, interview 3/12/15)

While the designers, save Hoerder, mentioned above use elements of masi or its motifs in their designs, they are not the focus of this research because they do not participate in the Suva fashion scene. Or in Nacola's case, he is not focused on below because at the time of my fieldwork he did not engage with masi in his design or artistic practice. Unfortunately, he has now stopped designing professionally. This study mainly focuses on Suva's urban contemporary use of masi, so the remainder of this chapter will examine five of Fiji's established fashion designers and their artistic practices.

### ***Samson Lee / Samson Lee Fiji***

Samson Lee, with paternal links to Nalotu village (Yawe, Kadavu) and maternal links to Daliconi (Vanua Balavu), grew up in Suva in a large family of mixed indigenous Fijian and Chinese heritage. He began his professional career as a social worker after receiving a degree from Brigham Young University in Hawai'i. While social work was fulfilling, his passion was in fashion design; in 2015, he returned to Fiji and began designing from his family home on Milverton Road in Suva. Having support from family and friends, though his parents were not at first supportive of a career in the arts, he 'first began printing on clothes, something I got inspired with back in the days during my mum's Tiki Togs era...and I tell you a lot of people walk in here and think it's a Tiki Togs shop!' (Lee, interview 23/6/18). His brand Samson Lee Fiji began as an online venture and was

officially launched in October 2016 with his 'Cevuga' (ginger) collection. In 2017 he moved his practice to a shop front on Suva's Butt Street when he became motivated to keep designing after receiving feedback from customers. With the slogan 'Celebrating the Richness of Life', Lee is the designer and director of the brand. It builds on the simple principle of life and not missing the opportunity to celebrate the richness found all around us. 'My brand is all about our Pacific richness, the colours, the culture, the people, and in essence, celebrating the richness in all of that' (Lee, pers. comm. 2/7/17). Viewing fashion as an art, he tries to incorporate art as much as he can into his designs. However, he does not want to be called an artist. 'I believe that my designs involve [everything] from hand picking fabric, printing and actually making it. Hence, that total sense of immersion is the reason I prefer being called a fashion designer' (Lee, pers. comm. 2/7/17).

Lee works on collaborations with local artists because he considers partnership and collaboration are important in succeeding in the long term. Many of the inspirations for his designs come from the natural environment around him, 'I am a proud Fijian and I want to do something true to [the environment] and dedicate it to Fijian motifs' (Lee, pers. comm. 2/7/17). Many of his design ideas for his collections come from the land and the ocean. 'Ika' (fish), 'Lase' (coral), and 'Waitui (the sea, salt water) are inspired by the sea and its inhabitants (figure 3.04) while his collections 'Niu' (coconut), 'Drokadroka' (green), 'Senikau' (flower) and 'Paradise' are born from the connection to the earth. Using vivid and engaging colour palettes, he juxtaposes what he describes as indigenous with the contemporary:

I am into big, bold and abstract prints, that's my thing and that's what I love portraying. Basically I am reviving something that died ages ago and the prints are motifs that have been reconfigured to give it more contemporary flair, so we don't offend any cultural group by taking their original designs. (Lee, interview 23/6/18)

With clientele both in Fiji and overseas, his most popular designs have been those with visible cultural influences. The previously mentioned 'Cevuga' collection is joined by his 'Moana', 'Kesakesa', 'Sekoula' and 'Vanua' designs (figure 3.05) and all feature markers of cultural identity. Perhaps the most poignantly named, the last - with several interconnected meanings - can be translated as 'land' or 'chiefdom' in the Fijian language, but also signifies indigeneity and being 'of the land'. Whether directly or indirectly, the word vanua evokes land, identity and belonging (Ravuvu 1983:76). Lee's 'Vanua'

collection, along with the other four mentioned above, features masi motifs printed on material; because of masi's inherent connection with the land and identity, Lee felt it an appropriate name (Lee, interview 23/6/18). When asked what masi means to him, he replied: 'Masi is part of our history and our culture. Masi is an important part of almost every aspect of traditional Fijian life. For any Fijian's purpose in life, masi [is] very symbolic. It represents different provinces of the indigenous people of Fiji' (Lee, interview 23/6/18). Lee's cultural connection to masi is evident in how he relates it to his creations. He takes time to choose specific aspects of masi to incorporate into his designs; featured in his shop and in his mainstream collections, he highlights his deliberate use of masi motifs on material, which he prints himself:

Yes, I use masi motifs on my materials. The motifs that I have chosen are reconfigured masi motifs to give a more contemporary flair. My designs are incorporated, defined and then redesigned in such a way that I don't offend the indigenous people of Fiji. I love shapes, so I pick my designs by the shapes. The motifs I usually [choose] are more of a triangle outline. This is to not only represent Fijians, but also the Pacific Island countries such as Tonga Hawai'i and Samoa. (Lee, interview 23/6/18)

While he has endeavoured not to interfere with the originality and ownership of masi motifs on his printed material, Lee has still faced accusations of appropriation and cultural copyright infringement. In 2017, whilst in the midst of creating the 'Vanua' collection, Lee was accused by a fellow Fijian designer of both copying the motifs that she was using in her designs and of using motifs that were not from his vanua or regionally/culturally his. While his earliest masi designs of 2015 and 2016 featured motifs found across Fiji, it was felt by some that their composition was directly reminiscent of masi from the Cakaudrove region, particularly from Somosomo (a chiefly village and the seat of the Tui Cakau, the paramount chief of Cakaudrove). Although Lee has not been the only designer or artist (or foreigner) to use these motifs, he was the target of copyright breach accusations (Lee, pers. comm. 3/5/18). The complainant, being of a chiefly family from Somosomo, may have taken offense because they were upset with seeing their provincial motifs used by someone from a different area. However, they may have also been upset simply because Lee's designs resembled their own creations and did not want to face direct competition.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> This may be the case because another designer, Adi Vuya Raratabu, frequently uses Cakaudrove masi in her masi couture creations and, to date, has received no backlash from others in her field. However, this

Regardless of the reason, it was from this moment that Lee made a more concerted effort to choose motifs that he could abstract to a greater degree or that were already in widespread use in Fiji. Affected by this event, Lee has consciously researched his choices for each collection he creates in order to ensure he is not overstepping any boundaries. In 2018, he contacted me (amongst others) to enquire about two specific designs: ‘I’m working on some new designs and wanted to ask you if you knew what these motifs meant? I’ve circled them in red. Please help me if you know the meanings and where they originate from’ (Lee, pers. comm 3/5/18). As discussed in chapter 1, meaning in masi motifs is arbitrary and does not contribute to understanding their composition or visual message. The preoccupation with meaning, however, has opened up conversations about ownership, cultural heritage and what to do if others try to commodify them (see chapter 5). While meaning proved irrelevant to Lee in the end, the motifs he was enquiring after were discussed and evaluated in terms of (mis)appropriation. With one of the two motifs potentially being problematic, open dialogue and discussion allowed for an alternative to be chosen and incorporated into the designs for his next collection.

In mid 2018 Lee opened Samson Lee Fiji Bridal, his second shop (also located on Butt Street in Suva), catering to the entire bridal experience from the dress to the bridal party attire, to accessories, to the décor of the wedding. Created to be a one-stop-shop, Lee’s bridal boutique featured couture Western-style gowns. Lee works closely with contestants in beauty pageants to style and clothe them, most notably Zara Begg (Miss Fiji Islands, 2017) and Anne Dunne (Miss South Pacific, 2017). He also uses his fashion platform as a mean of advocating and raising awareness for different causes. In 2016, he raised funds for breast cancer and childhood cancer research with his ‘Cevuga’ line, while his most recent collection, ‘Waitui’, is his second collection to highlight the need to preserve the ocean and care for the environment. His collections have been seen on former Fiji Sevens Rugby captain Osea Kolinisau and family, singer Talei Draunibaka, the Fiji Airways corporate team for the Tourism Fiji Expo (4-5 May 2017), and most recently on the delegation of the United Nations Secretary-General’s visit to Fiji (14-18 May 2019) when they wore his blue and white ‘Vanua’ bula shirts (figure 3.06).

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may also speak to the difference between masi motifs being used separately from real masi and the significance that the motifs hold.

### ***Hupfeld Hoerder / Hupfeld Hoerder Designs***

Hupfeld Hoerder began designing in the late 1980s when he was an economics student at the University of the South Pacific. A performer and artist for the majority of his life, he grew up in Suva and has German and Rotuman ancestry. Hoerder's mother is from Malhaha, Rotuma, and she first went to Suva as a teenager to attend high school. Hoerder's first venture into fashion was designing and constructing beach bags before moving on to simple shift dresses. Although casual resort wear was his first area of fashion design, he gained experience over the years and slowly began creating evening wear before finding a niche market in Fiji's bridal industry and haute couture. During his early years of designing he began working with indigenous materials, slowly incorporating more and more of them into his pieces until Fiji's version of Pacific couture - masi couture – was created. Most of his garments are exclusive designs and are made-to-measure. Speaking of his beginnings in fashion, Hoerder reminisces that:

It was amazing to be able to create fashion in the 1980s and 1990s – that was my favourite time. There were fashion competitions, and Vaki [Adi Vakaoca Lalabalavu, Igglesden's first cousin] used to model for me, but even though we were all against each other it didn't feel like a competition. It was just about being creative and putting it on the runway. One time the thing was to think about what to do with an Indian Sari – make it into a 3-piece suit or something outside of the box like that. Winning was a bonus. It was just amazing. (Hoerder, interview 18/2/13)

Hoerder, through his brand Hupfeld Hoerder Designs, established in 1992, is known for creatively merging indigenous and unique designs with the contemporary. Working out of his home in Lami on the edge of Suva, he incorporates the traditional with Western materials and fabrics to make his designs convey a strong sense of Fiji, and the greater Pacific region, and thus promote culture and tradition. The brand's mission is 'to be the leading brand name of Pacific clothing in the region and globally, [while] also promoting sustainability and an eco-friendly environment, as well as social and environmental issues in the Pacific through [its] designs' (Hoerder, interview 18/10/12).

Hoerder's fashion design is now recognised internationally as well as in Fiji. He has won numerous awards in Fiji for his designs, most notably for his 'culture' creations. He first showed outside of Fiji in 2000 at the 8<sup>th</sup> Festival of Pacific Arts in Noumea, New Caledonia, where he was the fashion coordinator and the assistant art director for the Fiji

delegation. He has also designed the Fiji Team uniform for the Olympic Games (Sydney, Australia, 2000), the Commonwealth Games (Manchester, UK, 2001) and the South Pacific Games (Suva, Fiji, 2003). In November 2008, Hoerder represented Fiji at the inaugural Islands of the World Fashion Week in the Bahamas and was a finalist in both eco-wear and cultural wear, and has shown in fashion shows in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, the USA and the UK. World Fashion Week in the Bahamas was a significant event in his career because it taught him a lot about his own national, cultural and ethnic identity and how that is portrayed outside Fiji. Given the complex ethnic and national issues in Fiji since independence, he felt a sense of patriotism that can be lacking at home: ‘Most people asked me where Fiji was when they met me during and after the show. It was an exhilarating and lovely experience because when you’re out there [outside of Fiji or the Pacific], it is not as a Rotuman or part-European or whatever else you can be called – it is about being Fijian and being from Fiji and the Pacific’ (Hoerder, interview 18/2/13). Hoerder has participated annually in Fiji Fashion Week since 2009 and has also showcased his work in every Style Fiji and Bottega Fijian Fashion Festival show. Additionally, and at that time unprecedented in the fashion industry, in 2005 Hoerder was acknowledged by the Fiji Development Bank in their Small Business Awards, receiving three accolades: Overall Premier Award for Small Business, Award for Young Entrepreneur, and Award for Handicraft and Fashion.

Among the defining features of his brand are the hand-painted motifs he applies to fabric (and masi). Curls and swirls, with abstracted senibua flowers connecting them, are painted on fabric in bold and vibrant colours; they represent island motifs that can be found across the Pacific and are a symbol of both Hoerder’s ancestry as well as the shared cultures of the region. He says his inspiration comes from everything around him, but especially from nature: ‘Inspiration comes from anything...A lot of my work is based on natural things and if you look at my work, even without being told it’s my work being shown, you’ll know right away that it is mine’ (18/2/13). However he makes a distinction between inspiration and originality, and feels that the word inspiration ‘is interesting since I think that every artist has to be original, because once copying begins – I mean once you copy someone else’s work claiming that it inspired you – well then that is not your own work’ (18/2/13). In addition to being a fashion designer, he is also a fabric designer and has been commissioned to create fabrics for major organisations in Fiji. His signature hand-painted motifs adorn the majority of his works, primarily on resort and evening wear, but also on some of his bridal and masi couture pieces (figure 3.07).

One of the first in the Fiji's fashion industry to work with masi and other natural materials, Hoerder began making distinct and bespoke pieces that represented his culture, identity and heritage. Using simple shapes and patterns, his early pieces were hand sewn and illustrated the malleability and durability of masi as a 'fabric'. The Fiji Museum houses examples of Hoerder's development in fashion design and style. On display in the museum's masi gallery until 2016, his pieces begin with European material being embellished with magimagi (coir cord) detailing, which develop into using cloth with hand-painted designs and a small amount of shell and magimagi detailing (figure 3.08); they then move to a piece which merges cloth and masi together, an empire-waisted dress featuring a masi bust hand painted with his signature curlicues and cloth skirt. Hoerder's masi couture resembles haute couture in that he uses Western fashion patterns and adapts them to fit Pacific culture and identity. Often choosing two-piece creations over standard gowns – because masi as a material does not have much give, meaning it isn't stretchy, it is easier and can look better as a bodice and skirt rather than a gown, which puckers in places – they are elaborately tailored and decorated (figure 3.09). The corset-style bodice is among his favourite styles. Hoerder's masi is sourced from the island of Vatulele and is strong enough to withstand being manipulated and machine sewn.

In 2017, Hoerder resigned from his full-time position at the University of the South Pacific as a hospitality and business administration lecturer in order to concentrate more time on his designing and further his fashion education. Now holding a diploma in fashion design, Hoerder has also undertaken short training courses including one at Shanghai University, China, in 2018. As a member of both the Fashion Council of Fiji and Fashion Designers Alliance of Fiji, he actively contributes to the fashion community and provides support for both emerging and established designers.

### ***Epeli Tuibeqa / Kuiviti Couture***

Epeli Tuibeqa has maternal links to Lomaiviti and paternal links to Rewa and was raised by his grandparents in Tamavua village on the outskirts of Suva. His fashion roots were planted in the village where he would spend time sketching designs in notebooks. The turning point for him in believing he could be a designer was when he attended a Red Cross Fashion Show in Suva in 1994. The Red Cross shows, as well as the Southern Cross fashion shows, of the late 1980s to early 1990s were not large-scale events as they are known today. The same shows that Hoerder referred to above, they were competitions in which a group of artists participated in tasks to create 'fashion' out of the concept and

material provided. Occurring on an annual basis, these types of shows were a showcase of the skill of artists and their ability to create under pressure. Intent on entering the fashion industry in any way he could, Tuibeqa began as a model in Fiji's Agricultural Show, a show in which up-and-coming designers, not yet in the industry, began to showcase their contemporary masi designs because there wasn't yet anywhere else for them to display their talents.

In thinking of himself as a creator of designs, he defines fashion as wearable art (albeit mainstream street wear or bridal couture), but 'I prefer being called an artist [rather than a designer]. Fashion designer is the term I call myself only when I'm around the mainstream media' (Tuibeqa, interview 3/7/19). The name of his brand, Kuiviti, comes from the Naitasiri dialect – Kuiviti is the Naitasiri equivalent of the Bauan word Kaiviti – and pays homage to growing up in Tamavua village, which falls within the boundaries of the province of Naitasiri. Kuiviti Couture was officially launched at Fiji Fashion Week 2015 with a collection called 'To Have and To Hold' and included evening wear fashioned from masi motif material, as well as bridal wear and masi couture. Fashion blogger Jacquii Lie wrote: 'Well Fiji Fashion Week certainly saved the best group of designers till last, [Kuiviti] by Epeli Tuibeqa stole the show with his dramatic designs and talented use of tapa and masi prints. His bridal collection featured a show-stopping Fijian design (figure 3.10) to rival Rihanna's Met Gala yellow cape!' (2015).

The Fashion Council of Fiji has labelled Tuibeqa as a genius of contemporary masi design; masi has been Tuibeqa's first medium of choice since he first started designing. Always using masi kesa (including kuvui, smoked, that has been patterned), Tuibeqa's designs are distinct because of the theatrical flairs and flourishes that he incorporates. Frills and intricate accessories made from masi, including head pieces, are his niche and one of his signature design features. For Tuibeqa, masi is an iconic and integral part of Fiji's cultural identity:

It holds so much mana. What the motifs mean, I don't know. But I imagine [masi] to carry myths and stories of our people. I love the smell of tapa and how it's draped traditionally and love seeing how it looks when it's all sewn up in a modern outfit. I use masi in my designs to showcase not only our culture but also the fact that I am a proud iTaukei [Fijian] and I never want to lose this part of me. So, no matter how modern this world becomes, I hope to remain grounded in my roots. Also, of all of the clothes I've seen thus far [at fashion shows], none compares to masi couture. It's so regal and majestic, and whether it be the Tongan ngatu or Samoan siapo, it still holds so much mana and pride. (interview 3/7/19)

Like other urban designers, Tuibeqa purchases the masi he uses for his creations at the Suva Flea Market. In choosing his masi, he doesn't look for specific motifs, instead 'I believe each masi [piece] is made for a reason depending on the artistic vibes of the lady that makes it. What I do look for is a motif combination that is dark and earthy so that the garments look as though they were an heirloom gifted from generations passed' (Tuibeqa, interview 3/7/19). When transforming sketches into paper patterns and transferring them on to cloth, he uses specific masi that speaks to his overall vision (figure 3.11):

I prefer using masi from the islands of Nayau or Moce in Lau, as well as masi from Vatulele. Their prints are so fine and detailed. I'm so fascinated by the story of Adi Vilaiwasa and the story of the veiqia [female tattooing] that I sometimes imagine how the tattoos of the women would have looked [on their skin] as I place the dress pattern on the masi. (Tuibeqa, interview 3/7/19)

When creating mainstream fashion pieces, Tuibeqa also uses masi as inspiration, but in the form of masi motif material. While he doesn't print his own fabric like Lee or Ganilau Lee (see below), he chooses 'not to use ones that are too similar to real masi as I feel like I'm cheating on my vanua if I do that. So I always go for a contemporary designs when opting for printed fabric' (Tuibeqa, interview 3/7/19). Tuibeqa's first collection in 2015 featured fabric (figure 3.12) with abstract vutu, vunisei, kamiki, bati ni tadruku, bati ni ogo and triangular motifs in a variety of colour combinations. As a brand, Kuiviti's logo is a seru (comb; figure 3.13) which has been designed to resemble a stylized version of the popular and widespread masi motif. His current range of masi motif material creations from his 2018-2019 collections exclusively feature the seru in various different styles while still retaining their hand stencilled aesthetic (figure 3.14).

Tuibeqa uses the performative qualities of Fijian culture in his designs and in the presentation of his collections. It is important to him to replicate and pay homage to the culture from which he comes. As a performer himself, he began as a member of the groups Kabu ni Vanua (under the direction of Master Lai Veikoso) before moving to dance with the Oceania Dance Theatre at the University of the South Pacific, first run by Allan Alo and then Peter Espiritu, and to sing with Pasifika Voices (run by Igelese Ete). He now performs with Dolce Sounds Dulali under the direction of Master Simione Sevudredre and is contracted by the Lei Entertainers as a choreographer of contemporary Fijian meke.

Tuibeqa has also been the stylist and designer for five Miss Fiji representatives at the Miss South Pacific pageant.

### ***Adi Koila Ganilau Lee / Haus of Koila***

The eldest granddaughter of the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and Ro Lady Lala Mara,<sup>37</sup> Adi Koila is of chiefly lineage from both sides of her family. Her father, Ratu Epeli Ganilau, is from the village of Somosomo (Cakaudrove) and her mother, the late Adi Ateca Ganilau, hailed from Tubou, Lakeba (Lau). Ganilau Lee began designing in 1998 and decided to do so professionally in 2007 before launching her first label ‘Marama Dina’ in 2009. Choosing the name in tribute to her late grandmother, ‘Marama Dina’ was a label and a collection which would communicate her message about her grandmother and noble Fijian women being ‘true ladies’ or ‘real women’. Standards, gender, culture and wealth are all communicated through ‘Marama Dina’:

I stand here today as living proof of what Nau [Ro Lady Lala Mara] helped create.<sup>38</sup> As I was growing up, I learned how she valued culture and tradition, and she was an open book in her teachings about culture, our language, our roles in society and, most of all, what our ambitions are and how they should reflect us. (Ganilau Lee, 23/10/18)

The first time she showed outside of Fiji was in 2009 when she won the bid to dress Miss World New Zealand, and she has continued to show since, including at the inaugural London Pacific Fashion Show in 2012. From ‘Marama Dina’, came her two menswear lines ‘Momo’ (casual streetwear; the word means mother’s brother) and ‘Rattoo’, a play on the chiefly title Ratu and made to portray a dignified male persona.

Rebranded as the Haus of Koila in October 2016, Ganilau Lee has made fashion her tool to analyse and teach her heritage to others and also assess the values of Fijian culture. Her choices in design, patterns and motifs tell people who she is and what her standing in

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<sup>37</sup> Ratu Mara and Ro Lala Mara were both of chiefly lineage. Ratu Mara (1920 – 2004) was Tui Nayau, Sau ni Vanua ko Lau and Tui Lau – the Paramount Chief of the Lau Islands from 1969 until his death in 2004. He is also considered the founding father of the modern nation of Fiji, serving as its first Prime Minister post-independence from 1970 to 1992 and President from 1993 to 2000. Ro Lala Mara (1931 – 2004) inherited the title of Roko Tui Dreketi from her father. It was the traditional title of the rulers of the Burebasaga Confederacy, one of Fiji’s three confederacies, and covers the provinces of Rewa, Nadroga-Navosa, Namosi, Serua, Kadavu and parts of Ba and Ra. It was Ro Lala and her daughter Adi Litia (Adi Koila’s mother’s younger sister) who commissioned the latter’s masi wedding dress in 1991 (see chapter 2).

<sup>38</sup> Although Bu or Pu are the word normally used for grandmother in the Fijian language, Ganilau Lee and her family refer to both their late mother and grandmother as Nau, which is usually designated only for mothers.

Fijian society is. She has been able to create fashion with multiple functions – practical, for ease of wear, and also historically informative – that reflect her culture and upbringing. The Haus of Koila actively promotes indigenous Fijian prints, from material culture (such as fans, as evidenced in the logo) to masi motifs. Now a family run business with her four children, the brand aims to preserve and promote their heritage and lineage. She chooses colours found in the natural environment including vivid blues, greens, reds and oranges (figure 3.15). Both the Haus of Koila and its screen-printed motifs are ‘large and bold in nature’ (Ganilau Lee, pers. comm. 23/10/18) with the motifs paying homage to her Somosomo family ties. The motifs used are taken directly from Cakaudrove masi, something she feels she has the right and privilege to do because of her chiefly status and familial ownership over them. She only uses these motifs – no others – and they are all hand drawn to ‘reflect the status and beauty of our culture. The first motifs that I designed are called ‘masi ni Cakaudrove’ and feature individual motifs that are important to our province. My latest fabric design is called ‘vuniduva’ showcasing, again, Cakaudrove masi prints’ (pers. comm. 21/4/19; figure 3.16).

A point of difference with other Fijian fashion designers is Ganilau Lee’s choice not to utilise real masi in her creations. Coming from the region in which Colchester described masi as having historical connections to divine power may be a reason for this. According to Colchester (2005:147), older women who were still making masi asserted that the patterns they employed were of ancestral origin. Despite Ewins (2013:90) stating that patterns and motifs did not have names and purpose beyond aesthetics and were not intended to replicate objects and ideologies found within the culture, older Natewan ladies suggest that the ongoing reproduction of patterns and motifs was a method of transporting ancestral powers into the world of the living. Even more, ‘The notion that masi clothing was a vessel that could serve as a conduit for divine intervention was also suggested by the terms used to describe formal components of masi design which had an affinity with those used to describe spirit possession’ (Colchester 2005:147). When priests interacted with the spirit world, they performed rituals involving lengths of masi, considered ritual media by Christian missionaries, and thus became vakawaqa or possessed as a result. The term waqa, meaning ‘skin’, ‘container’ or ‘vessel’, was used in descriptions of masi design composition, with lewena (‘flesh’ or ‘contents’) being motifs which were embedded in the waqa (Colchester 2005:147). Being deeply connected to masi, and being female, thus potentially connected to the creation of masi in a way that many male urban designers are not, Ganilau Lee’s decision to reserve real masi for use in ceremonial contexts

demonstrates her reverence for and innate female link to it. As the only urban contemporary Suva-based fashion designer with strong chiefly lineage (both of her parents and her maternal/paternal grandparents), her regard for culture is evident in her separation of real masi and its motifs.

Ganilau Lee's designs tie her to Fiji's cultural and social foundations in more ways than one. Being produced in Suva and in the social, cultural and political contexts that make up everyday Fijian life, she has created fashion focused on her culture and beliefs:

The Haus of Koila (International) is so much more than just making money or producing fashion shows and wearing beautiful clothing. It's an epic celebration - it's a full circle moment. In a season of 'The Culture of Power' we celebrate 'The Power of Culture' in the clothing we produce. The brand is the embodiment of Fijian culture and making all Fijians proud when wearing true authentic iTaukei [indigenous Fijian] prints. If you know nothing about the importance of your identity, this statement will mean nothing to you and only accepting it as standard or the norm. We're in the business of shifting the culture with time, changing the game and creating new waves on the fashion platform. If there is one thing I will promise you for 2019, nothing will remain the same again when it comes to preserving culture. (Ganilau Lee, 21/4/19)

As of the beginning of 2019, the Haus of Koila has sold more than seven thousand outfits around the world. With Ganilau Lee marking cultural preservation as a priority in her life and artistic practice, she undertook to trademark all of the motifs/prints she uses in her designs when the Haus of Koila was established. Individual 'ownership' in the Western sense does not exist in traditional Fijian custom and protocols, instead communal living and ownership are the norm, thus trademarking motifs is an unusual practice (see chapter 5). However, she pursued trademarking the motifs because she feels that she has to protect her family, vanua and cultural heritage for future generations. For such a traditional and strictly vakavanua province, it will be interesting in the future to see what happens if somebody from Cakaudrove wants to use elements of the motifs that Ganilau Lee has legally protected. Will the trademarks be lifted? It is also somewhat ironic that she has used Western copyright laws to safeguard an inherently indigenous entity. While the answer to the question remains to be revealed, Ganilau Lee has already encountered copyright issues regarding her designs when dealing with Suva-based corporations. In April 2017, she reported:

It saddens me that bigger retail shops are now duplicating my prints because of their greed for money and their attempts to shut down iTaukei [indigenous Fijian] businesses. Nu Look shops, owned by Dominion Apparell, were taken to task today by our [Haus of Koila] IP [intellectual property] lawyer to remove all of my copied prints from their hops. They breached Trade Mark Laws and have been taken to task. (Ganilau Lee, pers. comm. 18/4/17)

Nu Look being accused of trying to shut down indigenous Fijian businesses by copying her design motifs (figure 3.17) - when in actuality the amount of masi motif printed material that is available in Suva and other urban areas is enormous – is intriguing because Ganilau Lee’s concern did not extend to other masi motifs being exploited by corporations. Understandable from a legal and branding standpoint, it is also interesting when taking a longer cultural view. Isn’t all masi culturally valuable and in need of safeguarding? In a sense, while her protection of her familial and provincial motifs is admirable, it also introduces a paradox. Ganilau Lee’s actions in trademarking her masi ni Cakaudrove motifs creates a vakavanua ‘once removed’ context in that the motifs are still culturally salient and significant, but that they are also one step removed from the vakavanua and now becoming rooted in the vakabisinisi realm. While the development of the urban corpus has contributed to this, Ganilau Lee’s actions also (unintentionally) cement Cakaudrove in urban commodification. This is paradoxical because keeping Cakaudrove masi and its motifs outside of vakabisinisi is something that people of the province have strived to do since urban contemporary masi entered the market place in the mid twentieth century, despite other Fijian masi making centres embracing it.

### ***Anton Conway Wye / ACW Fiji***

Wye is a fashion designer of indigenous Fijian, Rotuman, Chinese and European heritage. Growing up in Suva, he began designing and creating works at a young age. One of the few designers who sew all of their own work (Hoerder is another), Wye uses fashion as a means of exploring and connecting to his cultural identity by blending his roots with cutting edge design.

Wye’s brand, ACW, was founded in 2011 and while he is only at the start of his career, his goal is to design for the local Pacific market, the Fijian and Pacific diaspora, and for women of all shapes and sizes. Specialising in evening and couture wear, he uses masi and masi motifs in his creations. When using masi, he:

I choose pieces with bold motifs that are instantly recognizable as Fijian – if that is what the client wants. I will let them guide me in the masi that they feel most comfortable with, but I also have to think about what is available in the Suva Flea Market. Wedding gowns are my popular commission for using masi. (Wye, interview 19/2/13)

In his early years of designing, Wye also participated in the nation's Agriculture Shows, displaying his masi couture and masi motif creations, as well as participating in the sustainability categories. He often collaborated with more established designers in order to hone his skills. One of his first masi couture pieces was a collaboration between him, Rosie Emberson Semisi and Akanisi Rabune, created in 2011. A two-piece outfit, it is comprised of a full-length skirt and a halter bodice with an exaggerated peplum fringe, both pieces made of Vatulele masi and displaying the typical motifs found in Fiji's urban corpus. It was made in the same year was one of Wye's first evening gowns. A generic motif design, the gown is a strapless piece with a mermaid-style skirt and sewn out of masi motif material (non-masi material printed with masi motifs). Both the masi couture piece and the evening gown (figure 3.18) are now housed in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge.

### **Gendering and Re-gendering Masi**

The foregoing discussion of fashion and fashion designers has highlighted the issue of gender. In Fiji in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, apart from in a few places in the interior of Viti Levu, masi making and decorating was exclusively the domain of women. Men might assist with harvesting the trees and bringing the masi stems to the village, but, as has been explained in chapter 1, beating the cloth and applying designs, if desired, to the finished sheets was women's work. Men wore masi but did not produce it. Women produced it but did not usually wear it. Not only was it men's dress, but it also constituted one of the most important presentation valuables (*iyau*) in Fijian ritual life. Masi and mats were and are regarded as great valuables, essential to inter-clan or inter-chieftom exchanges, and they are regarded as women's major contribution to these important occasions when kinship and alliances are strengthened. Masi was and is intimately connected to women and to their crucial productive, reproductive and protective roles in Fijian society. In Natewa, Cakaudrove, the act of beating the bast (inner bark) and patterning the cloth adopted highly ritualised postures which were considered evidence of masi-making's implied role in the promotion of fertility and procreation (Colchester

2005:148). Sitting with legs spread while working was a direct imitation of postures employed during the different stages of giving birth. Normal demure Fijian female posture is sitting sideways with the knees together, but for arduous tasks such as masi beating and mat-making women adopt the cross-legged posture that men also use when sitting to do any work, or when relaxing. Emphasising its connection to the female role of reproduction and protection, masi swaddled newborn babies and shrouded the dead at burial. When used as seats or beds masi also separated and elevated those who were the focus of ritual. The terminology used when manufacturing masi also directly relates to the body and female life-giving qualities. Saplings are given anthropomorphic features in that each has an uluna (head) and a bui (tail), The former found at the narrow end of the tree and the latter at the wider end near the roots. Lewena (flesh) and dra (blood) are also used to describe the inner parts of the plant. The flesh is the inner bark used to make the cloth, while the blood is the pinkish liquid secreted from the flesh when soaked before the samusamu process begins (Colchester 1999:62).

Before the arrival and adoption of Christianity in the nineteenth century, women in Fiji wore liku (fibre skirts) and men wore masi. European cloth was adopted as clothing during the second half of the nineteenth century, but masi continued to be made as ceremonial wear at first-birthday rituals, weddings, installations and other important occasions. Women increasingly wore masi on these occasions, especially weddings, as a mark of special status, and the standard sulu ni vakamau (3-piece wedding attire; Ewins 2010:442) became fashionable in the twentieth century, demonstrating access to high-status clothing previously reserved for men of chiefly status. This is one way in which there has been a slow gender shift in the wearing of masi, from an exclusively male prerogative to one permitted to women on special occasions. There has not been a similar shift in masi production, in that this remains almost exclusively the work of women and women's prerogative. Despite the fact that beating the inner bark is extremely laborious work, perhaps more suited to a male stereotype, women on Vatulele, Moce and other masi-producing islands continue to be overwhelmingly the main producers. They have also retained control over the application of masi designs when traditional dyes are used, although, as will be seen in chapter 4, the application of masi designs by mechanical processes and the creation of corporate branding has meant that rights in and control over masi designs are now regularly challenged.

Looking to Suva, what is masi's relationship with gender as it, specifically masi kesa, now moves away from its conservative traditional roots and into a new arena: urban

contemporary Fijian fashion? As discussed above, while the making and wearing of masi was historically very gender specific, and still is in rural contexts and urban forms of traditional use, gendering occurs in the creation of and conversations about masi couture, but in a potentially unexpected way. Judith Butler's extensive work on gender studies explores gender as a socially constructed entity that serves to define and maintain identities (1990, 1993). Because she describes gender as an act that people come to perform, the concept of performance is introduced here even before masi is used in an outwardly performative way. This view of performativity reverses the idea that a person's identity is the source of their secondary actions such as gestures, creativity, speech, imagination and so on. Influenced by philosopher Michel Foucault, Butler sees a person as a condition of their actions (and not actions being dictated by a person).

While on a surface level, urban Fijian masi fashion appears to be dominated by male 'makers' (e.g. designers and artists) and female wearers and thus perpetuates gender divides (albeit in reverse of the traditional), the contemporary fashion scene in Fiji much more mirrors Western fashion systems and spheres of influence than it does the old Fijian gender stereotypes of what women and men should do and wear, especially when considering masi use and wear. The international fashion scene celebrates gender non-conformity, fluidity and inclusivity, both in its fashion designers but also in the products/works and 'performances' created by them, which is being increasingly reflected and accepted in Fiji as we move further into the twenty-first century. This had previously been a challenge for artists because the last three decades of 'designing in Fiji [have been] very conservative' (Hoerder, interview 18/2/13), the urban adaptability of gender roles in fashion and masi couture has allowed for predominantly male designers to create works for a genre mostly aimed at women. Women's fashion, in Fiji and internationally, is where the notoriety and market demand are situated and so it is around fashioning, dressing and adorning female bodies that the urban contemporary Fijian fashion industry revolves.

While in the early stages of this research, I had considered that the gender roles in masi-related contemporary fashion had simply and directly flipped in that men were designing and women were wearing. I now understand that masi's role in fashion has, instead of reversing gendered work and remaining strictly entrenched in male and female roles, become 'non-gendered' and more inclusive. Thus, the re-gendering of urban contemporary masi in fashion is, instead, the act of de-gendering it. Much like its regional design variations/affiliations have become more fluid in twenty-first century Fiji, and

particularly so in urban Suva as reflected in the urban corpus of masi motifs, so has the approach to gender and inclusion in fashion-related masi use and wear.

Although each designer has their own individual process, it always begins with engaging with female masi makers to obtain the cloth, however, some like Tuibeqa, seek to purchase their masi from vendors in the Suva Flea Market. In the arena of gender fluidity/non-gendering, it is interesting though that no fashion designers or artists have expressed the desire to grow, cut, prepare or beat their own masi. This is perhaps a gesture of respect towards cultural traditions and the materiality of the cloth. On initial consideration, it can be viewed as protecting the inherent qualities of masi and demonstrating that the materiality (and how that materiality is produced – by women, creators of the land and protectors of life/death) of the cloth when used in fashion is still important in an urban context and that the female role in society is still valid. As pointed out by Lee and Tuibeqa above, masi's deep entrenchment in indigenous culture and its representation of identity and tradition is valued by designers and, thus, it may be a conscious decision not to interfere with that. Practically speaking, the densely populated urban Suva landscape is not conducive to having the space to grow, cut, prepare and beat masi; an upside to this is that it gives income to producers to maintain their traditional skills (and survive in the cash economy-driven world), even if it is plain masi that designers want to use in their creative design process. Nacola (see above) is the closest example of fashion designers wanting to engage in the masi manufacture process; however, he is an anomaly because he does not design with masi nor use it in his work. His interest in eco-fashion is what drives his engagement with masi and is a future offshoot of the intricacies of defining gender in urban contemporary Fijian fashion.

The shift from tradition to fashion, and gendered to gender fluid, adapts the meaning of masi, no longer making it about gender identity, but about cultural identity. Fashion and masi couture challenging traditional gender roles of masi manufacture appears to be creating an adapted form of 'Fijianness' which is not gendered but centred in cultural distinctiveness and inclusion in the vakabisinisi realm. With fashion's introduction of gender fluidity and inclusion in the commercial sphere, it may release some of the vakavanua and vakabisinisi tensions that are not only felt in this masi-related context but are experienced and are of concern to all Fijians in their daily lives. One aspect of the tension is the perception of making money out of culture. This is copasetic in terms of masi production for sale to tourists, or even to other Fijians, but neglect of kin obligations for money reasons is another matter. There is still a fundamental tension between notions of

value in the Fijian vakaveiwekani (kinship) context and in the bisinisi context – in the former wealth resides in what you can display and give away, in the latter it is in what you can accumulate and keep. Toren's (1999:62) description of the strains between vakavanua obligations and what might be seen as selfish economic business practices by engaging with masi in a commodified way have the opportunity of becoming obsolete with the emergence of masi's urban contemporary role in fashion. The removal of the inherent gendering of the practice of masi making and the use of masi in traditional ways, and instead re-gendering it by making it non-gendered and fluid, relieves tensions and excludes urban contemporary masi fashion from being culturally 'inappropriate'.<sup>39</sup> Thus, as gender has been transformed and adapted with urban contemporary masi use in fashion, so too has its relationship to the manner of the land and 'na i vakarau ni bula vakaviti' (the Fijian way of life; Toren 1989:142).

### **The Theatricality of Masi and Fashion**

The following eye-witness account by Reverend Thomas Williams of a major ceremonial gathering at Somosomo on Taveuni on 23 June 1846 provides a vivid insight into the choreographed theatricality of presentations involving masi at that period. The context was a reception by Cakaudrove people for numerous visitors from Bau, whom the Somosomo chiefs wished to assist them in an attack on neighbouring Natewa. The political details of this event need not concern us, but what is striking is the colossal scale of the offerings of masi and food made to Bau as an inducement to participate in the alliance against Natewa.

The food being got together – it had occupied 200 men several hours – a large bale of cloth was brought into the open space opposite the food and the Bau chiefs, and leaving about 200 yards between them. Twenty other large bales were then brought in one by one. As they were placed the shouts of the warriors were as thunder, and trumpet shells were blown.

After a time Ratu Vaalolo, the [Somosomo] King's son, came out of the settlement under a load of stained cloth hanging from his shoulders to his knees in folds, his train 20 fathoms long. On reaching the Bau chiefs he threw down the heap of cloth, and returned by the way he had come. This he repeated five times. Each time he threw down the cloth the warriors shouted amain. A good share of the shouting was given by the Tonguese.

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<sup>39</sup> Toren's (1999:62) observance of cakacaka vakavanua as working and 'doing' in the manner of the land, and ways of living and behaving that is culturally appropriate, is inverted when considering fashion-related masi use and wear.

Ratu Vaalolo and the O Mai Tavui then came running into the open space, twirling and waving their fans. This was done twice when Ratu na Vu (cheers!) appeared at the more southerly entrance. His train could not be less than 100 yards long, and his “esquire” bore his huge *masi* for him. He was followed by 200 men with large *masis* [trailing] from their shoulders. Then came two men carrying a long bamboo with four large *masis* tied up and hung on it. These again were followed by 100 men with large *masis*. Having seated themselves on and about the bales of cloth, they were joined by 250 other men, similarly attired, who came in from an easterly opening. (Williams 1933:347-48; original italics)

Almost thirty years later Anatole von Hügel witnessed a *masi* presentation done in the style of the people of interior Viti Levu, which also was carefully choreographed for the audience, both donors and recipients.

On our return across the river we found a number of people who had come down from Nabuto, chief included. I am glad of this as I hope to make friends with them. An exchange of presents was, I found, to take place, and a *solevu* (a great meeting [and exchange of goods]) to be held. The Nabuto men had brought *masi* as their gift. Just as I came in the preparations for its presentation were going on, and most curious to watch they were. The large *masi* bundles having been undone, the many hundred yards of stuff were first rolled into an oval ball and then unwound from the ball and wound again on to the body of one of their own men, so that he had a huge encasement of *malo* round him and looked as if he had got into a cask with the bottom out. One end of the stuff was fastened in front and the other hung in a long tail on the ground behind him. There was white *masi*, and some which on one side was silver grey, and also a thicker and wider sort, shiny and very dark, and mottled with black. This last variety was put on to another man in a succession of loops which fell in rows from his chin to the ground, and was so disposed at the back of his head as to look like a monk’s cowl. When complete this strange garment made the wearer appear of enormous bulk, and the most extraordinary thing was that a single knot held the whole get-up together, which when undone allowed it to slip off in a mass to the ground. In the loop costume the man inside is to be considered as an animated clothes-peg, and in the “cask” as a reel or bobbin; he is in both cases merely a support to the offering. Altogether there were five of these cloth bearers.

The presentation took place on the green before the *bure*, where the chiefs and a great concourse of people were seated in a wide ring. The five strange cloth bearers marched solemnly along in procession till they were in front of the chiefs, when they paused and formed a circle. Assistants then approached and partially unwound the bobbin men and untied the knot that held the loops on to the others; then the whole five masses of cloth fell

undisturbed to the ground and the bearers, looking astonishingly small and naked, jumped out of their heaps and squatting beside their former covering, clapped their hands repeatedly.

The cloth having been done up in packets and these piled into a heap, an old fellow with a blackened face (I suppose a *mata* of the Narokorokoyawa chief) approached, bearing two fine *tabua* (sperm whale teeth), which he presented to the Nabuto chief with a long speech, the chiefs and the people signifying their approbation meanwhile by various exclamations and hand-clapping. The Nabuto chief answered by a few words, and then a Narokorokoyawan walked in a crouching attitude (or rather hopped, for he was lame) round the heap of *malo* and touched it several times with a sprig of *yaqona*, thus ending the strange ceremony. The cloth was then carried away for distribution and the people dispersed. Mats are, I hear, to be given in return for cloth. (Roth & Hooper 1990:68-70; original italics)

This section aims to draw out some comparisons between ‘fashion’ in Europe and in Fiji in the nineteenth century, to show that current Fijian fashion activities and dynamic events, although based on Western models, also link to historic Fijian modes of body and cloth display. It is not intending to exclusively label nineteenth century masi use and presentation as fashion, but is instead exploring the notion that large scale *solevu* were performative and theatrical visual displays. Greg Dening’s seminal 1996 work on the history of theatricality and performance, especially relating to the Pacific, explains that performances can stand alone or together, completed for different occasions and different audiences. Although an event or occasion may be repeated almost identically, the performative aspect remains unique because no two audience or atmospheres are the same, regardless of whether the actions of the performers are the same. As Richard Schechner, a decisive contributor to performance studies and theory, states ‘Even cloned performances are different from each other when experienced by different audiences or by the same audiences at different times’ (2015:7). A performance holds within it an older meaning of completion in that ‘performance is an obligation done. It has long held the connotation that the qualities of the duty done are heightened by being public, by having an audience’ (Dening 1996:xiii). Performances mark identities, reshape and adorn the body, bend time, and tell stories. Performances of art, rituals, and even ordinary life are performed actions that people rehearse and train for (Schechner 2015:7). Schechner is careful to point out that while theatre and theatricality is only one node on the continuum of performance, it is one that encompasses ritualisations through to everyday acts such as greetings, displays of emotion, family scenes, professional roles, and again through to sports, dance and ceremonies (1988:x). In other words, rather than it being exclusive and pigeon-holed to

specific categories, it is inclusive. When thinking of performance and performativity, one automatically considers the making of art as involving training and rehearsal; however, everyday life also involves this and it can take years of training and practice to learn culturally appropriate behaviour, including one's personal and social role within the larger community, such as during a solevu exchange. Public life is a series of collective performances that can be repeated or are one-time events. In the same vein, the same event can be a performance in one instance and not in another (Schechner 2015:7).

Showing its similarity to the conception and birth of haute couture, particularly the fashion parades and theatre shows, demonstrates its significance and cultural relevance during the time period in which the term fashion became known as what it is today. Comparable factors in each location/context demonstrate that skilled producers of distinctive Western and Fijian textiles, with an eye to eventual public display, prepare textiles for occasions when they are paraded for public scrutiny. With this observation, while presumably unintentional, solevu and ceremonial life cycle events can be considered as the forerunners of urban contemporary Fijian fashion – specifically masi couture that developed in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries – and assist in pinpointing the underlying cultural significance of it. Significant parallels, as well as differences which are at play, will be illuminated throughout the narrative by referring to historical quotes and descriptions alongside fashion accounts.

### ***Fijian Solevu and Parisian Fashion Shows in the Nineteenth Century***

In the nineteenth century, Fiji was witness to large-scale ceremonial presentations which took place in its major chiefdoms. Masi played an important and vital role in these presentations, particularly in the way it was presented during solevu. Solevu gatherings such as those described above by Williams and von Hügel take place in a range of different style across Fiji. Masi usually features prominently, even today, in these types of exchange gatherings. Solevu were (and still are) large ceremonial gatherings carried out to mark life-cycle events such as marriages, deaths and chiefly investitures, as well as to mark other important ceremonial exchanges. Reciprocal and interactive, in that the roles of host and guest can change with each occasion, they vary in size, attendance and preparation time. The scale of them depends on the number of participants and whether the occasion represents an inter-family, -clan or -chiefdom exchange. In urban events, such as marriage ceremonies or burial rituals, the presence of masi can take the form of masi motif printed

material, either in its entirety (material entirely substituted for real masi) or as part of the accumulated wealth (both masi and masi motif material present).<sup>40</sup>

Solevu involving chiefly ceremony can include thousands of people and take many months to prepare (Herle and Carreau 2013:10). An exchange between two groups acting as hosts and guests, solevu centre on the presentation of iyau (valuables) and magiti (feast foods), the former in almost all cases including masi and mats (made by women), and, depending on the region and occasion, bolts of cotton material/fabric, scented coconut oil, wood bowls, kerosene and clothes washing soap (Hooper 2016:98, 101). Each offering would be processed across the rara (village green/ceremonial ground) to the waiting hosts and piled in front of them before being divided and distributed amongst the host's group. The presentation and procession of all valuables was impressive; the contribution of masi during exchanges could be especially lively and spectacular, as attested to in the 1846 quotation above, often involving enormous amounts of plain and decorated cloth. Not only presented in rolled-up or folded bales, or paraded as open sheets by the numerous hands that made it, the body played an important role when presenting masi during both solevu and other ceremonial exchanges. In 1845, Reverend Thomas Williams remarked upon seeing a single piece of masi designated for a chief which he measured at 540 feet (166m) long (Williams 1931:297). Ceremonial occasions connected to life-cycle events were equally magnificent and equally connected to the body. Observing a wedding procession while visiting the island of Koro on Good Friday in 1876, Constance Gordon Cumming (1882:165, original italics) viewed the close relationship between the body and masi and how it was worn to maximise visual impact. She commented:

In the last few days there have been a great many weddings: and the people here are much more elaborately got up for the occasion than our friends in the mountains. Here both bride and bridegroom are swathed in so many yards of beautifully painted native cloth, that it is scarcely possible for them to move. As they could not walk any distance with this inconvenient weight of magnificence, those who come from other villages let their friends

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<sup>40</sup> While not pertinent to fashion, an interesting note is that for urban burials, masi motif material has become used more often than real masi. One reason this occurs is that once a person is buried, the gravesite is covered in masi and left during the observance of the bogi drau (one hundred nights) custom. In Suva's many cemeteries, masi left on graves is repeatedly stolen, presumably because of its cultural significance, but also because of its urban monetary value, and so can be sold for financial gain. Increasingly, masi motif material is left at the gravesite instead of masi, and if real masi is used it is slashed diagonally across its entire surface to discourage theft. Unfortunately, this does not always dissuade thievery as the masi can be repaired and subsequently sold.

carry the wedding-garment, and then they dress under the trees beside the sea – a process I have watched often with much interest. The cloth is rolled round the body in so many folds that the victim is simply a walking bale of the stuff; besides this, great loops and folds are worn *en panier*, and a huge frill is so arranged as to stand up like a fan at the back. A train of eight or ten yards is carried by attendants; and the effect produced is really very handsome and becoming, especially when several couples arrive at church simultaneously.

A forerunner of Western-style large-scale fashion show events, Parisian haute couture's visuality was a defining factor in the success of a European fashion designer. Choreographed displays of adorned bodies, highlighting bespoke creations for public consumption, there were visual similarities between fashion theatre and *solevu* presentations taking place at the same time in Fiji. In Europe, it was realized that a parade of models in a fashion house – and later in real theatres – would be as entertaining to watch as a theatre play featuring actors and sets. Writing in 1927, Paul Rebox noted 'presentations by mannequins [models] have acquired a kind of theatrical pageantry. The people to whom one shows a collection are seated as in a theatre performance... The curtain rises. The fashion show begins' (1927:15). The theatricalization process developed further during the twentieth century, when 'mannequin parades of the fashionable dressmakers became themselves fashionable occasions, which had certainly never happened before in the whole history of dress. People went to a fashion parade as their fathers had gone to a play or to a private view of pictures. They expected a luxurious décor, soft lights, music, a procession of beautiful mannequins, and, what is even more important, they expected something startlingly new and original in the clothes presented before their eyes' (Laver 1945:91). Theatres soon began to observe the popularity of the theatricality of fashion, and though there was debate on its intellectual stimulation, Troy has identified visual pleasure and identity as positive outcomes (2001:11).

The term bespoke above highlights two different versions of the word, but each equally important in the understanding of the similarities. In the European context, bespoke denotes singular and exclusive one-of-a-kind designs or pieces, yet in the Fijian context of *solevu*, while there may have been one-of-a-kind pieces of *masi* evident, the concept of bespoke here indicates that the *masi* present (which was present in copious amounts) would have been made specifically for presentation. Thus, though there were large amounts there, the bespoke nature of it comes from a situational viewpoint that they were made for the particular event and not something that was widely available.

In Parisian society, the theatre provided an ideal place for fashion displays both on the stage and in the audience; thus, the theatricality of fashion was not only applied to the staged play but also extended to the improvised theatrics and pageantry of the ladies who were partaking in the evening, 'For the theatre functioned figuratively as well as literally in conjunction with a range of interrelated activities in the domain of fashion that crossed the boundaries between the public and the private spheres, blurred distinctions between elite and popular culture, and posed sometimes alarming questions about the construction of gender and national identity' (Troy 2001:4). Much like masi's visuality and visibility during a solevu, Martin and Hoda (1995) suggest that during the late nineteenth century haute couture was defined by being made visible and as a result flourished as an art form patronised by the upper echelon of society. Thus, during the same half century and half a world apart, masi and European fashion were mirroring each other, and the body and theatricality were at the centre of both. Although Fijian society during this time did not have its own fashion houses or designers, this research is introducing the notion that the main masi-making regions of the country can each be considered as a 'house', each creating one-of-a-kind pieces of masi that were to be used in ceremonial exchanges and life-cycle events.<sup>41</sup> The public showing, or presentation, of these pieces can then be likened to the theatricality of haute couture, for it is important to note that during solevu the act of presenting is almost as significant as the presence and gift of the physical items themselves. At the same time Europeans performed in theatres in Paris, Fijians were enacting intricately choreographed routines on the rara during ceremonial gift exchanges. A late nineteenth century chiefly solevu has been described by colonial officer Basil Thomson (location and date not recorded):

There, the leaders wound many fathoms of native cloth about their bodies. The leading chief wore so cumbersome a cincture of it that his arms stuck out horizontally, and a man had to walk beside him on either side supporting its weight. The grown men blackened their faces and festooned the cloth about them until their bodies were entirely hidden, and they resembled turkey cocks with tails outspread. Armed with spears and clubs, bearing enormous [masi] turbans on their heads, they were ready for the great ballet that was to follow. The rest shouldered the salt or mats or pots, and the procession was formed. A warrior with blackened

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<sup>41</sup> A 'house' indicating identifiable types or styles is not a new concept but is an interesting one to consider here. Houses, workshops and individual hands can be identified in other Fijian art forms and has been suggested by Hooper (2016:120) when discussing the corpus of known nineteenth century Fijian breastplates housed in collections and illustrated in photographs or drawings.

face led the way. With his spear poised he crept forward step by step as if about to launch it at his hosts, pausing every few yards with a jerk of the elbow that set the point quivering. The chiefs and elders followed, bending under the weight of their huge girdles. Then came others with a litter of boughs supporting a great bale of white bark-cloth, and many more followed with the rest of the merchandise...In the centre of the square they halted, and laid down their burdens on a fast-increasing pile, each retiring when his task was done. The chiefs unwound their girdles, a process that occupied many minutes, and stepped out at last, naked to their waist-cloths, leaving the cloth as a stiff rampart about the spot where they halted. Meanwhile some twenty of the bearers had seated themselves apart. They set up a chant, marking the time with a small wooden drum, and the boom of hollow bamboos struck endwise upon the earth. Then from behind the houses came the ballet, five or six deep...With their black faces, their enormous [masi] turbans, their strange dress and their arms they were a terrifying spectacle. No ballet is so well drilled as this. (Thomson 1908:283-84)

Simultaneously occurring in major European cities and Fijian chiefdoms, theatricality and performance linked seemingly disparate Western fashion traditions and indigenous cultural practices. Participants in ceremonial occasions did not partake in performativity because they wanted to buy and wear expensive garments, as was done in European fashion circles, but because *solevu* are about quantity and bulk. Bulk in a presentation context signals a means of physically transporting a lot of something (in this case, *masi*) from point A to point B, and using human bodies to do so was practical. Without horses or donkeys, human labour was all that was available, so human vehicular transport of *masi* was and has been creatively made into a theatrical display. Not all of the *masi* which was seen adorning bodies at *solevu* were finely patterned *masi kesa* or *gatu vakatoga*, some were long strips and sheets of *masi vulavula* which others could decorate for themselves after it had been presented (on bodies and in bundles) to the hosts. Quantity was equally important in that ceremonial events called for large amounts of goods to be presented, but quantity and volume also demonstrates the ‘success’ of a chief in leading and looking after his people. If the village/clan/chiefdom/etc. can divest large amounts of goods, it shows that they can still prosper without it and symbolises strong leadership and *mana* (Hooper 2016:90). In terms of efficacy, being wrapped in cloth is an important element of ritual in the Pacific and signifies accumulated and preserved power, sacredness and exalted status. *Masi* not only protects, it also absorbs and becomes suffused with the power of the entity which it decorates, constrains and restrains (Gell 1993:89). Processing large volumes of *masi* during *solevu* accentuated the power of the giver for two reasons: the first displayed the

presenters' collective wealth and prestige by their ability to gift such quantities, the second, Gell argues, demonstrated the unwrapping of the masi 'skin' and divestment of mana (Gell 1993:89). Unwrapping is not simply the reverse of wrapping, but an additional means of controlling and managing the efficacy that is being harnessed when wrapped. When examining the components of a *solevu*, wrapping and unwrapping emphasises relationships, gender and identities. An embodiment of the women who made it and a female wealth that is wrapped around men (Sahlins 1981), masi is 'regarded as essential [in kinship presentation or exchange]. Women are life-givers, who bear children and whose mats, barkcloth [masi] and oil in turn wrap, protect, give lustre to and secure life in others, men and women, on ritual occasions throughout their lives' (Hooper 2016:98). Divesting masi marked the recipients' temporary ascendancy while not taking away from the mana of those giving it. Wrapping and unwrapping, or concealing and revealing, is a social and cultural practice of materialising identity, status, gender and life events (Harris & Douny 2014:29). During *solevu*, the animated performance of masi culminates in it being unwrapped from the body, representing a nonverbal communication and transfer of efficacy. Nineteenth-century accounts of masi presentations do not record this aspect of ritual, perhaps purposefully because of its pre-Christian values, and instead only comment on the exchange of 'presents' between 'dressed up' groups. However, although seemingly superficial, when Mary Wallis accompanied Williams on a trip to Bua on the island of Vanua Levu in 1851, she noted that the masi-adorned men unwrapped themselves at the close of the time-consuming gifting process:

[13 November 1851] Last evening, canoes arrived at Bua with native cloth to hold a *solevu* with the chief of Bua. They came from Vitilevu [Viti Levu] and brought about one hundred natives. This afternoon, Mr and Mrs Williams and myself crossed the river to witness the ceremony. On our arrival at the town, we observed the inhabitants seated round the *rara* (village green). At a distance of some two or three hundred yards, we could see the strangers arraying themselves in the cloth which they were about to present to Pita, the chief. We had not waited long before the strangers advanced. First came the musicians, who seated themselves in front of the chief and his officers of state. Soon afterwards, they began to chant, and the dancers were seen to advance...Some of the dancers had yards of cloth wound round their bodies, and others had it depending in loose folds from their shoulders. Their heads were mostly ornamented with native muslin [masi]...After the dance was concluded, which was done by raising their clubs and the firing off their muskets, they disrobed themselves of the

cloth which they had brought to present, and piled it in a heap in the centre of the *rara*.  
(Wallis 1994:23-25; original emphasis)

Historically, disrobing has been misconstrued by the Western and colonial gaze as un-Christian, uncivilised and unbecoming (Wallis 1851:252), yet I suggest that it contributed to the solevu's creative display and visibility. Without the act of unwrapping and divesting, the gifting of one's valuables to another, the performative aspect of the presentation would not be complete. Written accounts describe many different types of masi being wrapped around bodies during presentations: stained, marked, patterned and figured (CGC 1882:89, 95, 133, 139),<sup>42</sup> yet historical photographs of large solevu exchanges most often depict white masi being divested, very rarely in images is masi kesa evident (figure 3.19). This exemplifies the earlier observation that although solevu had the capacity to be visually complex and a spectacle for public view, they were also practical modes of transport in order to shift large amounts of material. Potentially an earlier form of creative adaptability, visuality was an important factor regardless of the perceived 'beauty' of the goods being offered/presented. Illustrations, however, such as that of Tui Nadrau drawn by Theodor Kleinschmidt in October 1877 (see figure 1.07) depict patterned masi. Tui Nadrau's black and red masi attire matches an 1877 account given to Constance Gordon Cumming by Sir Arthur Gordon (Gordon Cumming 1882:234), as well as the visually impressive presentation recorded by Anatole von Hügel on 7 July 1875 (quoted at the beginning of

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<sup>42</sup> While this cannot be covered here, a new question has arisen in terms of masi motifs and significance to Fijians and non-Fijians alike. This question can be examined further by considering scholarship on the subject, particularly by Helène Guiot who discusses the value and use of undecorated tapa in both Polynesia and Fiji (Guiot 2014, 2017). While my own research has pointed to nineteenth century collecting favouring masi kesa over undecorated pieces of masi, Veys (2017:83) and Guiot (2014) have observed that more than half of the early nineteenth century pieces of tapa in museum collections are plain and that white tapa was used as a valuable unit of exchange. Valuable to the communities exchanging them, they may not have been as valuable to those receiving them as plain tapa is not as well documented in museum collections as decorated tapa. Aside from Fiji Museum, which holds the greatest number of well-documented pieces of plain masi that I encountered during my research, most museums that house masi hold both patterned and plain masi, but the majority of it is masi kesa. In accounts written during the nineteenth century, Gordon Cumming and von Hügel wrote often about the beauty of patterned masi and collected it as well. These collecting preferences are evidenced not only in written accounts but in the material that was deposited into museum collections. Historically, two reasons for this may exist: non-Fijian visitors were attracted to the beauty of the cloth, and visitors were given masi kesa as *vulagi dokai* (important guests). The interest in masi kesa is still reflected in current collecting and display practices in UK museums, especially when relating to fashion. When asked to provide photographs of masi couture for a new display at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, in 2018 my choice of a plain white masi couture gown was declined and an alternative photo was requested. When asked why, the reply was that the white masi (although significant in Fijian culture) did not look 'Fijian' enough and that visitors wouldn't understand what Fijian masi (or masi couture) was from the first photograph.

this chapter). Life-cycle events, on the other hand, show masi kesa and masi bolabola in images more than masi vulavula.

An additional difference between Paris and Fiji during this time was a gendered one. As discussed earlier, historically masi is a women's valuable that is made exclusively by women and is in some regions considered intrinsically connected to inherent and intimate female rights such as fertility and procreation (Sahlins 1981; Colchester 1999, 2005).<sup>43</sup> In the nineteenth century, masi was made by women but worn only by men (Wallis 1851:131). 'It was a woman's privilege to make *masi*, a man's prerogative to wear it' (Clunie 1986:126, original italics), and so while females were involved in visually theatricalizing haute couture in Paris, it was only males who animated and performed masi during ceremonial exchanges and processions, as can be seen from the report by Thomas Williams of the great solevu at Somosomo in 1846, quoted at the start of this chapter.

Although Fiji and Europe paralleled one another in theatrical execution, there were practical and cultural differences evident. While visiting the island of Bau on 24 May 1852, Wallis observed 'that in all their dressing for feasts, they use no foreign ornaments. They do not appear to think themselves dressed unless they are clad in the production of their own hands...' (Wallis 1994:99). Similar to haute couture in that 'dress' was handmade, masi was not tailored but shaped on/to the body using wrapping and binding with fibre and other indigenous material adornments. Alternatively, foreign ornaments were coveted in haute couture because their exoticism added to the exclusivity and theatricality of it. Court-affiliated women of power who represented the bourgeoisie valued satin, damask, silk and lace, among others, for their luxurious, sumptuous and exotic appeal (Martin & Hoda 1995:13, 17).

### **Re-presenting Cultural Pathways in Contemporary Fijian Fashion**

It can be argued that masi's role in society parallels haute couture's history and trajectory onto the international stage, both showing structured manufacture, choreographed presentation and also considerable theatricality. Being explored here is the notion that while Fijian 'fashion' today borrows from Western fashion systems in contemporary concepts of commerciality and saleability, it also reflects enduring aspects of large-scale solevu presentation. In other words, masi has been re-presented but has maintained its inherent cultural pathway. Looking specifically at masi couture in fashion re-elevates and

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<sup>43</sup> See this chapter, as well as chapter 1

re-emphasises its original cultural significance. This is not to say that urban Fijian fashion is strictly an indigenous cultural phenomenon, but rather that masi's presence in the elitist system of fashion (one that promotes and encourages status, rank and hierarchy through body adornment and the cash economy) alongside the ubiquity of contemporary masi in urban Fiji has brought it to a place in which its theatrics, performativity and designer exclusivity have re-established and re-presented its nineteenth century grandeur and elite cultural value. Through its theatrical nature, the past is made present in a renewed form of ritual and ceremony which connects to performance and cultural memory (Dening 1996). Victor Turner, a contemporary of Schechner and Dening, defines this type of ethnographic or cultural performance as living history, a means of bringing the fullness of cultural action and meaning to an audience in the sense that it affects our present experience and actions (1987:30).

The manner in which masi couture is created is 'handmade, customised, tailored and elaborately embellished' (Hoerder, pers. comm. 11/6/16). Much like haute couture, masi couture is either created for a fashion show line or as one-off commissioned and custom pieces (Tuibeqa, interview 3/7/19). However, whether on the catwalk of one of Fiji's main fashion events, or commissioned for an occasion such as a birthday, wedding or graduation, both masi couture and, as an extension, masi printed creations, can be considered as replicating nineteenth century cultural values in their conception, preparation and presentation processes and follow culturally significant acts. Having had the opportunity to participate as a model in Pacific and Fijian fashion shows early in the process of undertaking this research changed the trajectory of this thesis in that working closely with the designers allowed me to disentangle what I had originally conceived as superficial reasons for using such significant indigenous materials in their work from a deeper understanding of the contemporary significance and enduring cultural qualities of masi. With this paradigm shift came the concept that rather than seeing contemporary Fijian fashion as entirely new, it is in fact a creative adaptation of the role that masi played in traditional historical contexts, particularly in ceremonial presentations and life-cycle events. To push the comparison further, both traditional and urban contemporary masi pathways have a creation/manufacture, procession/parading and presentation sequence of events.

Preparing for a nineteenth century solevu was a complex participatory process. Every ceremonial or life cycle event was not only about the individuals directly involved (for example, the bride and bridegroom in a marriage exchange) but instead about the groups to

which each party belonged. Thus, when participating in preparations, it was not a union of two people, ‘it was also the marriage of the two groups, who thereby became socially and economically related to one another’ (Ravuvu 1983:45). This concept still applies in the twenty-first century, and even though large-scale *solevu* and life-cycle events aren’t conducted to the same level that they once were, relationships and the representation of those relationships is still very important. Significant here is the need to readdress a fundamental difference between *solevu* and the presence of *masi* in contemporary fashion. *Solevu* is kinship-driven production and based on an action pattern of assembly, choreographed processional display using human vehicles, and then distribution and consumption. For fashion, the entire process sits in a *vakabisinisi* realm and is a cash-driven production, which then follows similar patterns of action.

During the first stage of the *solevu* preparation process, *cakacaka ni liga/soli iloloma*, while groups of people work together to manufacture or purchase the valuables being presented, each chiefdom, clan, village or household/family (if gathering on a smaller scale) will have their own *itavi* (lit: a portion assigned, a share, a duty; Capell 1991:225) which needs to be achieved. Once each smaller group completes its *itavi*, the larger group then meets to assemble their collective shares and prepare for the subsequent *ilakolako*, which is the act of going to present their goods. Sequentially speaking, the *ilakolako* itself is the first procession of the *solevu* or ceremonial exchange in a formal way, usually guests to hosts. It is increasingly considered in urban contexts that ‘the *ilakolako* actually takes place when the *itavi* are transported to the presentation venue in order to be offered to the host group, in other words is it the first act of processing to make a presentation’ (Brown, pers. comm. 2/6/13). The physical act of presenting to the host is called *vakacabora*. This takes place when the *masi* is physically divested and presented in a pile during a *solevu*; it is preceded by the *vakaraitaka* (lit: to show, to reveal, to demonstrate; Gatty 2009:290), the procession, parading and performative theatricality of the *iyau* (figure 3.20).

Similarities in participatory processes of *solevu* and the creation and presentation of *masi* couture help to demonstrate their shared theatricality, visuality and performativity. While ‘performing’ culture can literally be a show consumed for public scrutiny (of which both fashion parades and *solevu* are), it is also the enactment of everyday life (Schechner 2015:7; Teves 2018:16). *Solevu* are physical manifestations of the different relationships and kin networks that comprise and represent daily Fijian culture and life. Thus, here a double *entendre* of the term performance exists and *solevu* performativity is removed from European fashion in that financial gain is not of relevance to its cultural enactment.

Revisiting the parallels between Fijian masi couture in fashion shows and ceremonial contexts, although the intent and end points differ, solevu and contemporary fashion shows are public processions performing before large crowds. While not immediately connected when studying the two situations, they parallel each other because a fashion show is also an act where groups coming together for a creative, visual, and visible ‘display’ of culture that has been choreographed to highlight the visuality of (in this specific case) masi. There are many different pairs that create the two groups; much like Hooper (2016:97) notes that the hosts (itaukei) and guests (vulagi) change frequently in a marriage exchange, so too occurs in fashion, most significantly when interacting with masi couture.

A fine and marked example of masi couture’s close relation to solevu presentations, and its (unintentional?) role in the continuation of significance in ceremonial tradition, occurred not in Fiji but in the United Kingdom in October 2012 when the inaugural London Pacific Fashion Show took place. Hoerder was invited as one of three Fijian designers to take part in the fashion show and associated activities which included a workshop organized by the *Fijian Art* research project entitled *Fabricating Fashion? Curating and Creating Pacific Fibre Arts and Adornments*.<sup>44</sup> Taking on the role of host (Fijian Art research project) and guest (Hoerder), designers were invited to take part in a two-day session in which artists discussed and demonstrated their practice and also interacted with museum professionals, students, European textile artists and academics. Hoerder felt that the experience was a life-changing event for him, ‘the workshop opened my eyes to our history and our cultures. Seeing my Rotuman heritage represented in the [Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge] and connecting [emotionally] with it will shape how I approach my designs in the future and give back to my community’ (interview 18/2/13). As a result of the *Fijian Art* research project’s presentation of metaphorical iyau (in the form of knowledge exchange and sharing) to him, he reciprocated with a performance of his own. As his contribution to the fashion show, Hoerder brought approximately sixty outfits to be presented on the catwalk. Out of the sixty, only three had elements of masi in them. The most elaborate, and the only masi couture piece, was a two-piece ballgown made entirely from Tongan ngatu (acquired in Fiji), studded with small white and orange shells and magimagi and accessorised with a barkcloth headpiece featuring vertical magimagi strands and shells (see figure 3.09, bottom). Modelled by Sainimili Kata, the ballgown was Hoerder’s final look of his

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<sup>44</sup> See chapter 4 for more detail on the *Fabricating Fashion?* workshops.

collection. Hoerder discussed this piece in relation to his collection (or his itavi if considering his works in presentation terms) during his session at the preceding workshop. Kata's vakaraitaka of Hoerder's couture evoked culture, rank and status, eliciting a strong reaction from UK-based Fijians:<sup>45</sup>

Wow – this dress is amazing! Haute couture indeed, high Fijian fashion comes to town. What an authentic capture of the essence of its cultural significance. In awe of the magic of [Hoerder's] creations...absolutely magnificent! (Wacokecoko 2012)<sup>46</sup>

Totoka vakaoti, noqu tagane. Vinaka Hupfeld, a garment created with a lot of love, affection and creativity [has] transformed our cultural heritage and value into this vision of beauty and pride. Thank you again and God bless you. (Vavatoga 2012)

At the close of the evening, an unexpected vakacabora, and figurative divestment, took place. Hoerder expressed that he was so grateful to have been hosted by the *Fijian Art* research project to attend the *Fabricating Fashion?* workshop, that after Kata had completed her procession and the show was over, he presented the ballgown to Professor Steven Hooper, the project's lead: 'I wanted to give this masi couture to your project as thanks for being so amazingly hosted, for the warm Pacific hospitality, and mostly in recognition of the amazing work being done to document our past and living culture. Hopefully this gown will add to that conversation and inspire others to create' (Hoerder, interview 18/2/13). This offering is reminiscent of ceremonial exchanges in that after being theatrically performed, Hoerder presented the highest-ranking member of the project with his offering of masi. In cultural terms, Hoerder (the vulagi) presented the host (itaukei) 'chief' with masi. Although in traditional ceremonial exchanges the iyau would be immediately divided among the host's group, this could not and did not happen with

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<sup>45</sup> The first large group of Fijians to emigrate to the United Kingdom are referred to as the '212' – Fijian men and women who joined the British Armed Forces in November 1961. The majority of this group remained in the UK and comprise the base of the UK's Fijian diaspora. For more information about the 212, see Tough, D. 2018. *212 Soldiers for the Queen: Fijians in the British Army 1961-1997*. Geelong (VIC): Echo Books.

<sup>46</sup> While this study has not examined authenticity and does not intend to in the context of urban contemporary fashion, an interesting point can be made here regarding Vavatoga's comment. Referring to Hoerder's gown as an authentic capture of cultural significance is at issue here because Hoerder used Tongan ngatu, not masi kesa (or even gatu vakaviti) to fashion the gown. Most people, however, would not make this connection; it points to Fiji's strong relationship with Tongan culture and influence, as well indicates the diasporic reaction to the visibility of culture and being exposed to it outside of Fiji – which is of great relevance to notions of identity in diasporas. See Hall (1990), Teaiwa (2005) and Addo (2004) for further discussion.

Hoerder's soli iloloma. This gesture could also be seen as a tatau, a farewelling gift from a guest after being hosted. Whichever way it is viewed, it is also interesting because it shows traditional Fijian gift-giving taking place in the midst of professional business practice. Alternatively, Hoerder's gift was shared with a much larger group by way of appearing in the 2016 exhibition *Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific* (15 October 2016 – 12 February 2017; Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, Norwich) and the accompanying catalogue of the same name (Hooper 2016). Continuity of practice in new situations, especially those in urban and diasporic contexts, are as important as historical practice.

Perhaps where the above example diverges from solevu exchanges and ceremonial presentations is in the presence, and protection, of mana. I suggest that masi couture is not solely concerned with an individual's efficacy being wrapped, unwrapped, absorbed, managed or concealed when adorned, but instead that it represents a collective indigenous cultural mana. The physical embodiment of cultural value lends itself to what Hansen (2004:370, 372) describes as the 'efficacy of surfaces' in that the presence of the masi, its motifs and their materiality, acts as a malleable thing and becomes part of a cultural process that constructs identity. Temporally, masi couture sits in the constantly shifting present where fashion mimics culture in an urban contemporary setting. Cultural and national identity are entwined in this temporal milieu; on one hand masi is, and has always been, a deeply rooted marker of indigenous cultural identity, while on the other a superficial version of it has become Fiji's most recognizable form of national pride and identity.

### ***Re-representing the urban contemporary fashion culture: a (new?) Fijian lexicon***

As recognised in preceding sections and chapters, indigenous Fijian language connected to masi evokes its overarching cultural significance, its theatricality in ceremonial presentation and its presence in urban contemporary contexts like fashion, as well as the importance of the body in relation to all of the aforementioned. However, in Fiji's Na Vosa Vakaviti (indigenous Fijian/iTaukei) lexicon there 'is no word yet for fashion nor fashion industry' (Tamata, pers. comm. 30/5/18). Ali attributes this lack of language, and in turn cultural worth, to the 'Fijian society's complacency in valuing contemporary creative industries' (pers. comm. 9/6/19). Ali contends that until fashion is viewed as a viable industry, meaning that until 'people understand that fashion designers showing collections

is a creative [profession],’ there will not be adequate support, both physically and figuratively in terms of dialogue, language and education. Dr Apolonia Tamata, a Fijian linguist and culture specialist, has stated that the closest word to interpret the concept of fashion that exists is a literal description of what fashion encompasses: na isulusulu. ‘Na isulusulu ena gauna nikua [is] current or present-day fashion or dress, na isulusulu ena liu is the way of dressing in the past’ (pers. comm. 30/5/18). While this isn’t of great assistance when trying to define fashion in terms of lexicon and vocabulary, because ‘fashion’ as it is defined in Western terms still does not appear in Fijian paradigms, the terms that are in use distinguish between old and modern dress styles. A reflection of the path that scholarship in this area has taken in the last thirty years (and how non-Western dress has only recently been considered as ‘fashion’), perhaps Fijian fashion will be moving the same way in the coming years. While a Fijian version of fashion such as ‘na fashion’ as similar to ‘na motoka’ (motor car) has not yet come into popular use, it may in the future.

This corroborates questions asked to older Fijians and masi makers/sellers in Suva about their general views on dress, contemporary fashion shows and how they would define the term fashion. The majority of their replies focused on the words vou (new) and makawa (old). The term fashion when applied to the Western concept of fashion/fashion industry/fashion shows, especially in relation to the use of masi in contemporary fashion, was translated as na isulusulu taka vou: ‘What is fashion? Do you mean like how they have fashion shows now? I don’t think there’s a word for it. It’s just how people, especially the youths, dress now. So just call it na isulusulu taka vou. That’s what it is’ (Rayawa, pers. comm. 3/7/17). Selai Buasala, a prominent Moce masi maker based in Suva who participated in the third version of the *Fabricating Fashion?* workshops<sup>47</sup> and created a final showpiece with Tuibeqa, interprets pre-fashion show fashion as the ‘old’ way of dressing; ‘What did other ones call fashion? Oh, okay – then I call it na isulusulu taka makawa because it’s the old way of doing things before the fashion shows started. Wearing masi in the old times can be called that too’ (pers. comm. 6/7/17). Interestingly, in all instances where Fiji’s urban fashion designers were asked, regardless of age or ethnicity, they always spoke of ‘fashion’, in any context, in English; no other language terms have been offered. According to Lee (interview 23/6/18):

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<sup>47</sup> See chapter 4

Fashion as an extension of someone's personality rather a manner of doing something. It is about personality and individuality.' In contrast, the 'fashion industry is the body that deals with making of clothes, accessories, shoes, etc. Predominantly, [it is not about creativity or self-expression] it is a means of converting fashion into monetary worth – so, I wouldn't say that they are same. Nevertheless, they rest on the same platform of a commercial trade in an economy.

As Ali has noted during the first Bottega Fijian Fashion Festival, he considers the origins of fashion in Fiji to be in historical masi use and presentation. Fashion's lexicon thus borrows heavily from traditional cakacaka vakavanua practices which have been swept up in the urban drift of the cash economy, much like many other aspects of ceremonial exchange and presentation have.

Fiji's established fashion designers are actively contributing to the urban adaptability of masi, especially in Suva. Their manipulation of both masi and masi motifs speaks to its cultural significance and the demand for it as a marker of cultural identity in urban contemporary life-cycle events such as weddings, birthdays and newer milestone occasions like graduations, corporate expos, dignitary visits and beauty pageants (see chapter 4 for further discussion). The Fijian fashion industry and designers have, over the last four decades, slowly but firmly participated in the urban re-gendering of masi decoration, wear and use in that the non-gendering or gender fluidity of it allows for greater societal inclusion and acceptance, as well as introduces a reprieve from the constant social tensions between vakavanua and vakabisinisi practices.

While Western 'fashion' appeared as a new concept in Fiji in the mid twentieth century, the makings of it are evident in nineteenth century solevu presentation displays. Occurring simultaneously with the advent of haute couture in Europe, particularly Paris, although there are visual similarities there are also fundamental differences. Exuberant theatricality and concern over visibility – in both Fiji and Europe creative visual displays were desired effects and ends in mind by social actors – resulted in choreographed presentations for public viewing and divestment. Much like has been discussed with Cook Islands tivaevae and their divestment (not their consumption) creating cultural wealth, biographical relations, and markers of time (Küchler 2003a:97), masi's role in contemporary Fijian fashion can also be considered in this way. While more research is needed on aspects of this topic, currently masi couture's figurative divestment into society marks both cultural significance and notions of cultural identity.

Coming back to vakavanua and vakabisinisi, this is perhaps where the narratives of the two comparisons diverge. Kinship obligations and financial gain are differences that cannot be aligned, but masi's re-presentation of solevu-like presentation is an aspect that endures in contemporary Fijian fashion, which is a financially driven sector. However long the sector has been in existence, the lexicon being developed surrounding Western 'fashion' in Fiji is still in its infancy. The origins of fashion and fashion vocabulary are embedded in traditional cakacaka vakavanua practices and is an example of the constant shifts and adaptability of masi in an urban contemporary context.

Regardless of where the roots of 'fashion' in Fiji began, the end result of visual pleasure, identity and spectatorship - linked to solevu presentations - in urban contemporary Suva resembled European conventions, albeit for different reasons. Early descriptions of the two provide similarities – namely that theatrical display, which included sometimes exuberant pageantry and performativity, have become woven into the social fabric of each and have contributed to their enduring cultural significance.

## 4 'Urban-Fiji': Masi, Modified Modes of Display and 21st Century Creative Adaptability

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This chapter continues from the previous one by extending and expanding masi's urban contemporary reach to include not only fashion but also displays, exhibitions, productions and installations. Looking at masi's modified modes of display – meaning those developed outside of the ceremonial and traditional context – celebrates the creative adaptability of twenty-first century Fijian masi makers and users.

The term 'Urban-Fiji' in the title of this chapter plays on the term 'Urbanesia', which signifies the urban contemporary self-unification of peoples from Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia in Auckland, but has recently begun to be used in urban centres across the Pacific. Coined in 2012 by Samoan poet Courtney Sina Meredith, her vision of Urbanesia represented an intrinsic Pacific perspective in an urban world; an Urbanesian person was a new breed and one that represented the dichotomy of being globalised and urbanised, yet still enmeshed in extended families and cultural expectations. Named in the same vein that the constructed categories Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia, urban is from the Latin *urbs*, meaning city, and nesia is from the Greek *nesos*, meaning island. Thus, the city of islands was born. Interesting is that the name Urbanesia is a combination of Latin and Greek – the other three (Melanesia, Polynesia, Micronesia) derive from Greek only – which perhaps reflects the mixing of people and ideas through time and space. Given that Urbanesia is made up of many different diasporas in the middle of a cosmopolitan – and largely European governed – space, it is a place that encourages indigenous ways of knowing to flourish and to frame lived experiences. It also highlights how the conversation about indigeneity is rapidly expanding, challenging binaries of traditional and contemporary, rural and urban, land economy and cash economy while consequently redefining them at the same time. Urbanesia, and Urbanesians, has created a contemporary social fabric of different cultures, of diasporic communities residing in urban areas, that are also very similar. Choosing to eschew what makes them different from each other, Urbanesians focus less on from where their cultural heritage comes and more on the fact that they are united as 'Nesians' (Raymond, pers. comm. 9/3/14).

While Urbanesia can be used in Fiji to describe the different Pacific cultural communities who call Fiji home, here Urban-Fiji is being used to signify Suva's role as a

national diaspora. As discussed in chapter 1, Suva is Fiji's major diaspora in that it is a meeting point and melting pot for rural Fijians to relocate in order to further themselves and their futures, or to reunite with family that have already migrated there. As the capital, and the country's major urban area, Suva offers opportunities that villages and outer islands cannot. Here, Fijians find themselves navigating familial, regional and cultural differences and similarities in the same way that Auckland's Urbanesian community does, while working around relational protocols such as tauvu and naita on a daily basis and having to participate in regional and familial occasions from an adapted urban perspective.<sup>48</sup> Outside of Suva's diaspora, global Fijian diasporas exist, and the same challenges are faced. These communities are perhaps more likely to fit within both Urban-Fiji and Urbanesia because they are 'cities' made up of Fiji's islands and also 'cities' of Pacific islands. As discussed in chapter 1, there are large Pacific diasporas in many places around the world. With Urbanesia comes a renewed sense of ownership of cultural histories, presents, and futures. As fashion is forming a new lexicon in urban contemporary Fiji, so too is Urbanesia by (re)claiming vocabulary and acts of 'doing'. The Pacific Sisters and Rosanna Raymond have coined 'doing' expressions that are being used throughout Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia and are slowly being introduced to the Pacific Islands: fabrication, articulation, presentation, installation and activation. With respect to Urban-Fiji, two more terms are being offered here: modification and adaptation.

Displaying an Urban-Fiji identity through masi, and its increasingly modified and adapted modes of display, includes exploring the notion of the materiality, or physicality, of masi and the significance of masi's designs and motifs. Is there (now) a conscious separation of masi in terms of the material and the motifs, reminiscent in nineteenth century collecting? In unpacking this, urban contemporary art and performance is examined as being driven and dictated in large part by the art of clothing, dress and fashion, as well as the influence on and presence of the body on/in masi. The remainder of this chapter details modified modes of masi display in the twenty-first century. From a Western perspective, the narrative of the chapter runs from the least modified to the most, with static displays beginning the discussion and urban art and performance concluding it.

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<sup>48</sup> Tauvu translates as 'having the same vu (ancestral spirit), root or founder: used of people who worship the same kalou, and who are therefore allowed the reciprocal right of taking each other's goods and swearing at each other' (Capell 1991:224). Today this relationship extends to whole districts and provinces. Naita is a 'mutual form of address to a certain group of people, a relationship known as veitabani, traditionally mutual branches or close allies. The origin is theoretically based on their ancestral spirits having been cross-cousins' (Gatty 2009:178).

However, in engaging the performative and theatrical qualities of masi, particularly its relationship with movement and the body in both historical and contemporary contexts, from a Fijian perspective the ‘ordering’ of modes of display may actually point to the opposite in that being placed behind glass or left static is more modified than masi adorning the body.

### **Urban Displays – Suva’s Market Place**

The market place in Suva acts as a form of urban contemporary distribution. Much like in a ceremonial occasion where hosts and guests gather to exchange and distribute goods, Suva is the host which (re)distributes the goods that guests (makers, sellers, artists, vendors) from different regions and vanua (but who live in Suva) bring as an ‘offering’ to present to others and sell. Stepping back to look at it from a wider lens, Suva as a national diaspora is also a site of contact for urban ‘exchanges’ that take place in the same manner that traditional vakavanua ones would. The notion of vakavanua versus vakabisinisi adds a deeper dimension to the market context because specific market sites cater to both traditional and contemporary cultural pathways, yet the cash economy is involved in both. Representative of various vanua and regional heritage art forms coming together, Suva’s market place is becoming a hub for the urban ‘corpus’ of masi making and motifs. Instead of working together in vanua-based associations such as soqosoqo vakamarama, women of different vanua and social statuses are working side by side, unconsciously encouraging motif and design sharing – which may take place innocently or in more contentious ways:

When I started up my stall here [Suva Flea Market] I didn’t sell handicrafts or artefacts or anything like that – I only sold perfumes. But I saw all the stuff that other ladies were getting plenty money for and so I learned how to do things by watching what they did. I learned how to make salusalu, wreaths, mats, and the best one, I learned how to kesakesa the masi. Just by watching them, sara ga. At home I practiced every night and now I do the kesakesa just as good as them. (Anonymous, pers. comm. 2/3/15)

While market places may not be considered as a ‘modified’ mode of display, in this thesis the market is used as an example of modification because ‘modified’ is being defined as any mode of public display other than as a form of ceremonial exchange or being adorned in masi attire for a ceremonial occasion.

## ***Suva Flea Market***

Opened in the late 1990s, the Suva Flea Market has had multiple extensions added to it, most recently in 2018 (figure 4.01). In January 2016, there were already one hundred and forty-six stalls operating in two buildings. However, many businesses were using two stalls apiece. In the main building, stalls are arranged in a grid pattern with each block of stalls facing another, creating aisles to walk through. The majority of the blocks have eight stalls (four back to back), with two longer blocks along the outer edges of the building. At a cost of \$72 FJD per week (= \$3,744 per year) in 2016, stall owners selling masi – especially those whose businesses took up multiple stalls – needed, for example, to sell one isulu ni soqo or three-piece masi attire (in 2016 the average price was between \$75-\$250 depending on the seller/maker, size, and type) per week to keep the stall viable. At that time the stall owners were all women and ninety-five percent of the women were both the maker and vendors of the goods that they sold. If the vendors were not the makers of the masi, it was usually made by a family member.

The stalls in the Suva Flea Market sell various sizes of masi (rarely the small suitcase-sized pieces) and have one to two of the same or similar designs at a time. Many women also do kesakesa while sitting in their stall; if they are not stencilling, sometimes they are repairing old pieces of masi to re-sell or to be repurposed into items such as wreaths or salusalu. Ceremonial masi attire is found in the majority of the stalls selling masi (figure 4.02). Unisex wedding attire is the most common, followed by children's birthday attire, and finally funeral regalia and accompaniments. Masi from Cakaudrove is the only type which cannot usually be purchased in the market; 'There was one lady selling Cakaudrove masi until early last year [2014], but it's a bookshop now' (Qalo, interview 25/1/15). Cakaudrove masi's absence from the market place is indicative of its continued use in ceremonial and traditional contexts. Consciously not adapted for urban use and representing a highly ritualised practice, the large taunmau ni viti of Somosomo and their distinct motifs remain almost completely unchanged from the nineteenth century examples housed in museum collections and seen in historical photographs. In the main building, Vatulele masi is the most common one found, and the most commonly purchased, although the quality – thickness of cloth and the quality of the kesakesa - is considered not as good as others. 'Feel the difference between mine and that other one. Soft, right? That's because the Lau masi trees are better. Our kesakesa is better too' (Qalo, interview 25/1/15). However, as pointed out earlier when referencing the sharing of motifs, the perceived 'Vatulele' style may be a version of the urban corpus introduced in chapter 1. As Vatulele

masi itself is a combination of Moce, Cakaudrove and other Lauan design motifs, it can be difficult to distinguish between the two. In theory, Vatulele motifs are large and spread out when stencilled on masi; the stencilling is not tight, nor is it intricate, as is found in Cakaudrove and Lauan masi kesa. The urban corpus more closely resembles Lauan masi in composition style, but the Vatulele style in motif selection. Lauan masi, specifically from the islands of Moce, Namuka and Nayau, is in high demand for ceremonial occasions where *isulu ni soqo* are required. Mrs Qalo, of Qalo's Handicrafts (stall 75) and from Korotolu, Moce, said:

I make and sell plenty *sulu ni vakamau* from my stall. When people need masi for their wedding and they want to wear the masi, they come to me because Moce masi is the best for this kind of thing. Now, I have started selling a four-piece outfit. It's the number four because I make a *salusalu* and add it to the package. They come to me and they can get the whole thing in one place. (Qalo, interview 25/1/15)

As a cash economy-driven market, at first it was surprising to see the local urban-based community regularly visiting the flea market to buy masi. Why were they not going through family connections to acquire masi? Purchasing masi for traditional ceremonial occasions from the Flea Market is more reliable than waiting for masi to be shipped from their natal provinces or, more practically, burdening family members with the task of making masi for multiple occasions. This brings to attention how formerly rigid regional ownership boundaries have been severed (or relaxed) with motifs specific to certain areas being utilised by urban artists and makers because of supply and demand and the cash economy.<sup>49</sup> Thus, for a customer, if it is evident that motifs are being shared across traditional boundaries, there will be less *madua* (shame) in using this new form of generic masi. It has become a cause and effect relationship: if the artist or maker does not succumb to *madua* when decorating masi with designs that are not their own, then, as a result, the buyer removes his sense of shame as well. However, when walking through the Flea Market, there is a division between those who perform *kesakesa* in their stalls and those who do not, a difference between those who proudly inform you of the origins of their design motifs and those who do not. For many of the older *bubu* (elders, grandmothers), *madua* and scorn associated with social stigmas remains in their living memory.

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<sup>49</sup> Ewins (2013:97) refers to this as 'pan-Fijianisation' and notes its presence in masi decoration. However, his analysis focuses on Vatulele masi, which is already a form of pan-Fijianisation.

A diaspora (stalls in the flea market) within a diaspora (Suva market place), within a diaspora (city of Suva), the Suva Flea Market represents a concentrated social and cultural experiment in the confines of its organisational structure.

### ***Government Handicraft Centre***

In contrast to the Flea Market, Suva's Government Handicraft Centre (GHC) is much smaller in size and caters more for the tourist market than the local demographic (figure 4.03). Established after Fiji gained independence in 1970 when tourism and branding masi motifs as a national identity was in its prime, the GHC sells a diverse range of goods: carvings of all types, small mats, tablemats and coasters and bowls/dishes, jewellery, tanoa, plastic hula outfits, masi, salusalu and more. Much of what is sold fits into luggage: 'Everything I sell, you can put it in your suitcase! What do you want? Whatever it is, I will have it here for you...and I have all the stickers [on the bottom of the wooden products], so your country will let you keep them. I give you the best price! (Prasad, pers. comm. 23/2/14). The GHC's proximity to the wharf where cruise liners dock makes it easy to attract the attention of visitors wanting to buy souvenirs. The building houses fifty-two stalls divided into four rows, the central two of which back onto each other. Nineteen additional stalls are outside the main building, facing the sea wall.

Of the outside nineteen stalls, in 2016, only one sold masi and only two women operated stalls. The remaining seventeen were operated or owned by Indo-Fijian men, who were both forceful and coercive in trying to make vulagi (visitors) buy their goods. Inside, there was a greater mix of male and female sellers (3:2 ratio) and also a greater number of stalls selling masi. Of the fifty-two stalls inside the GHC, thirty sold masi. Only one, stall 25, was selling large pieces that could be used for ceremonial occasions; the other masi-selling stalls stocked round, rectangular and square pieces for tourist consumption, the largest size being 75cm x 45cm. Vendors and distributors, stocking masi purchased from other areas and people, had what can only be described as mass produced masi – all made by hand, but countless numbers of the same design composition. In these cases, the outer border designs were composed of the urban corpus, while the middle was left open except for two or three stencilled designs, either a traditional motif or a stylised one for Western tastes such as fish, dolphins, trees and seashells. At stall 37, I counted forty-three pieces of the same design and size.

### **Corporate Distribution**

The final type of market place examined here is 'big box' shops. At these, supply and demand of masi as a cloth is based solely on perceptions of tourist demand. Prouds and Tappoo Ltd, Australian and Fijian companies respectively, purchase masi from makers with strict stipulations as to what should be depicted on the sheets. Instead of buying masi as it comes to them, they commission precise designs and sizes from several makers. One, who asked to remain anonymous, described the finicky buyer/seller process while mixing dye to make her latest commission:

Masi making for the big shops is really different than I thought it would be. I'm not growling, you know, but they tell me what I can make and what I can't make. I don't get to choose. And if the draudrau [motifs] aren't mine [from where she is from], I have to use them anyway if I want to be paid. If they don't like what I do, they won't buy from me and they will go to somebody else. At least I have a good relationship with them now, so I can tell them what I am going to put around the outsides of the masi and then they tell me what is selling and what the Europeans want to buy, and then I will make those designs look good on the inside.

(Anonymous, interview 20/2/14)

Disassociated from culture and ceremonial contexts, masi is a commercial product in these kinds of shops. Buyers are seldom iTaukei Fijians, not least because of the prices charged. Jack's Handicrafts is another company which sells masi and cultural items, with retail outlets in Fiji's main urban shopping areas (such as Suva, Nadi, Sigatoka, Lautoka, Nakasi and Ba). Along with Jack's Handicrafts, Prouds and Tappoo Ltd. also have outlets in Fiji's hotels and high-end resorts. Although masi and its motifs are physically connected on cloth in this context, there is a lack of connection to the richness of masi's significance in Fijian society. As shops dictate designs utilised by masi artists, they in turn dictate what is bought (by their corporate buyers) and, therefore, what is available to tourists. Thus, in as much as the urban corpus has been developed out of motifs from masi's main masi making regions, urban drift and the cash economy, and the government's twentieth century push for a distinct post-independence national identity, it is also largely controlled by corporations who sell masi in their multiple retail shops, outlets in resorts around the country and in airport duty-free stores.

## **Urban Displays – Fiji Museum Exhibitions**

Fiji Museum houses an extensive tapa collection from around the Pacific region. The Fijian masi collection at the museum is well-rounded with a large percentage of the collection documented to include donor information, collection history and description. In looking through the museum's accession records, even more masi was housed at the museum in the early twentieth century, but no longer remains part of the collection for various reasons. Aside from masi occasionally being shown in temporary exhibitions, there is only one space in the museum in which masi is able to be seen by visitors, the rest remains in the museum's stores.

### ***The Masi Gallery***

On my first research visit to the museum during fieldwork in 2012, my attention was drawn to the masi gallery.<sup>50</sup> Located on the museum's mezzanine, it was formally opened in November 2006 and sponsored by British American Tobacco. Six years later, the gallery was still home to the museum's contemporary masi fashion collection (figure 4.04). As referenced in chapters 2 and 3, Fiji Museum's fashion collection consists of works, including but not limited to, by Hupfeld Hoerder, Adi Vuya Raratabu, Dahia Shoes, and Annie Bonza. Particularly strong in showing the development and creative continuity in the early years of Fiji's fashion industry, the gallery was a snapshot in time depicting progression of masi in an urban contemporary context. Sagale Buadromo, director of the museum at that time, wanted to 'display the modification and extension of masi in Fiji because I am interested in creating a gallery space that shows shifting views of tradition and ceremony and how that is interpreted in society' (pers. comm. 8/12/12).

At first, masi fashion and couture were displayed on hangers or supported by flat wooden boards placed inside of the garment. Although this type of object mounting allowed for easy display of each garment, it did not evoke masi as a moveable, malleable and wearable art form. Stiff dresses were unrelatable to the accompanying text panels about masi being wrapped and shaped around bodies and things. To rectify this, I was asked by the director to assist the conservation and exhibition teams in re-displaying the pieces. With very limited resources, multiple mannequins were sourced and allowed a number of the creations to return to being three-dimensional and re-associate themselves with the human form. At a time when fashion, especially masi couture and wearable art,

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<sup>50</sup> Prior to fieldwork, I had spent much time in the museum over a twenty-five year period, but not in a research capacity.

were not widely displayed or discussed outside of the fashion industry, Fiji Museum's masi gallery created a satellite Urban-Fiji inside of the larger Urban-Fiji of Suva.

In 2016, the masi gallery was refurbished with new cases, LED lighting and updated environmental controls. Officially opened on 27 July, the new gallery was conceptualised by Lecturer of Pacific Studies (University of the South Pacific) Dr Jara Hulkenberg and showcases masi beginning with its manufacture and concluding with an urban contemporary adaptation of masi: a masi couture gown. A rectangular gallery (figure 4.05), the story begins on the visitor's left-hand side when entering the main door displaying tools and examples of raw materials used in the manufacture process. Following a clockwise direction, masi is apparently grouped by region or type though it is not clear which is dictating the grouping sequence, or if indeed space within cases is the determining factor. After tools and raw materials, the gallery displays plain white masi and smoked masi before moving onto gatu vakaviti. A thin and finely beaten piece of white masi follows with pieces from the interior of Vit Levu being displayed next. An intricately stencilled Yasayasamoala taunamu is shown adjacent to the three-piece white masi outfit (figure 4.06) worn by Tui Bua (Macuata province), named Ramasima, when he signed the Deed of Cession in 1874 (FM82/93-82/95). The most yellowed piece of the three (FM82/95) is important because it was also used in the painting of Ramasima's newborn son with rerega (turmeric), a custom that has since become obsolete in urban areas. Called masi rerega in the museum's accession register, and described as above, its title marks its nineteenth century adaptation from one type of masi to another - masi yarayara to masi rerega - prior to entering the museum's collection. Presented to the museum in August 1981 at the Bose Vakaturaga in Lomanikoro (Rewa) by Nagagavoka, the fourth Tui Bua to own it and who only wore it himself on very important ceremonial occasions such as the vakataraisulu for Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna in 1958, it illustrates the ephemerality and continuity or adaptability of masi, especially in an urban context where visitors to the museum may not know masi's traditional and cultural role. Following Tui Bua's attire is a mix-and-match display of Lauan, Cakaudrove, Lauan (Moce) and more Cakaudrove masi. The Moce pieces comprise another three-piece outfit (FM82/307a-c; figure 4.07), an isulu ni vakamau made for the tauvanua (people who are not of chiefly rank; common people) of Moce. The isulu's collection history and object description has been recorded in the museum's accession register:

Made by Alisi Vuli, a member of the daunimasi (Rasau clan) of Moce. Her aunt is the only surviving woman who really knows the true Moce draudrau (decorative motifs). The masi itself is the type known as masi tutuki. The three garments are the underlying isulu, the delana, and the ioro belt or waistband which is worn over the others with the long fringes at the back.

- a) iSulu – the white tutuki area at the top includes lauci trees, leaves and flowers. Other motifs include the long waqani, sui ni ika, kumete, seni vutu veituitui, brown waqani, domo ni duru, yava ni bici, senicodo, vetau leka.
- b) Delana – the white tutuki area at the top again features the lauci motif. Long lines of sui ni gata, a line of domo ni duru, two lines of sui ni gata with brown waqani in the middle. Then several inches of brown tutuki with lauci designs with some sore ni ui in the centre of each. A long line of vetau leka with black border and fringe forms the bottom part of the sheet.
- c) The long fringes of the iOro allow it to be tied firmly about the wearer's waist. They fly freely in the breeze at the wearer's back. Presented 1981. (FM82.307a-c, Fiji Museum Accession Register 1982; recorded by Fergus Clunie)

The Cakaudrove pieces are all forms of masi bolabola and are particular to the region. As discussed in chapter 1 and earlier in this chapter, Cakaudrove masi is usually only seen on ceremonial occasions and has not been adapted for urban use or the market place, except by Adi Koila Ganilau Lee who uses the familial motifs on her designs and by Samson Lee. Finally, the gallery culminates with a masi couture gown by Nadi-based fashion designer Adi Vuya Raratabu.

While the new masi gallery received praise from the public upon its opening via anonymous comments in its visitor book, 'it's great to visit this new masi gallery with a totally new experience' and 'congratulations Fiji Museum [on] the wonderful display of the new and different masi pieces in your collections', aside from the masi couture gown, the body and masi's performative quality is lacking from the display. Although I have provided information from the accession register, this is not included in full in the display captions nor are they for other pieces in the gallery; and while displayed according to museum standards, the static and one-dimensional nature of the mounting takes so much away from the cultural significance of the cloth. Despite being contradictory to views expressed throughout this thesis, masi's materiality and existence is coincidentally inconsequential in this gallery because the materiality of the cloth cannot be experienced. Poor gallery lighting aside, it is the motifs that are shown to be important here. Unintentionally, the cultural, ceremonial and ritual significance that is attempting to be

conveyed here is seemingly lost. Even though the new gallery is much richer in content, motifs and intent than the Fiji Museum's previous urban contemporary fashion masi gallery, in its final iteration the fashion gallery embraced the body's inherent connection with masi and masi's urban contemporary creative adaptability, more than the current display. It also represented Urban-Fiji's influence on society and museum collecting.

### ***Temporary Exhibition: Art and the Body***

Fiji Museum's Temporary Exhibition Space, located in the centre of the History Gallery, has been the location for a variety of exhibitions. It is unusual for masi to be displayed in this space because of the size of the cases and the lack of environmental controls.

However, because exhibitions are typically short in length, a few have taken place.

An output of the *Fijian Art* research project, *Art and the Body: Exploring the Role of Clothing in Fiji* ran from 19 March to 18 September 2014 and was jointly curated by project partners<sup>51</sup> and Polynesian artist Rosanna Raymond. As a form of body adornment, masi played a vital role in the story of this exhibition and the exploration of clothing in Fiji. Aside from the masi gallery display upstairs, it was the only space in the museum (at that time) which related masi to the body, to performance and to the contemporary relevance of textiles in Fiji. Divided into four themes (clothing and gender, clothing and power, clothing and performance, and clothing transformed), the exhibition told a chronological story from the nineteenth century to the present (figure 4.08). The body was involved in every section of the exhibition; if a 'body', albeit in mannequin or imagery form, wasn't available to help the visitor visualise the narrative, mounting techniques and creative object placement were used to evoke the body, movement and action. Photographs of people wearing and embodying masi, both historical and contemporary, were used to layer the story with meaning and significance, much like the layering of adornments help to accentuate and identify a person or thing. Masi was selected both for aesthetic considerations and for the skill of the maker, but pieces were also chosen for the documented role that they played on a body. The first case in the space was themed 'clothing and gender' and displayed two pieces of masi collected by Rev Richard B. Lyth. While very different in appearance, visitors were able to read labels about their importance in the mid nineteenth century:

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<sup>51</sup> Karen Jacobs, Katrina Igglesden and Fiji Museum staff.

**Malo** loincloth (58.32)

1839-54; Given by its owner [Tuikilakila] to Rev RB Lyth in Somosomo  
Barkcloth

**Masikesa** patterned barkcloth (58.37)

1839-54; Probably made in the Yasayasamoala Group; collected by Methodist missionary Rev  
RB Lyth

Barkcloth, pigment

This large sheet of cloth was worn by King Tioti [Fijian version of George] Tupou I of Tonga when he visited Fiji in 1853. Intricately stencilled and finely beaten masi was in high demand in Tonga in the 18<sup>th</sup> century

Because the cases could not accommodate showing both pieces of masi in full, handwritten labels affixed to the masi were not able to be seen. Accompanying photographs displayed the hidden information (figure 4.09):

FM 58/32 – ‘A Feejeean Man’s / Dress – one of Tuiilaila’s [Tui’ila’ila/Tuikilakila] / cast offs – / Lyth’

FM 58/37 – ‘Dress of King George / Dr Lyth’

As further themes were explored, photographs depicted masi worn for meke performances, for marriage ceremonies, during funerary rituals and during fashion events. The final section of the exhibition, separated from the rest and on open display, was the installation *Masi Maidens: Observational Outlooks Through the DNA of the Atua Tagaloa* by Raymond and me, using photographs and adornments to convey the contemporary significance of masi and textiles in the Pacific, particularly for Pacific communities residing away from the region. The imagery depicted characters adorned in a combination of masi and masi motifs applied directly onto the skin in the same way that motifs were applied to the cloth. The installation was activated on the opening night of the exhibition (see *Masi Maidens*, this chapter, for more).

**Temporary Exhibition: Kamunaga**

Opening on 15 June 2017, *Kamunaga: The Story of Tabua* was envisaged as a three-month exhibition about the meaning and value of tabua as a form of kamunaga.<sup>52</sup> Jointly curated by Fiji Museum and the iTaukei Trust Fund Board, project partners in the follow-on-

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<sup>52</sup> Kamunaga means something of great value and is an honorific term for a tabua, a presentation sperm whale tooth, which is still regarded as the greatest of Fiji’s traditional valuables (iyau, see Hooper 2013). The Kamunaga exhibition is still open (as of July 2019) and there are no immediate plans to close it.

funding AHRC *Fijian Art* research project grant, it utilised the six cases in the temporary exhibition space to share, gather and exchange tabua knowledge. Divided into themes, the different cases examined the physical characteristics of tabua and the introduction of fake tabua in Fiji, the evolution of its form (going from wood to shell, to whale bone and ivory), names and functions of tabua as kamunaga, value (both monetary and cultural) and the different uses of ivory within Fijian culture. As the museum's first in-house curated exhibition in three decades, it was also the first bilingual (Fijian and English) display put on at the museum. Aimed at Fiji's indigenous Fijian community as well as the general public, tourists and school children, the exhibition relied heavily on photographs, videos and imagery to convey tabua's cultural significance as kamunaga. To further evoke kamunaga's importance, the exhibition team included a male mannequin adorned in ceremonial masi attire and holding a (fake) tabua in a gesture as one would see during a presentation (figure 4.10). Able to be seen from all sides, the masi-ed mannequin provided a display of a kind not available elsewhere in the museum, or in Suva, and allowed visitors to experience and understand the way in which masi is used in adorning a person. Although only a prop in the exhibition, the masi displayed there reunited the body and the cloth, while helping to familiarise urban visitors with a ceremonial act which they may not have seen before.

### **Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific**

As one of the four largest Fijian diasporas in the world, the UK Fijian community has a removed relationship with masi manufacture and regional variations. Unlike among the Aotearoa New Zealand and Australian diasporas, masi is not made in the UK, and very rarely is it decorated or stencilled here. However, the UK holds the largest number of museum collections of colonial-era Fijian material in the world. That said, because of the fragility of textiles – large pieces of masi being difficult to remove from storage, and there usually being insufficient space to interact with them – it is not often one can view whole pieces of masi in museum displays and special exhibitions.

*Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific* opened to the public at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, at the University of East Anglia, on 15 October 2016 and ran until 12 February 2017.<sup>53</sup> Formally opened by the President of Fiji His Excellency Jioji Konousi Konrote, the exhibition showcased the extensive range and the magnificent quality of material culture

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<sup>53</sup> The exhibition was co-curated by Steven Hooper, Karen Jacobs and Katrina Igglesden.

made in Fiji over the last two centuries (figure 4.11). In addition to historical works, a few contemporary pieces were interspersed throughout the show, allowing visitors to appreciate firsthand the creative continuity and adaptability of Fijian artists and makers. The exhibition brought together several large nineteenth century examples of masi and showed each of them in their entirety, without being rolled or only partially displayed as is often done in exhibitions. Two contemporary pieces (masi bolabola and isulu ni soqo) were left in their ‘traditional’ or ‘ceremonial exchange’ form, while two others (masi couture gown and wedding dress) were examples of urban contemporary adaptations (figure 4.12). The masi bolabola was commissioned for the exhibition and made in 2016. Designed by Kelera Wea Watling and decorated by Adi Kunea Lalabalavu, Adi Melania Sotia and Adi Maca Matanababa, the piece was partly made in Somosomo and partly in Suva. Not ‘urban contemporary’ in the way that the terms are being widely discussed in this thesis, it is contemporary in the way that it was made in the twenty-first century and that it demonstrates the creative continuity of a regional design composition that is not included in masi’s urban corpus. Although Cakaudrove women are generally unwilling to make masi for sale, they agreed to a commission in this case because it would celebrate their ongoing cultural practice when shown alongside fine nineteenth century examples.

Like the masi bolabola, the isulu ni soqo does not indicate urban adaptability in motifs, design or method of adorning, instead it is a display of masi’s role in the urban cash economy. As with many pieces purchased in the Flea Market, the maker of the masi is not known. It was sold by a vendor rather than the makers themselves, who made the masi on Nayau Island in Lau (Hooper 2016:155). Both the masi couture gown and wedding dress have already been discussed in detail (in chapters 3 and 2 respectively) and were especially significant to Urban-Fiji because of the familial and vanua-based connections made by UK-based Fijians who visited the exhibition. Displayed on ‘bodies’ in the round (instead of within a display case) and resembling real people, the gowns served as a tangible reconnection between family: ‘during this era of frantic modernization, I’m truly grateful to be reminded of rich cultural heritage and my family – who are still so connected to me – so far away from Viti (Harvey, pers. comm. 7/2/17). The largest nineteenth century piece in the show was 15.23 metres x 1.04 metres; a piece of masi bolabola from Somosomo, Taveuni (Cakaudrove). It shared gallery space with four other lengths of cloth.

Encouraging a connection to the Urban-Fiji identity of different regions/vanua coming together as one community, the masi displayed across the entire 900sqm gallery space were representative of some of Fiji’s historical masi making centres: Cakaudrove

(Somosomo), Lau (Yasayasamoala, Nayau), and interior Viti Levu. Urban-Fijian people viewed Urban-Fijian things throughout the exhibition, and while museum practice does not allow historical masi in collections to be wrapped around a body or to adorn a mannequin, drawings, paintings, photographs and videos were used to illustrate what the masi itself was not able to. A puzzling thing for numerous Fijian visitors was the variety in motifs present on the different types of masi, as was the presence of so many pieces from Cakaudrove and the southern Cakaudrove/northern Lau border. Completely unlike the urban 'Fijian' corpus seen in Suva, and Fiji as a whole today, which is mostly from Vatulele and Moce, Cakaudrove masi, especially some of the nineteenth century examples in the exhibition, is almost alien to those who have no familial or regional connection to it: 'Wow, look at the patterns on this one. Amazing. Very interesting geometric designs, I have yet to see these kinds of designs on masi today' (Tamanisau, pers comm. 9/2/17). The final gallery of the exhibition, where the majority of the masi was shown, was called 'A Heritage of Marvellous Skills'. In this space, historical was directly juxtaposed with contemporary and filled the area with fashion, performance and theatricality spanning two hundred years.

The exhibition was not revolutionary in its inclusion of masi in the show, but it was in terms of being able to display so many large pieces in full while still including the great number and typological diversity of Fijian cultural heritage assembled to create the show (figure 4.13). A major component of the exhibition's branding and graphic design was the use of motifs found on multiple forms of Fijian material culture. Adapted by designer Andrew Johnson, specific motifs were chosen that would evoke indigenous Fijian culture, practices and mana. Johnson's ability to create graphic motifs that appeared just as they do on material culture, hand-rendered and not artificially created or manipulated, was the strongest element of the exhibition's design and branding. Three individual motifs and one composite motif design were used in the exhibition logo, on feature walls/plinths and on exhibition signage (figure 4.14).<sup>54</sup> While one of the motifs (interlocking triangles) is not found on masi, but instead is found carved on wooden objects such as the kinikini club from the British Museum (OC.9000; figure 4.15), the others are. The seru and kamiki were used to create the exhibition logo, and the seru (along with the interlocking triangles) was also used as a design feature throughout the gallery space (figure 4.16). The composite

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<sup>54</sup> These motifs were also featured in the accompanying exhibition catalogue of the same name. While the kamiki, as a design element, was not prominent in the exhibition, it was used throughout the catalogue as one of the main graphic design features.

motif design is made up of black triangles underlined with typical vetau motifs. The triangles are reminiscent of the Cakaudrove ‘dakai or kubunidakai motifs, but do not match them exactly’ (Tuvuki, pers. comm. 11/11/17) and may represent a motif exclusive to a particular, village, vanua or chiefly lineage. The composite motif design was used exclusively on exhibition signage indicating direction (figure 4.17).

When considering the overarching message of the exhibition one becomes aware that ‘Fiji’ was not being portrayed as a nation, but as a culture. Lacking inclusion of the many other ethnicities that comprise the current government’s definition of ‘Fiji’ and ‘Fijian’, the exhibition’s job was to portray the richness, diversity, skill and creative continuity of indigenous Fijian culture. Thus, unlike in other twenty-first century modes of display, as demonstrated by the Fiji Rugby Union discussed below, the separation of motifs from masi in this instance signified a celebration of cultural identity rather than a marker of national identity. While unintentional in the scope of the exhibition, the separation of motifs and their prominence in branding and publicity of the show ignited the UK’s Urban-Fiji identity. Although Norwich does not have a large Fijian community (the closest sizable community is Ipswich/Colchester), Urban-Fiji was drawn in by the motifs and once in the exhibition, reunited with the materiality and cultural significance of the cloth. As a form of ritual embodiment, in this specific sense masi and its motifs became a vessel of community embodiment. And that embodiment represented, to the diaspora, a national identity.

### **Shows and Events – COP23**

In 2016, Fiji was nominated by the USA to preside over the 2017 United Nations Climate Change Conference, also known as the 23<sup>rd</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP23) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and was officially awarded the presidency in November 2017 by the COP22 Presidency Secretariat (Morocco and the UNFCCC). The climate change conferences are yearly gatherings which have been held since 1995 and serve as formal meetings in which UNFCCC parties assess progress in dealing with climate change.<sup>55</sup> COP23 represented the first time a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) country would chair one of the COPs. The nomination of Fiji, a member of the twenty Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS), was particularly poignant

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<sup>55</sup> Since COP3 (1997) the conferences have also included negotiating the Kyoto Protocol, a treaty that commits parties to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, in their remit; in 2015 (COP21), the Paris Agreement and its implementation was added to the remit. The Paris Agreement is important because it was designed to create a global path towards climate action.

because the Pacific is a region very strongly affected by climate change and rising sea levels, yet it produces zero percent of the world's carbon emissions. As the incoming COP23 Presidency, Fiji began taking on formal roles with the UNFCCC in order to begin planning the conference, events leading up to it, as well as finalising the Fijian delegation, more specifically the Fijian COP23 Presidency Secretariat team. The Fijian COP23 Presidency (figure 4.18), with Fijian Prime Minister The Hon. Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama taking on the role as COP23 President, was special not only because it was the first time a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) country held the presidency, but also because it was the first time the conference would not be convened in the country of the presidency holder. For infrastructural reasons (and also for the cost and carbon footprint incurred of travelling to the host country), Fiji could not host the conference – which in previous years had seen up to 25,000 delegates attend – and so the UNFCCC, along with the German government (GIZ) and the city of Bonn, took on the role as host venue. The UNFCCC headquarters are based in Bonn and provided an effective venue for the 2017 conference.<sup>56</sup> Because delegates would not be travelling to Fiji, the Fijian COP23 Presidency Secretariat made the important decision to inject as much of a Fijian flavour into the conference as possible and to take Fiji to COP23 and Bonn by implementing two important concepts.

The first was 'Bula Spirit', bula in Fijian meaning 'life' and being a well-known greeting in Fiji conveying wishes of health, life and friendliness. Hence 'Bula Spirit' was intended to convey an attitude of inclusive friendly engagement. Linked to this was the second concept, 'Talanoa', meaning open and non-confrontational dialogue of the kind that happens in Fiji around the kava bowl and, in an ideal sense, on other occasions. Talanoa is considered a process of inclusive, participatory and transparent dialogue that builds empathy and leads to decision making for the collective good. It is not about arguing from entrenched positions and laying blame, but about listening to each other, learning from each other, sharing stories, skills and experiences. By focusing on this spirit of friendliness and dialogue, it was hoped that the global climate agenda could be moved forward (Fijian COP23 Presidency Secretariat 2017).

In order to encourage bula spirit and the concept of talanoa, branding as well as cultural practices and protocols were significant elements of the presidency's messaging. Delivering practices and protocols not only occurred in high-level areas and meetings, but

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<sup>56</sup> Before Berlin, Bonn was the capital city of (West) Germany between 1949-1990. Since reunification, Bonn has maintained some government ministries including the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), which worked closely with the UNFCCC and Fiji during COP23.

also took place in a greater and more participatory capacity in the Fiji Pavilion, the headquarters of Fiji's cultural delegation at the meeting. The Presidency's primary cultural reference made in its messaging was to Fiji's, and the Pacific's, strong maritime tradition. Bainimarama stated in May 2017, and many times thereafter, that:

As a symbol of Fiji's Presidency, the drua [double-hulled sailing canoe] is a reminder to the entire world that we are all in the same canoe when it comes to climate change. No-one is immune to its impact. We are all vulnerable and we all must act. At COP23, we must fill the sail of this canoe with a collective determination to move the climate action agenda forward. (Bainimarama, speech at the UNFCCC May Sessions 17/5/17)

Several double-hulled sailing canoes were featured during (and after) Fiji's presidency and provided important context for the President's key message, beginning with the *iVola Siga Vou* (July and October 2017, July 2018 and May 2019), the *Adi Yeta* (November 2017), and the *Adi Cagi ni Veisau*, a model built for/during COP23 as a gift to the city of Bonn. The double-hulled *Uto-ni-Yalo* also played an important role in Fiji (October 2017, May 2019). As will be discussed in further detail below, the drua were connected to masi and its display in different ways. The Fiji delegation numbered roughly 50 people, small for a presidency team but large for a PSIDS country. The presidency's core team consisted of the President (Bainimarama), Minister Responsible for Climate Change and Fiji Delegation Leader (The Hon. Aiyaz Saiyed Khaiyum), Chief Negotiator (Ambassador Nazhat Shameem Khan), Fiji's High Level Climate Champion (The Hon. Inia Seruiratu), Climate Change Ambassador (His Excellency Deo Saran), Chief Coordinator (Peniana Lalabalavu), and finally, the Executive Director (John Connor). Many other support staff, including a communications, advisory and cultural team, made up the remainder of the delegation. As part of the cultural team, Lalabalavu, Akini Qauqau and I were tasked with delivering cultural content for the entire Presidency, with a specific focus on ceremonial events and associated presidential activities. Based in the UK for the majority of the planning stages of COP23, aside from the planning and execution of the Climate Action Pacific Partnership event in Suva (3-4 July 2017), I came into the position as a cultural manager and adviser, helping to create a strong and culturally significant presence at the conference and ended up being charged with assisting with the overall conference branding (cultural, language and pictorial), as well as the design, build and running of the Fiji Pavilion. At its heart, COP23 was a Pacific-centred endeavour and Fiji had a unique

opportunity to showcase itself – both nationally and culturally - to a new group of stakeholders.

### ***Climate Action Pacific Partnership and Pre-COP***

The first official event of the presidency took place in Suva on 3-4 July 2017. Called the Climate Action Pacific Partnership (CAPP) event, it was used as an introduction to the presidency and its message and was directed at emphasising the need to support and strengthen the participation of Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) in the global climate action agenda. From the outset of its nomination, Fiji had made it a priority to take a holistic approach into COP23 concerning the environmental health and future sustainability of the region; to do this, CAPP convened fourteen of the twenty PSIDS (along with representatives from Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand), civil society, non-governmental organisations, faith-based groups, academic institutions and others to discuss a Pacific-centred approach to climate change, climate action and climate justice that would comprise the backbone of the Fijian presidency's deliverables. As CAPP was the UNFCCC's first collaboration with Fiji which included members of the Pacific region attending, as well as CAPP being the first event hosted by the incoming presidency, the Fijian COP23 Presidency Secretariat (called FCPS from here on) wanted to create a display of Pacific culture, and one that specifically displayed national Fijian identity during the event, including ceremonial welcomes, cultural performances and demonstrations of cultural practices and heritage art forms.

The private ceremonial welcome for the high-level delegates took place on the evening of 2 July and was conducted in the manner of a yaqona vakaturaga (chiefly yaqona ceremony). Working with a cohort of artists from the Fiji Arts Council,<sup>57</sup> the room was dressed with masi and mats (figure 4.19). The room was divided into two sections, with the honoured guests at the front (above) and the yaqona bowl and other guests facing them (below). As within a typical ceremonial context, the front of the room was the decorated side, behind the guests, who faced their hosts. Two large intricately stencilled taunamu ni viti made by Moce women were used as the backdrop for the honoured guests and were

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<sup>57</sup> Fiji Arts Council was established in 1964 as a charitable organisation. It is a coordinating body, and national agency, for the preservation, promotion and development of Fiji's arts and creative industries and encompasses heritage and contemporary art. As one of the three management agencies under the umbrella of the Department of Heritage and Arts (Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts), it coordinates national programmes and activities for the promotion of visual, performing and fine arts. In addition to promoting and advocating for 'Fijian' art, it has recently expanded its remit and also caters to assist in developing displays of overseas artists living in Fiji.

flanked on each of their sides by floor-to-ceiling ‘bows’ of masi vulavula and masi kuvui (two outer bows) and masi tutuki and masi kuvui tutuki (middle bow). Significant in that bows of this type would adorn chiefs, either around their arms or on their backs with the tails of the bow acting as a train – the length of the train indicative of status – the bows used in the yaqona vakaturaga decoration paid respect to the high-status of the guests whom were being welcomed. Directly in front of the taunamu, the floor was layered with mats and masi. At the bottom was an ibe vakabati, on top of which sat two side-by-side pieces of masi: masi kesa and gatu vakatoga. The top (and third) piece was also gatu vakatoga. Acting as a pathway for the honoured guests to walk and be seated on, the presentation mimicked other ceremonial occasions in which high-level visitors were welcomed,<sup>58</sup> as well as occasions in which chiefs were involved. Masi-wrapped side tables sat on top of the mats and masi pathway. The side table for Bainimarama, in his capacity as COP23 President, was wrapped in masi kuvui. Additionally, the lectern was completely wrapped in several types of masi kesa. On this occasion only real masi was utilised – no masi motif material was present in the ceremonial welcome – possibly indicating the cultural significance of the event. As a welcome for Pacific leaders, most of whom are indigenous, it was important to accord a ‘traditional’ welcome and event. Urban-Fiji was represented at CAPP because the masi, made especially for the occasion, was made by women of the different masi-making regions who reside in Suva as well as by women who own stalls in the Flea market. Further, both Bainimarama and Mrs Bainimarama (seated on the right side of image in figure 4.19) were adorned in masi motifs, he in a bula shirt and she in a sulu jaba. Perhaps this is the beginning of the government’s (and FCPS’s) contemporary distinction between national and cultural identity: masi motifs separate from masi itself is a national signifier and physical masi is a symbol of cultural identity, thus, masi motifs alone signal ‘Fijianness’ as much as masi itself (with or without motifs) does.

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<sup>58</sup> Not all high-level visitors who are accorded a ceremonial welcome are done so with large amounts of masi being present. For example, in 2019, visits from the Prime Minister of Australia and the Crown Prince of Norway did not use taunamu or masi motifs as a backdrop, instead a digital LED screen announcing their name and rank was used. In November 2014, while India’s Prime Minister Modi visited and received a ceremonial welcome with the yaqona vakaturaga conducted in masi attire, the backdrop was a graphic printed screen showing both masi and gatu vakatoga motifs. He and Bainimarama sat in chairs upholstered with masi motif material. However, the Samoan Prime Minister received a welcome with a gatuvakatoga backdrop and masi accents in August 2018. The British Royal Family has also received ceremonial welcomes, with large amounts of masi involved, from the early/mid twentieth century (Her Majesty The Queen’s first visit in December 1953 is evidence of this and images show masi hanging from trees, being used as a pathway from when she arrived on the wharf to reaching Albert Park, as well as on the dais where she and His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh sat) until the latest visit by the Duke and Duchess of Sussex in October 2018, when there was a gatu vakaviti backdrop on the dais.

This will be explored further in this and the following section and alluded to throughout the Urban-Fiji discussion.

The opening of the CAPP event took place on the morning of 3 July and saw the venue's conference room transformed into a ceremonial-like context. Much like the décor and adornments of the previous day, the speakers' stage was laden with mats and masi (figure 4.20). The lectern, in this case, was adorned in the same way that a warrior or chief would have been and was adorned in two pieces of elaborately stencilled and pleated masi kesa, resembling the under- and over-skirts on a human body. Different to the masi-wrapped lectern at the welcome ceremony, intentional or not, the body was brought back to masi in this event, an event attended by Pacific leaders and dignitaries who understand the connection between cloth/tapa and the human form. A small display of heritage arts was showcased in the main conference room as well. Later that evening, a reception was held for delegates at Fiji Museum. The Fiji Arts Council decorated the verandah of the museum using a mixture of material and masi. Dolce Sounds Dulali, a traditional meke group under the direction of Master Simione Sevudredre, performed several mekes during the reception wearing masi motif material in place of real masi (figure 4.21). A troupe composed entirely of indigenous Fijian men and women, the group also performed several traditional Indian cultural dances for the guests.<sup>59</sup>

Throughout the conference, Fiji Art Council artists were stationed in the venue's courtyard making and creating goods. Demonstrative of Fiji's diversity in art forms and a celebration of skill, the goods were also available for sale to delegates. Masi was being made by Selai Buasala and shows the urban adaptation of traditional Moce motifs mixed with religious slogans (figure 4.22). Urban adaptation was also evident in that CAPP became its own small market place, allowing all of the artists to transact with the delegates. Set up much in the same way as the Suva Flea Market and Government Handicraft Centre, artists benefitted from sales and reacted to the supply and demand created in the CAPP bubble:

People are wanting pieces that really look Fijian and show that they were in Fiji for something important. I have all different kinds of things here with me – big kesa pieces and small ones

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<sup>59</sup> Highly unusual for Sevudredre's group to do, this anomaly occurred as a request by the FCPS to showcase Fiji's multi-ethnic heritage. While not entirely relevant to this thesis, had this occurred the opposite way around, it is likely that there would have been an uproar amongst indigenous Fijians and possibly from some members of government. However, this does demonstrate the proposed connection between masi motifs and national identity rather than just cultural identity.

that fit right into the suitcase. I have to sit here and do a lot of [stylised] turtles now because they sell really fast and visitors love them. Visitors from other islands like Tonga and Samoa really like the ones I do with bible verses or family sayings on them. (Buasala, pers. comm. 4/7/17)

Aside from Mr and Mrs Bainimarama's wearing masi motif outfits during the welcome ceremony and the Dolce Sounds Dulali performers wearing masi motif material skirts in traditional colours that mimicked real masi, the only other form of masi motifs at CAPP came in the shirts handed out to the delegates with their registration packs. Males received blue shirts and females received green, an indication of COP23's branded colour scheme, and they depicted artistic motifs from around the Pacific which included the COP23 logo. Masi motifs included the vutu ni drali, kamiki and seru (figure 4.23).

### ***Pre-COP***

During the same month as CAPP, the FCPS cultural team began to discuss in detail the cultural presence that the presidency would convey during Pre-COP and at COP23 in Bonn. Pre-COP took place on 17-18 October 2017 at The Sheraton Fiji Resort on Denarau Island with 300 delegates in attendance. Pre-COPs are informal ministerial meetings in which matters are discussed more casually before the formal COP begins. Pre-COP 2017 is the largest one that has ever been convened; the attendance numbers were interpreted as support of and confidence in Fiji's presidency.

As at CAPP, Pre-COP began with a ceremonial yaqona vakaturaga. Taking place on the grounds of the venue, a dais was set up for the ceremony. The yaqona vakaturaga was more elaborate than occurred at CAPP, reflected in the decoration and adornments present, both on people and things. A large taunamu ni viti (12 metres x 3 metres) provided the backdrop, which was accented along its top by a long strip of masi kuvui kesa. Commissioned specially for Pre-COP, the taunamu was decorated with interesting motifs, particularly those on either side of the central panel which appeared to represent climate and ocean related motifs. While it is unusual for ceremonial masi designs to be naturalistic (as opposed to geometric), this is usual for Tongan motifs and thus inspiration may have been taken from there, or from the urban contemporary context in which these masi makers live. Moce style masi was also hung across the front overhang of the stage and ran along the entire length of the structure. Three masi-wrapped side tables sat on the stage with the chief guests (figure 4.24). Again, masi was used exclusively in the welcome ceremony

instead of masi motif material. The only exception was Mrs Bainimarama who wore a sulu jaba made from masi motif material, this time in the traditional colour scheme of white, red/brown, and black.

The welcome ceremony culminated when the high-level delegates moved onto the grass for the arrival of the *iVola Siga Vou* (figure 4.25). Reinforcing the Presidency's message that 'we are all in the same canoe' and that Fiji's maritime traditions promote environmental sustainability and growth, the drua was also performing a powerful act in that it was delivering messages written by Fijian citizens urging the world to think about Fiji's and the Pacific's future when deliberating and negotiating in Bonn. Another means of taking Fiji to Bonn, the messages and drawings were written on large pieces of white masi. A project sponsored by the Fiji National Provident Fund and the Uto-ni-Yalo Trust, Fijians were able to visit areas in Suva to record their messages or, in more remote areas, write them when visited by the *Uto-ni-Yalo*: 'The environment is in us not outside us. What you do to the environment ultimately you do to yourself. Protect our environment. Julie Cirivakayawa' (see figure 4.25). Also a sustainable product, the activity of transcribing messages on masi showcases its sustainability as a product and also re-introduces its accessibility as a means of paper. Reminiscent of the special edition *Polynesian Gazette* and *Fiji Times* newspapers printed on masi in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the masi scrolls presented to Bainimarama by a young school girl were highlighted as representing the voices of people living on the front line of climate change. Bainimarama declared that these scrolls would be delivered to high-level leaders and displayed at COP23. While not covered in artistic motifs, this masi was covered in writing and drawings, which can be viewed as the same thing: a product of the land being decorated by the people of the land, to be used in the ceremonial context of a large gathering.

### **COP23**

As mentioned above, from July 2017 until COP23 began in November 2017, intense planning was taking place on a number of levels. Most significantly, perhaps, was the thought and deliberation going into the branding of the conference. Working very closely with colleagues from multiple branches of the German government, which provided the majority of the funding for both the Presidency and the national delegation, it turned into a diplomatic dance of representing Fiji on a national and cultural level, agreeing with the viewpoints of the venue city and team, while also having to please those that were funding

the project.<sup>60</sup> What resulted was a mix of Fijian and German aesthetics in the overall branding of the conference, weighted on the Fijian side, and a sometimes conflicting tug-of-war between indigenous Fijian cultural heritage and the message of the Fijian Government through the FCPS.

As explained in chapter 1, the working definition of ‘Fijian’ in this thesis describes people of indigenous ancestry. This term is not favoured by the Fijian Government – who use the term iTaukei. ‘Fijian’ is used by them as a national marker. ‘Fijian’ therefore is not an ethnicity, it is a descriptive term for any national, citizen or person from Fiji.<sup>61</sup> Following this, great care was taken by the FCPS to represent Fiji as a multi-ethnic country during COP23. Strict regulations were put in place in order to ensure that multiple religions and ethnicities were depicted throughout the entire conference. Urban-Fiji takes on a different connotation in this specific instance, for it can actually also represent the different ethnicities of urban Suva, instead of the different villages and vanua of indigenous Fijians who have migrated there. An interesting point of note regarding COP23 and the FCPS was the overt favouring and prominence of indigenous Fijian culture to represent Fiji as a nation. As a complex cultural, social and political event, COP23 exemplified the cherry-picking of masi and its motifs as both national identifier and cultural signifier. While there is a distinction between the national and presidential delegations, it is difficult to separate them because both were working under combined leadership, and the overlap was great. However, a key distinction between the presidency delegation and the national delegation saw a slight shift in priority of the government’s definition of ‘Fijian’, and masi played a significant role in that shift.

COP23 ran from 6 to 17 November and conference took place across two zones: the Bula Zone (formal/negotiation zone) and the Bonn Zone (climate action/civil society zone). COP23 was the first COP to join the two zones together and allow high-level events to take place in both areas. Although more open and inclusive, there was a caveat in that while those with Bula Zone accreditation could also enter the Bonn Zone, those holding Bonn Zone accreditation could not enter the Bula Zone. This meant that the COP23 branding and messaging, particularly in relation to Fiji, Fiji’s presidency and the Pacific,

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<sup>60</sup> The German government (GIZ) provided the majority of the funding for the FCPS. While other nations also contributed large sums of money, and had stipulations attached to how their funds could be spent, the German government paid close attention to the process and had to give approval on fund spending. If unhappy, the proposed spending would need to be amended. All funding went into the FCPS Trust Fund. For ‘culture’ to be represented at COP23, GIZ allocated 400,000 Euros.

<sup>61</sup> This view is not shared by Fiji’s other political parties nor by the official Opposition.

had to be consistent in both areas. While the Bula Zone was home to the formal negotiation areas, it also housed the FCPS offices. Used for high-level bilateral meetings, as well as for planning meetings with the UNFCCC, the President, Chief Negotiator and Minister Responsible for Climate Change were designated individual office space. As the climate action area, the Bonn Zone was home to the Climate Champion's office as well as to national and civil society pavilions/exhibitions. The Fiji Pavilion was the FCPS's main focal point in the Bonn Zone. A joint space, collaborated on between the German government and the FCPS, was the secondary focal point in the zone and was another space in which Fiji's cultural branding was strongly utilised. Masi was used in two ways during COP23: branding (graphic) and as décor/adornment. Both were forms of national and cultural identity, but it is interesting how each type of use was perceived. Branding led to many dilemmas on my part, and on a cultural level, because it represented a fine line between identity and exploitation in terms of cultural ownership and intellectual property. For cultural and national décor, FCPS partnered again with the Fiji Arts Council, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and masi makers from Fiji's masi producing regions, who were commissioned to make masi of varying sizes, from long and thin pieces to large taunamu ni viti and ceremonial attire: 'I made eight masi costumes for the COP23 performers. The ministry said that my masi was going to be worn during the opening ceremony of COP23 when they do the yaqona' (Anonymous, pers. comm. 15/2/18). Of the masi makers who participated in making pieces for COP23, not one resided in their respective masi producing region. Each of the masi makers was urban-based, specifically Suva-based. In total, twenty-six pieces were commissioned, as well as forty smaller pieces that were used as gifts and attire for performers (figure 4.26).

### ***Bula Zone***

In the Bula Zone, aside from the branding found at multiple levels of signage, photographs, and the display of *Adi Yeta*, masi and masi motifs were consciously separated in the way that they were utilised, and both were used sparingly compared to that used in the Bonn Zone. The Bula Zone juxtaposed real masi with graphics representing in a sense the separation of cloth from design in the vakavanua versus vakabisinisi debate. Vakavanua represented the masi as a cloth and vakabisinisi represented the use of the motifs in an urban contemporary manner. Masi motifs used in conference branding was minimal, except for in the ground floor cafeteria and corridor leading from the main World Conference Center Bonn (WCCB) building to the plenary building. It was in these areas

that masi motifs were wrapped around pillars. Real masi was not used in the branding, only graphic renditions of the motifs. The motifs used were created from a single piece of masi that I received 2012, and is reminiscent of the urban corpus described in chapter 1. FCPS graphic designers digitally recreated the masi (figure 4.27), removing four motifs from the piece and adding two different ones in their place. The newly adapted COP23 masi included the following motifs (listed from the top outer edge to the middle): codo, sui ni gata, seru, kamiki, vutu ni drali, icula and civeyadra. The kamiki motif, in this case copied directly from the CAPP shirts, speaks to Fijian cultural identity but also to PSIDS nations as it is also found across the Pacific region on tapa and in carvings. The designers, through long discussions with the team, endeavoured to make the graphic masi look as kinetic and textile-like as possible. To do this, they did not use graphic design to manipulate the motifs, instead they recreated the motifs directly from the original masi, showing waviness of lines and bleeding dye, so that its handmade qualities would still be evident in the final product. As the final step in the re-design process, they adapted the colours of the original masi to match the official COP23 brand colours. While FCPS envisaged that the masi motifs would have a greater presence in the Bula Zone, utilising the pillars (figure 4.28) in the corridor and cafeteria was a compromise because cultural items could not be placed in these areas for security reasons.<sup>62</sup>

The only areas in the Bula zone where real masi was used and coincidentally spatially removed from the graphic branding, were in the FCPS office spaces where one piece each was hung in the President's and Chief Negotiator's offices – but not in the Minister Responsible for Climate Change's office - and in the plenary building above the entrance to the second largest negotiation room. Masi for the two offices were chosen based on size, but also on visual appeal. COP23 President Bainimarama, as the highest-ranking member of the team (or as the 'chiefly' figure), received the most impressive piece of masi, along with smaller decorative pieces and mats on the floor. The large piece of masi used to adorn his office wall featured specialised stencil, the COP23 logo, and demonstrated the urban adaptability of masi's significance in contemporary contexts (figure 4.29). The masi hanging above the plenary room entrance consisted of four large taunamu ni viti; each from or representing a different masi making region, but all made in Suva. The taunamu were the only examples of real masi that delegates moving through the Bula Zone were

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<sup>62</sup> The United Nations campus and associated headquarters, including the WCCB, are high level security buildings; it is for this reason that building plans to show pillar placement and masi placement for the WCCB cannot be provided here.

able to see. Mounted on a frame using magimagi ties, these taunamu represented the only pieces of masi hung in COP23 using sustainable methods, meaning that the entire exhibition space in the plenary building was climate friendly (figure 4.30).

### ***Bonn Zone***

Because of its new connection to the high-level negotiations, areas of the Bonn Zone also contained graphic masi motifs, specifically the joint space shared between the German government and FCPS. Named the Talanoa Space, the area was managed by both the German and Fijian delegations and concentrated on the Global Climate Action Agenda, providing a place for non-state actors to celebrate diversity and activities while encouraging exchange, sharing and the spirit of talanoa. The graphic masi created by FCPS designers was made in three colour combinations. As seen in figure 4.28, the Bula Zone used two of the combinations on the pillars. After going back and forth on the design of the Talanoa Space, and Fiji being displeased with initial German proposed designs because they reinforced colonialist stereotypes of the Pacific, it was decided that the space should make use of the remaining masi graphic/colour combination and apply them to its main information screens (figure 4.31). After making the decision to use the masi graphic, the two teams worked collaboratively to create a logo for the Talanoa Space. As it was an area to bring together Germany and Pacific, the FCPS insisted that the logo have a Pacific feel and provided the German design team with a selection of motifs that evoked the Pacific, including a few of the more generic but less urbanly popular masi motifs. The German team came back with several options and group consensus chose the version which best combined the two cultures coming together. Following a minimalist German aesthetic, the logo (figure 4.32) featured a vutu tutuki (of which there are multiple variations). Liked by the German team and chosen by the FCPS because it represented Fiji and the Pacific, it was celebrated by all parties involved because it also nuanced the process and act of talanoa. Evoking the talanoa and bula spirit, the vutu tutuki was seen to represent different parties sitting around a central figure/ thing (eg. a tanoa) and talking through issues using inclusive and transparent dialogue.

As the FCPS's main focal point in the Bonn Zone, the Fiji Pavilion was a 400sqm area in which both the national and presidency delegations participated in side events.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> At COP conferences, pavilion space is available for national delegations to apply for and use to hold events, network and convene meetings. A variety of sizes, the Fiji Pavilion was the largest available (with

Approximately eighty side events took place at the pavilion and ranged from presidency, to government, to civil society to non-state actor engagements. When conceptualising the pavilion, it was a difficult task because it had to be different things to different parties. It needed to be efficient in terms of running events, it needed to provide space for the FCPS's Grand Coalition and, above all, Bainimarama required it to be a space that evoked Fiji's culture, environment, hospitality and diversity. After much collaboration and discussion, it was decided that the Fiji Pavilion (figure 4.33) would evoke a traditional indigenous Fijian village setting. In Fiji, the central feature of any village is the valelevu (big house/chief's house), the valenibose (meeting house) and the rara (village green/ceremonial ground). Working together – as a family, as a village, as a larger regional community, a chiefdom or a province – is an imperative component of indigenous Fijian life; all important events, meetings and gatherings occur either in the valelevu or on the rara (or both) and encourage open dialogue, conversation and knowledge sharing. With a rara in the centre of the space, there were five zones based around its perimeter: Valelevu, Valenibose, Yau Kei Viti, Grand Coalition/Climate Action Agenda, and Fiji's Cultural Diversity (featuring the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme's virtual reality experiences).<sup>64</sup> Save the Grand Coalition/Climate Action Agenda zone, each zone showcased masi in different ways.

Going counter-clockwise from the left side of the entrance to the pavilion (see figure 4.33), the Grand Coalition area did not display any masi and focused instead on the presidency's vision of forging together to accelerate climate action before 2020. This space allowed coalition members from civil society, non-state actors, as well as the Fijian government to highlight their work and was used as an informal gathering space for Pacific civil society, NGOs, youth groups, as well as yaqona and sigidrigi (group singing with guitars) sessions. Next, Fiji's cultural heritage art forms were featured in the Yau Kei Viti zone. Highlighting the sustainability and development of living Fijian arts and culture, the zone combined showcasing the sustainability of Fijian cultural heritage in the raw materials used, as well as the development and promotion of heritage arts via the 'FijianMade' initiative (see chapter 3 for more detail). The zone showcased innovative and

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only Germany matching it in size). Other non-state actors, NGOs and civil society are provided exhibition stalls to highlight their work.

<sup>64</sup> The church is now an ever-present feature of a Fijian village, but in view of Fiji's multiethnic and multifaith population, any reference to practicing religion was avoided. COP23 also repurposed areas on the conference site, or built temporary structures, to assist in religious practice for all religions present at the meetings.

effective ways to spur sustainability and development in face of the threat posed by climate change and signaled confidence in Pacific solutions, more ecologically sound ways of life, materials and abilities, things that are waning in outer islands or rural areas where craft specialists are in decline. Eight artists (carvers, weavers, binders and a masi maker; figure 4.34)<sup>65</sup> gave live demonstrations every day in the Yau Kei Viti zone, adorning and decorating the area with their creations daily. The stencilling demonstrations of Iगतolo Tokase, a masi maker originally from Moce, gathered large crowds and she routinely took the time to explain to delegates about masi, its history and her views on its future (figure 4.35). The area most populated by masi in the pavilion, Yau Kei Viti's three tables were adorned with densely stencilled masi kesa. When *Adi Cagi ni Veisau*, the two-metre model drua constructed in the pavilion, was completed she was adorned in masi for her naming ceremony, and Tokase made a masi name banner for her to commemorate the occasion (figure 4.36). Masi was also displayed on mannequins as body adornment/clothing, alongside a kuta three-piece outfit and an Indo-Fijian sari. It was also in this zone that the Pre-COP masi scrolls were displayed. Presented beside the drua, the scrolls not only conveyed messages of Fijian people to COP23 delegates, but also spoke to sustainability and development of masi as a raw material and Fijian cultural heritage. Decorated with the COP23 stencil, and a stencilled border, the central scroll connects masi to climate change and climate action on a deeper level yet also presents a double-edged sword. Whilst sustainable and renewable, climate change and the increased intensity of natural disasters are destroying the growing habitats of masi and other natural resources:

The District of Vanuabalavu in Lau, District of Koro in Lomaiviti, and the entire province of Ra [were visited after TC Winston of February 2016 to gather research for this report] in order to assess the effects on cultural heritage. Damage was found to be concentrated on: (i) raw materials necessary to fuel the production of costumes for rituals, prepare herbal medicine etc. (ii) totemic plants/trees (iii) crops & animals important for rituals and ceremonies that were lost. The loss of these important cultural agents has the potential to contribute to the deterioration of cultural values of people, diminishing sanctification of taboo areas, impact on social and cultural rituals, ceremonies and rites, and in the worst cases a relocation of village sites and village inhabitants. (Fiji Arts Council 2016:3)

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<sup>65</sup> Setareki Domonisere, Jiujiu Bera, Mosese Cama, Inoke Tauyavu, Laisani Waqanisau, Mataiasi Qaroro, Niqa Tuvuki and Iगतolo Tokase.

That Fiji's cultural industries are being severely affected was a message that the Yau Kei Viti zone, artists, and masi scrolls endeavoured to convey. Showing Fiji's living culture and the affects that urban contemporary living is having on natural resources – humans and globalization are leading factors in climate change – demonstrated the negative effects of urban adaptability:

Cultural producers (crafters and artisans) impacted by TC Winston have suffered significant losses to their supply of raw materials, including kuta from Vanua Levu, voivoi from Koro, Lau, Ra and Ba, and masi bark from Vatulele. The livelihood of the producers are strained causing stress in trying to meet their family needs. (Fiji Arts Council 2016:4)

The Valenibose and the Valelevu were zones in which bilateral meetings and side events, respectively, took place. In both areas, masi kesa was used as décor and adorned mat-lined walls. Traditional village structures, the valenibose (meeting house) and the valelevu (big house/chief's house) were the centre pieces of the pavilion and used masi to evoke their cultural significance (figure 4.37). It was originally the FCPS's desire to keep these two zones as sustainable as possible; one way of doing this was to use white masi, a thick and durable natural and renewable material, as projection screens. Using no power, the masi screens would have been thick enough to provide clear and crisp images. A nod to the Pacific's history of oral tradition and storytelling through patterns and designs applied to material culture, which are as integral as words, having presentations projected onto masi would have enabled words and imagery to combine, hybridise and adapt into a new form of knowledge transfer and exchange. While strongly advocated for by the presidency, the German government, did not find using masi in this way plausible and rejected the proposal, even though team members had done so with success in the past.<sup>66</sup> A medium of sustainable communication, as with the masi scrolls, it was a lost opportunity. The final zone, Fiji's Cultural Diversity, used two virtual reality films to illustrate Fiji's plight and fight against climate change (figure 4.38). The first called *Noqu Vanua* was created by The World Bank and the second was created by the United Nations Development Programme and called *My Story: Young Fijians on the Front Lines of Climate Change*. This zone caused much tension within the presidency in the few weeks prior to the conference

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<sup>66</sup> In 2010, I was a member of staff at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia and one of the staff members who worked on refurbishment of the museum's visible storage collections. Renamed the Multiversity Galleries, its opening coincided with the start of a new exhibition called *Border Crossings* in which white masi was used as a projection screen for a work by Rosanna Raymond.

because of the initial lack of ethnic diversity shown in the films, as well as the masi motif wall branding chosen by The World Bank. Almost pulled completely from the pavilion by the Attorney-General/Minister Responsible for Climate Change, the films were eventually allowed to remain if re-edited to depict Fiji's rich ethnic diversity. The only space in the pavilion which used masi motifs in graphic form instead of real masi, the film's issues triggered fears that the Fijian government's definition of 'Fijian' – all people of Fiji are Fijian, it is a national and not ethnic/cultural designation – was not being accurately portrayed in the pavilion and by the FCPS. A defining moment in the pavilion and in the divide between national and cultural identity, it was decided by the Attorney-General that as long as Fiji's cultural and ethnic diversity was represented in other visual ways (such as through photographs, in videos and in artistic representation) throughout the entire conference site, then letting indigenous Fijian material and iconography be the prominent material culture identifier was allowed to take place. Within this zone, delegates also had the opportunity to write messages to the people of Fiji. In direct relation to the masi scrolls displayed in the Yau Kei Viti zone, and much like in a ceremonial context in that host and guest exchange gifts and offerings, the gift of the masi scrolls was being reciprocated by COP23 delegates and would be taken back to Fiji and be presented. A large piece of white masi was hung inside the zone, beside the virtual reality hubs, allowing people to respond and react to the videos by writing a message or to write a message to Fijians about their COP23 experience at any time they wished (figure 4.39). Further illustrating the versatility, adaptability and sustainability of masi, the masi lent itself to promoting environmental benefits of climate action.

Along with having heritage artists be part of the living aspect of the pavilion, the Fiji Police Band travelled to Bonn to undertake various ceremonial tasks during the conference, to perform as a marching band during high-level and community engagements, and to perform daily in the Fiji Pavilion. Each day, male and female band members performed songs to open the pavilion in the morning and performed meke and lakalaka at lunch time. While dancing, female members were adorned in masi, again bringing the cloth back to the body and connecting it to performativity and theatricality (figure 4.40). Not only adorned in masi, masi motifs were often printed on their daily uniforms. Many of the national and presidency delegation wore masi motif-printed clothing during the two-week conference; on the opening day, the entire Fiji delegation wore blue and brown masi motif material uniforms – bula shirts for males and sulu jaba and dresses for females (figure 4.41). Theatricality and performance also took place in the unveiling of the Ocean Pathways

Partnership in that once the partnership was ratified, the delegation led by masi-adorned warriors and women, processed and paraded from the Bonn Zone negotiation area to the Fiji Pavilion to announce its success.<sup>67</sup> Advocating for climate change negotiations to address the relationship between climate change and ocean health, it was a partnership formed in the true spirit of talanoa and as a key component of the Grand Coalition (figure 4.42). In that sense, although the Grand Coalition zone in the Fiji Pavilion was devoid of masi, it was filled with masi's living and breathing form during the Ocean Pathways event. The final display of masi in the pavilion took the form of merchandise: shoulder bags and portfolio clutches. The shoulder bags depicted the COP23 logo and a hybrid of Pacific and Fijian masi motifs, while the portfolio clutches were one hundred percent sustainable, woven from pandanus leaves and covered in masi kesa. The specialised COP23 logo masi stencil was used for the portfolios, which were only presented to high-level delegates.

Returning to the presidency's dilemma concerning how to represent Fiji's cultural diversity, a second conundrum arose when planning the national and presidency's vision for cultural inclusion: traditional versus contemporary. This related to masi because contemporary visual and performing artists often use masi and/or masi motifs in their works (see Productions, Activations, Installations, this chapter), and the higher levels of the FCPS were adamant that only traditional art forms could be displayed and performed during COP23. Ironic in that contemporary Fijian art and culture represents a diverse and dynamic range of ethnicities and beliefs, it would have answered the FCPS's desire to showcase multiethnic, multifaith, and multicultural Fijian communities who use natural, renewable and recyclable materials to fabricate responses to the very issues that COP23, UNFCCC, and the German government advocate for. After I spent much time pushing for the inclusion of contemporary art and culture, and being consistently opposed by indigenous Fijian members of the team, an opportunity came by the way of The World Bank. Max Edkins, of The World Bank's Connect4Climate team, was passionate about bringing young people into the fold of climate action and through various projects used contemporary visual and performing arts to do so. Funded by his team, Edkins' efforts allowed the Fiji team to create and support two live-link (live streaming via Facebook) performances that took place in Suva and were free for Fijians to attend. Streamed in every

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<sup>67</sup> Potentially viewed as symbolic racism or a commercialized version of Fijian culture, having warriors adorned in masi present during this event occurred because it is a significant act/role within indigenous Fijian culture. It is the warrior clan's role lead important people and occasions in ceremonial contexts. Chiefs, or honoured guests, are escorted by warriors both in rural and urban settings.

negotiation room in the Bula Zone and on every available screen in the Bonn Zone, the live-link brought masi and masi motifs to life in performances by the Oceania Dance Theatre, Pasifika Voices and Rako Pasefika. A highlight for many at COP23, and a direct connection between Fiji and Germany, the live-link highlighted what could have taken place in the Fiji Pavilion. An explicit urban contemporary adaptation of masi use and significance to Fijians, the inclusion of the contemporary in the FCPS's mission and vision would have allowed for a wider breadth of engagement with stakeholders. However, with high-level team members opposed, it was not possible and instead spoke to a disregard of cultural significance in favour of a singular national identity.

### ***COP23 Legacy***

What happened to all of the masi that travelled to COP23 in Bonn? The FCPS left a legacy through the masi it commissioned for COP23. In the same way that masi was and is presented and (re)distributed during ceremonial exchanges, this too was done at the conference between 'hosts' and 'guests' and between the entire network of COP23 team members. The majority of the masi was presented and distributed to parties who hosted the Fiji team, who collaborated with the FCPS and who assisted the delegation in ensuring a successful event. Most notably, the four taunamu hanging in the Bula Zone above the plenary negotiation room entrance were gifted to the German government. Masi was also distributed to the city of Bonn alongside the drua *Adi Cagi ni Veisau*. The drua and masi were gifted in a ceremony on the final day of the conference (17 November) and accepted by the Mayor of Bonn, Ashok Sriharan, in acknowledgement of his and the city's support of Fiji, the presidency and the conference. Today, the drua (complete with its masi pennants) sits on display in Bonn's City Hall. Several pieces of masi each were also gifted to the Fiji High Commission London and the Fiji Embassy Brussels, for their high-level support, as well as to acknowledge the British and European Fijian diasporic communities who supported team members, artists and band members during the conference.

The digital footprint of masi motifs is perhaps COP23's greatest legacy because it is still in use today as part of the core components of COP24 in Katowice, Poland, and will be used in COP25 in Santiago, Chile. The Talanoa Space birthed two different initiatives: Talanoa Dialogue and Talanoa4Ambition. Each use the core Talanoa Space masi motif (*vutu tutuki*) in their logos and also use varying motifs from the adapted masi graphic created by the FCPS design team. The Talanoa Dialogue (figure 4.43) uses the central *vutu tutuki* motif and pairs it with a repetitive *seru* top and bottom border, while the

Talanoa4Ambition logo (figure 4.44) reconfigures the adapted masi making the words the central portion of the masi and utilises the previous central motifs (exchanging the vutu ni drali for the vutu tutuki) along the borders. Although it is regarded as culturally incorrect to use central motifs as vetau or borders, and a vutu tutuki as a white motif instead of black or red/brown, as a logo made in the vakabisinisi manner, nevertheless this is an example of urban contemporary adaptation.

### **Fiji Rugby Union and Masi Designs**

The Fiji Rugby Union (FRU) was founded in 1913 and is the governing body for the sport of rugby union in the country.<sup>68</sup> Rugby union in Fiji is made up of over thirty provincial unions, with approximately eighty thousand registered players making up those unions. The Fiji Rugby Union joined the International Rugby Board in 1987 and the Pacific Islands Rugby Alliance in 2002.

Called the Flying Fijians, the 15s international team competes every four years at the International Rugby Board's World Cup. Of the forty-two players currently listed on the 2019 World Cup squad (the tournament takes place in September 2019), fourteen players are members of French clubs, thirteen play for British clubs, one is a member of a Japanese team, one is an unattached player and ten are members of Fijian union clubs. All members of the 2019 World Cup Squad are of indigenous Fijian ancestry. The Flying Fijians updated 2019 logo, features the same iconic palm tree in a rugby ball, as used before, with the words 'Flying Fijians' replacing 'Fiji Rugby'. Brian Thorburn, general manager commercial for the FRU stated:

There is barely a global rugby symbol more recognised and loved than our iconic palm tree – worn on the chest of Fiji's players for over 100 years – as they battle on the field for family country and God...its tradition, heritage and culture. (Bola 2019)

While the 7s international team does not have a designated name as do the Flying Fijians and the rugby league team the Fiji Bati, it is one of the most successful 7s teams in the world. Popularly called the Fiji Sevens, the team has won the Hong Kong Sevens eighteen times since it began in 1976, and has won the Rugby World Cup Sevens twice, both times when held in Hong Kong (1997, 2005). In 2016, the first year that sevens rugby was introduced into the Summer Olympic Games, Fiji won the gold medal. In 2019, as well as

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<sup>68</sup> Originally called the Fiji Rugby Football Union, the name was changed to its current one in 1963.

in 2006 and 2016, Fiji won the World Rugby Sevens Series, which is the grand prize in the annual culmination of the World Rugby Seven Tournaments which are held during the year in several cities around the world. The Fiji Sevens team is one of only two teams (New Zealand is the other) to finish in the top four teams of the World Series every season since its inception.

The uniforms for both national teams are black and white, consisting of black shorts, and black and/or white jersey with black and white striped socks. In recent years, the uniforms have been developed and adapted to include masi motifs as cultural signifiers and identifiers. The following sections will examine these cultural motifs in relation to the 15s and 7s Rugby World Cups and the Olympic Games.

### ***National 15s Team (Flying Fijians) – Rugby World Cup***

In the early 2000s, the FRU began actively using cultural motifs on official kit worn during the Rugby World Cup. From 2011, when this doctoral research began, regular season jerseys featured a culacula (club) across the right shoulder. However, for the 2011 World Cup jersey, the Fiji team debuted a mix of contemporary design complemented by masi motifs. More Pacific in flavour than Fijian, this jersey was the first time that the FRU used a ‘white on white’ design technique. With this technique, the design is not easily seen from a front-on angle, but shimmers when in movement or caught in the light. The 2011 Rugby World Cup Jersey depicts two stylised turtles, one in the front bottom left corner and the other on the breast of the front left intermixed with curlicued shapes reminiscent of Pacific fish hooks (figure 4.45). The shapes continue onto the left arm of the jersey. Generic masi motifs, which are graphics instead of looking hand rendered, are applied in black around the cuff of each sleeve and the hem of the jersey. Not realistic, nor specifically evoking ‘Fiji’ or ‘Fijianness’, the main cuff motif resembles the Samoan siapo (barkcloth) motif called fa’a tuli or fa’a gogo after the sandpiper and sea tern respectively. It is bordered on the top and bottom by a single row of serrated triangles. It is possible that the FRU was drawing on designs that would appeal more to the Pacific community than the local Fijian population when designing these jerseys; as the Rugby World Cup 2011 was held in New Zealand – home to the largest Pacific diaspora in the world – Urbanesia and its communities would have provided merchandise revenue for the FRU.

In 2015, the Rugby World Cup was held in the UK and Fiji’s jersey followed the previous one in that it featured a central white on white design, flanked by black motifs (figure 4.46). This time, however, the design and motifs were unmistakably Fijian. The

central design is a civavonovono (composite breastplate); its placement and use makes a statement about Fijian men's heritage as brave warriors, as well as chiefly associations. Visually impressive, when the jersey is worn, the civavonovono covers the entire chest of the player much like a real one would. On the side of the jersey directly under the arm, are six repeated masi motifs. While four of them are distinctly Fijian, two are questionable as masi motifs but are found in Pacific and Fijian carving patterns. Using Kooijman's well documented Moce fieldwork (1977), the Fijian motifs from bottom to top are: valesiki, nuqa, kamiki and seru. While the seru and kamiki motifs are part of the urban masi corpus, and the nuqa motif isn't as popular within the corpus (but is present), the valesiki motif is regionally specific to Moce (Kooijman 1977:56) and is a reference to the internal structure of a traditional Moce house.

In 2019 the FRU unveiled its updated brand logo. At the same time, on 9 February 2019, the FRU launched its 2019 Rugby World Cup jersey. A momentous occasion, the launch marked the public's introduction to newly 'created' masi designs, adapted from existing ones, to reflect the values and vision of the FRU. Not limited to the Rugby World Cup jerseys, the new masi motifs will be used throughout the FRU's different divisions including corporate uniforms, elite (national and international) teams, school competitions and community events. In order to create the motif adaptations, Brian Thorborn (FRU) worked in collaboration with the Department of Heritage and Arts (Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts), Fiji Arts Council, masi maker Selai Buasala, cultural development officer Niqa Tuvuki, and visual/graphic artist Anare Somumu:

A Masi artist [Buasala] worked with a modern graphic artist [Somumu] to integrate traditional masi elements with unique rugby motifs to create a truly unique and meaningful pattern of designs. Each of the Masi Rugby pattern designs are supported by a rich narrative that tells their story and the strength behind them. (Bola 2019)

Continuing with the core design placement and elements of the previous two Rugby World Cup jerseys, the 2019 edition features Fiji's renowned black and white colour scheme (figure 4.47). To be debuted in Japan in September 2019, the only patterns applied to the jersey are masi motifs – a first for any FRU World Cup kit. The body, front and back, of the shirt are plain (except for the obligatory sponsorship logos on the chest). White on white masi motifs cover the entirety of both sleeves and connect along a narrow strip at the back of the neck where the logo of the famous Fijian winger of the 1950s Josefa Levula is placed. Black and white motifs run down the sides of the jersey, as well as along

the back collar and around each sleeve cuff. However, what is unique to the newly created ‘masi’ designs is their hybridization with Fijian rugby and cultural heritage images which have been configured into shapes that look like traditional masi motifs to the naked eye. It is not until one views them closely that the details can be seen and appreciated. With Thorborn referring to all of the motifs as ‘masi’ designs, it demonstrates the FRU’s urban contemporary re-writing of masi motifs for future generations. Rather than solely adapting or creating new motifs using older historical examples as inspiration, the FRU and its collaborative artists have generated motifs which have previously not had any place in the art form. Allowing popular culture, much like the COP23 customised masi stencil, to infiltrate masi making and design is a provoking act; it firmly roots masi in an urban, commercial and vakabisinisi realm. Unclear as to whether the ‘new’ designs have been given unique names, from top to bottom the motifs positioned on the sides of the jersey in black are: crossed iula (throwing clubs), sinucodo, vutu tutuki in a diamond (four rugby balls configured in the shape of a vutu), FRU palm tree, sinucodo, sui ni gata, crossed iula, sinucodo, vutu tutuki in a diamond (four rugby balls configured in the shape of a vutu), FRU palm tree, crossed iula, and sinucodo (figure 4.48). Each motifs runs horizontally and is separated from the next by a thin serrated triangle design. The white on white masi motifs follow the same order, but are larger and therefore make up fewer rows. Speaking at the unveiling in relation to the FRU’s updated branding, Prime Minister Bainimarama stated:

This facelift also includes new masi designs unique to Fiji Rugby to be applied to the jersey of our national teams and other applications. The design reflects our culture and heritage and [creates] a sense of continuity and connection to the values of our teams. (2019)

### ***National 7s Team – Olympic Games and Rugby World Cup***

Fiji’s 2016 Olympic Games uniforms featured both Pacific and Fijian motifs (figure 4.49). Found on masi and on carving, the mix of motifs speaks to Fiji’s national, cultural and regional pride and identity. It is across the body of the jersey that Fijian and Pacific motifs intermix. One masi motif also found on carved items is the codo (‘fitting into each other’; Kooijman 1970:70). Masi motifs are exclusively located on the shoulders and on a band across the upper back underneath the collar. Examining the motifs from the bottom band on the back of the jersey and coming up over the shoulders, the patterning is as follows: stylized fusion of vunisei and valesiki, vacu ni tadruku, kamiki, sui ni gata, rosette/vutu

tutuki, stylized vetau, vunisei/valesiki, vacu ni tadruku, kamiki and zig-zag/serrated triangles. Again, as with the previous examples, the masi motifs are clearly computer-generated, with a mechanical artificial feel that could be considered insensitive to the talent and skill of the masi makers who create them on real masi. It will be recalled that the designer of the graphics for the exhibition *Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific* used original masi designs, with all their minor irregularities, to convey something of the dynamic spirit of Fijian design. It would appear that the designers employed by the FRU decided to tidy up and in some respects neutralise the hand skills of the original masi makers.

As previous two-time winners of the Rugby Sevens World Cup, the 2018 tournament held in San Francisco included five masi motifs and a matting design (figure 4.50). Instead of being in horizontal rows, as was designed for the various 15s Rugby World Cup jerseys, the 7s jersey design shows the side masi motifs in vertical lines starting with kamiki closest to the centre, then moving outwards with seru and an adapted senibua motif. A plain white block separates the senibua from the following waqani-like and vetau motifs. Overlapping with the vetau is a photographic and textured matting motif, which has also been used by the 7s team during the 2018-2019 Rugby World Sevens Series. The senibua motif is repeated in a horizontal pattern along the clavicle areas of the jersey; underneath it is the sinucodo. Again, the designs have a machine-made regularity about them, at odds with the lively hand-made appearance of original designs. It seems that masi designs are given a corporate make-over when they are appropriated for national rather than cultural purposes.

With each example provided from the Fiji Rugby Union, a parallel can be made with fashion, masi couture and the use of masi motifs. Just as in fashion, and in ceremonial contexts, masi (motifs) are being processed and paraded during sporting events. Although the intent of sport is not to present masi as a gift to a host or to make exchanges, it has become a performance of masi at its most basic level. In contrast to masi's use in fashion, masi as a highly female gendered art form has not been altered – women's motifs are adorning men, and men are performing its cultural nuances to an audience at a large gathering. However, also in partial contrast to fashion, here real masi is not used at all; it is the motifs that are salient to the context. The motifs have been consciously separated from the cloth and support the urban contemporary shift to value the motifs in a different or adapted way from the materiality of the cloth. As a result, masi as a form of *cakacaka ni liga/cakacaka vakavanua* does not exist and instead lives in the graphic and *vakabisinisi* realm of national identity.

Other national Fijian sporting teams (netball, soccer/football, women's rugby) do not have masi included on their uniforms. Fijiana (Fiji's female rugby 7s team), have matting designs across the shoulders of their jerseys while the Fiji Pearls (female netball team) have palm fronds decorating their kit. Interestingly, Fiji's national soccer/football team, a sport which in Fiji has been dominated by Indo-Fijian players, depicts a tabua cord around a soccer ball on their jerseys. The tabua (presentation sperm whale tooth) is still regarded as the greatest of Fiji's indigenous traditional valuables (Hooper 2013) but is not considered to have a traditional or ceremonial connection to Fiji's Indo-Fijian community. When examining the iconography chosen to represent Fiji's national sporting teams, there is no representation of the nation's other ethnicities or cultures. The closest that is displayed is a generic Pacific flavour in motif choice, which is also seen on a few of the FRU uniforms in the early 2000s.

That said, further examination is required in that the FRU's national teams are all composed of indigenous Fijian men or those having some indigenous ancestry. As a cultural identifier, as well as a national identifier, this brings a new dimension to the debate. Perhaps the FRU's commissioning of newly adapted/created/hybridized masi designs is a hint at the organisation's attempt to de-indigenise its use of masi and make it represent the country's definition of 'Fijian'.

### **Productions, Activations, Installations**

The cultural influence and significance of masi and its connection to the body is explored in contemporary art and performance across Urbanesia, as well as increasingly in Urban-Fiji and its diasporas. 'Performing' masi or 'acti.VA.ting' it, to use a term from Rosanna Raymond and the Pacific Sisters' lexicon, is not new in Fiji but its use in urban contemporary visual and performative arts has only been visible and supported by communities for the last two decades.<sup>69</sup>

Performance studies and performativity theory offers a critical lens to understand societies, groups and individuals, all of whom embody and enact their personal and collective identities (Schechner 2015:6). It has been developed from the hypothesis that we live in a performatised world in which cultures are influencing and colliding with each

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<sup>69</sup> 'Acti.VA.ting' is a term that was coined in response to Raymond, and the Pacific Sisters, having their cultural expressions called performances by outsiders. Raymond asserts that one does not perform their own culture, but instead activates it by enlivening their cultural history and ancestors. The capitalized 'VA' signifies the Tongan and Samoan concept of va, which considers space as active and embodied by people, relationships, reciprocity and things.

other at an increasing rate, often ending up in the hybridisation of cultural acts and practices as evidenced by globalisation and urbanisation. Performance studies is a response to the evolving global situation in which we find ourselves. It follows the line of thinking that anything can be considered ‘as’ performance, but something ‘is’ performance when ‘according to the conventions, common usages, and/or traditions of a specific culture or social unit at a given historical time, an action or event is called a “performance”’ (Schechner 2015:6). Given the fluidity of the definition of performance, how can it be defined so as to classify what it actually is? Schechner (2013:28) defines the term ‘to perform’ as being, doing, showing doing, and explaining the act of showing doing. He further characterises being as simply existing in an active or static state. Doing and showing doing are actions that are always in flux and always changing. The final category, explaining showing doing, ‘is a reflexive effort to comprehend the world of performance and the world as performance’ (Schechner 2013:28). He points to Erving Goffman’s use of the term performance as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants, who may be considered as the audience, observers or co-participants (Goffman 1959:15-16). Thus, performativity is not a single act because it is always reiterating a cultural or societal norm or a set of norms. It acquires an ‘act’ like status but at the same time conceals the characteristics that make it a repetition or reiteration of a previous form (Butler 1993:12-13).

Schechner states that a ‘performance’ can only take place as an action, interaction, or relation (2013:30). Speaking to Pacific, particularly Urbanesian and Urban-Fiji cultural practices, the act of ‘being’ is the same as the act of ‘doing’ meaning that performativity relates to both animate and inanimate things. A piece of masi or a fibre mat can be performative because of their role within society. As Schechner explains ‘To treat any object, work or product “as” performance – a painting, a novel, a shoe, or anything at all – means to investigate what the objects does, how it interacts with other objects or beings, and how it relates to other objects or beings. In relation to Pacific contemporary performances and activations, it is important to note that these are not ‘re-enactments’ of culture from the past.<sup>70</sup> Instead they are enactments of living culture, of the people who are embodying it and the living history which informs present practices.

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<sup>70</sup> Dening (1996) refers to re-enactments of history, and culture by extrapolation, in his work and observes that they tend to hallucinate the past as merely the present in fancy dress. By referring to fancy dress, he suggests that re-enactments do not hold the same cultural or societal significance that the ‘real’ event in the past did; perhaps more bluntly, it is suggested that re-enactments involve simply dressing up to re-live a ‘performance’ and do not evoke its original meaning or importance.

### ***Moana: The Rising of the Sea and Mataqali Drift***

*Moana: The Rising of the Sea*<sup>71</sup> was first performed in 2013 (6-14 December) at the University of the South Pacific's Japanese ICT Theatre. The production was performed by the Oceania Dance Theatre and Pasifika Voices (both part of the Oceania Centre for Arts, Culture and Pacific Studies). Music, song, dance, poetry and storytelling were used to explore the human dimension of climate change and the experience of being forced off one's natal land because of rising sea levels. Thirty performers told these stories through innovative choreography featuring dance styles from the Pacific nations directly affected: Kiribati, the Solomon Islands, Niue, Samoa and Fiji. Elaborate costuming utilized culturally significant materials in order to differentiate each nation's climate change story. The production gives each island country space to share its plight using its own dances, songs and language with elaborate costuming accentuating the performance.

*Mataqali Drift*, shown at the Suva Civic Centre from 12-13 December 2013 and choreographed and performed by Fijian contemporary dance group VOU, was a full-length production created to highlight Suva's conversation about traditional/contemporary and rural/urban dichotomies and the resulting cultural issues. A response to urban drift, the term 'mataqali drift' describes a reversal in the pull towards urban migration. It signals the need and the call for urban people to go back to their villages, to their land, and get in touch with their cultures. It is an instruction to water one's roots and grow from the knowledge and practices of the ancestors. The production's roots, therefore, are in VOU's multiple journeys to the different vanua of its members in which they took part in ceremonial occasions, reconnected with families and learned meke and vucu. The personal and affirming experiences felt during those journeys are reflected in the choreography performed; cultural identity and significance are translated through and into bodies and performed as contemporary dance.

In both productions, masi plays a role in situating the importance of each show's events. Masi adorns the dancers and performers and names them as 'Fijian'; masi identifies and signifies them and the stories they are telling. Yet as performers, the term 'costume' relegates the masi to a prop instead of as an agent of wrapped, contained and protected mana. *Moana: The Rising of the Sea* uses masi in two different ways. In Fiji's story, masi

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<sup>71</sup> Written and produced by Vilisoni Hereniko, choreographed by Peter Espiritu, music by Igelese Ete and cultural consultancy by Allan Alo, the production was adapted and performed again in 2015 on a European tour and at the 2016 Pacific Arts Festival in Guam.

adorns and wraps each dancer. Masi and its motifs form a protective and cultural barrier, enveloping the dancers and displaying the ability of the cloth to move with the body. Pasifika Voices support the main cast and wear masi motif printed costumes. Males wear white shirts, with the right half of the body of the shirt covered in vertical black and white masi motifs, complemented by the same on the left sleeve (figure 4.51). Their white shorts have the left leg printed with masi patterns and the right leg left plain. Female members are adorned with minimal motifs, only a single black vertical line running down the centre of white strapless dresses. Likewise, *Mataqali Drift's* dancers are wearing black costumes, the males resembling the long sulu vakatoga, and both male and female skirts have a wide strip of black and white masi motif material running vertically down the overlapping flap of the skirt (figure 4.52). The masi motif material adorning the contemporary dancers, and an isulu ni soqo adorning a village elder, *Mataqali Drift's* story and performance displays the merging together of traditional and contemporary, and the urban adaptability of performance, dance and masi. Miller (2014:130) describes the difference between rural/traditional and urban/contemporary dance in Fiji as a mindset. Traditional meke and vucu are thought of as cultural practices, while contemporary dances (or simply 'traditional' meke done in urban settings) are called performances because when taken out of a ceremonial context they are considered to lose their cultural significance. Perhaps the same sentiment, but in the opposite configuration, describes urban contemporary masi adaptability: traditional (and historical) masi use and exchange is thought of as performance, while urban contemporary masi is categorised as cultural practice. She elaborates:

Dance, be it traditional or 'contemporary', has the power to connect and tell of each other's [lives]. If offered and received with respect, meke and other dances will always have a place in the rural and city homes and communities in our modern Fiji. (Miller 2014:131)

Also applicable to masi because of its power to connect people's lives via vakaveiwekani and ceremony/status/rank, masi will remain relevant in rural and city contexts when given and received with respect. Both productions feature performance and theatrics as the central means of melding traditional and contemporary. However, while these contemporary troupes explore contemporary dance styles, choreography and ideas, masi is still being used in its traditional way. While it is being performed and presented to a public audience, in a contemporary way, masi remains as it did historically. It binds,

wraps and envelops but stops short of being something more than cultural. In his article *Fijian Dress and Body Modifications* (2010:435-443), Ewins discusses Fijian dress in only a cultural context, omitting the influence of masi and the emergence of masi couture in urban contemporary Suva (and Fiji as a whole). In the same way that he relegates Fijian adornment to cultural dress instead of exploring the dynamism of urban contemporary fashion, the above dance productions do the same with masi in that while being used in a contemporary context, its adapted mode of display (wrapping/adornment) does not differ greatly from ceremonial exchange situations.

### **Masi Maidens**

During the sixteen years artist Rosanna Raymond lived in the UK (1998-2014), she remained connected to the creative community within Auckland-based Urbanesia that she and the Pacific Sisters helped to create. She did this by bringing together creatives in London and weaving together collective stories in the UK's own Urbanesian communities. Known for her interventions in British museums where she concentrated on championing Pacific ways of seeing, being and doing, as well as her cultural reverence for Pacific textiles and fibres, Raymond's works integrate traditional imagery and knowledge with contemporary materials, communities and cultural values. In June 2013, while sitting in her Herne Hill (London) kitchen, Raymond began discussing ideas for her next work. It would be performed for the first time two months later during the opening ceremony of the 2013 Pacific Arts Association International Symposium being held at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia (Vancouver, Canada) and she wanted it to blur the boundaries between skin, ink, fabric and bodies. We began speaking about masi, siapo, mana, genealogies and the role of women in Pacific society; several hours later, the *Masi Maidens* were born.

At the core of its existence, *Masi Maidens* is an Urbanesian fusion which engages with masi, its motifs and also its materiality by way of Raymond and me activating spaces with our bodies adorned in masi motifs (figure 4.53). Not limited to Fiji, *Masi Maidens* speaks to the female wealth and power found throughout the Pacific, especially Samoa where Raymond has ancestry, in cultural practices and in material culture that has long been viewed with a Western gaze as being associated with males, because they are the ones that 'wear' them. As with Colchester's (2005:148) discussion of Natewa women's beliefs that masi making, and especially the application of motifs, holds ancestral power and meaning, *Masi Maidens* unpacks the mana of masi and 'the relationship between deities and the

living [which] is one of the points along a continuum, fused with genealogies' (Croucher and Richards 2014:212). Linear rather than dichotomous, the relationship between the ancestors and the living is evident in the colours chosen for the work, white represents the heavens and red/brown is indicative of the earth. Also a response to Western scholarship on the body, wrapping, pattern and dress, the maiden is the cloth and the cloth is the maiden. One inseparable from the other, patterns and motifs adorn the body just as cloth would adorn it, wrapping around skin – becoming the skin – and being infused with the mana of the body it envelops. 'Mana is genealogically passed from deities to people, through ancestral lines of ascent...the efficacy of mana is only realized in action and event... Moreover, the cloak [masi], and tattoos bound and wrapped the body, adding to the genealogical, symbolic, and sacred protection of the wearer during essential but hazardous transactions between people and deities' (Croucher and Richards 2014:212-213). The *Masi Maidens* are living embodiments of masi. They symbolize the wealth of the female body in time and across space and explore skin's (literal skin or a second skin) paradoxicality in that it physically contains and conceals, while also advertises and draws attention to the thing that is being concealed (Croucher and Richards 2014:212). Wrapped in motifs, the maidens are 'dressed' drawing attention to the reclamation of the Pacific female form while simultaneously attempting to counteract Western imposed stereotypes of sexuality and licentiousness in their perceived 'lack' of Western-style clothing. 'When you look at the Polynesian body, it's about genealogical matter and the shared space of the ancestors through that. Through living you enable the past to be in the present. We make these works and we activate the spark of life and activate the body' (Raymond, pers. comm. 8/11/13).

In the maidens' embodiment of masi, five motifs are used. Two on Raymond and three on me, the red maiden's motifs are distinctly Fijian while the white maiden's motifs juxtapose themselves against her already marked skin creating a conversation between cultures, genealogies and mana (figure 4.54). The seru, tusea and vutu ni drali adorn the red maiden from head to toe; wrapped around and across the body, the motifs find crevices and curves to mould themselves into. Red/brown seru complement the black vutu ni drali and tusea, the creaminess of the red maiden's skin anchors the composition. A living masi tutuki, the masi (maiden) is further adorned in a red raffia liku, vesa, wakula and a masi kuvui malo. Her contrasting white maiden is densely stencilled, with the upper half of her face the only part of her body free of motifs. White vunisei and a composite codo adorn

her body, transforming her into an intricately stencilled masi kesa resembling the great taunamu ni viti from the Yasayasamoala Group.

Photographed by Samoan artist Greg Semu at the Pacific Arts Association International Symposium, *Masi Maidens* exists in visual/digital form as a series of nine images, as well as in performative form. Activated at five events since its conception, *Masi Maidens* has been ‘performed’ in Canada, the UK, New Zealand and Fiji.

### **Canada**

On 6 August 2013, *Masi Maidens* was debuted at the Pacific Arts Association International Symposium (PAA) by activating the opening ceremony alongside a cohort of Pacific artists. Not art or performance, the act of activating is an ancestral, genealogical and cultural act, one that connects and enlivens time and space with the ancestors and people inhabiting them. At the PAA, *Masi Maidens* activated the space by creating a processional from the Pacific section of the museum’s Multiversity Galleries. Here visitors are greeted by a ‘traditionally contemporary?’ masi installation which juxtaposes an urban contemporary mannequin inspired by Tui Nadrau, wrapped and draped in layers of white masi and masi motif material, a twenty-first century sulu ni vakamau and a contemporary salusalu made of recyclable and natural materials by artist Lambert Ho (figure 4.55). The installation purposely allows visitors to see through to the other side of the glass where historical collections are displayed. Raymond and I created the installation in 2010; coming back and acknowledging the role of masi and its motifs wrapping bodies, and working with indigenous and Canadian textile artists in the days before, further developed the mana behind the characters’ activation. The processional entered the Great Hall using deliberate and synchronized movements (figure 4.56). Turning to face the crowd, the *Masi Maidens* presented themselves to their hosts, their masi bodies acting as the offering of guest to chief. Choreographed movements took place in front of George Nuku’s perspex marae frame *The World of Light* before exiting the ceremony and museum building through Nuku’s creation and past an outside assemblage of Haida mortuary poles and house.

At the conclusion of the symposium, the *Masi Maidens* in collaboration with Semu were turned into a small exhibition in the Multiversity Galleries. Semu’s photographs were used to convey the maidens as living embodiments of masi (figure 4.57). A first for the Fijian diaspora of Vancouver to witness, many of whom arrived in Vancouver in the 1960s

and have a strong yet removed cultural relationship with masi, *Masi Maidens* reawakened the performative and ancestral connections with masi.

### **United Kingdom**

After debuting the *Masi Maidens* in Canada, Raymond and I returned to the UK not imagining that the *Masi Maidens* would continue. October and November 2013 gave the *Masi Maidens* opportunities to activate two spaces, the GAFA Arts Collective's production *Gafa: A Family Called Samoa* and the exhibition *EcoCentrix: Indigenous Arts, Sustainable Practices*. Prior to these events, *Masi Maidens* was a loosely choreographed and culturally driven activation. However, at that point it became an intricately choreographed activation punctuated with spoken word. Using her Samoan ancestry, Raymond created the spoken word piece *Observational Outlooks Through the DNA of the Atua Tagaloa*. Armed with a new lexicon of words and highly stylized movements – each purposely choreographed and chosen to emit and evoke mana through action – the *Masi Maidens* was adapted for UK's Urbanesia and Urban-Fiji communities.

In *EcoCentrix* we were able to communicate the *Masi Maidens* as an exhibition within the larger exhibition. Shown in the Bargehouse on London's South Bank, the exhibition combined Semu's photography with the maidens' adornments. The images were mounted on the bare warehouse walls, accentuated by the white maiden's korowai coiled and hung as skirts are for storage in the Pacific. Around the top of the coil were her eye patch and neck adornment. At eye level, the eye patch resembled the eye of an ancestor keeping watch over the space. Spread in a circle on the ground directly underneath the white coiled cloak sat the red maiden's liku. Figuratively and literally displaying the heavens and the earth:

We wanted to literally put ourselves into the actual fabric of the exhibition as a whole by weaving through the body and opening up the space. Start looking at the skin - you can start looking at the pattern [on masi/tapa] and then start looking at the pattern on our own skin, so we tend to blur the boundaries between skin and art, and what art is. By bringing the body in, we hope we can explore and portray different aspects of these beautiful cloths that are very much the actual fabrics of our society. It is the work of women and how women partake in the wealth of villages at times of gift giving. These are our vehicles to the gods. They are our pathways to the heavens. The patterns on our skin transcend time and space and are the ways that we are allowed to partake in the past, the present and the now – they are wrapped around

the body, and wrap themselves around our bodies and are activations of mana. (Raymond and Igglesden, exhibition talk 8/11/13)

The exhibition, and the entire *EcoCentrix* exhibition, was activated by the *Masi Maidens* on 8 November 2013 (figure 4.58). As living embodiments of masi, the activation also served as a living embodiment of the *Masi Maidens* display. Julia de Rossi reviewed the performance (2013):

This transformation from visual arts installation into performance takes the audience on a journey of exploration, sharing with them what it means to be culturally and genetically linked to an indigenous ancestry. Specifically for Raymond, of Samoan descent, and for Igglesden, of Fijian ancestry...[they] choose to manifest the ceremonial cloth as full body drawings: effectively showing the creative potential of the Tapa cloth tradition working with the context of the performance as a living symbol of cultural exchange between performer and audience. I notice, however, that the elaborate patterns covering their bodies don't look like stage make-up but 'naturally' complement the performers' own Polynesian appearances. The performance, in fact, begins outside the Bargehouse and, like a religious procession, moves through every room on all four levels of the Bargehouse. For this, the performers use styled actions and sounds that at first seem like stereotypically tribal incantations. However, their specific interactions with various spaces soon change this impression. When the two performers finally arrive on the third-floor performance space, they enter from the stairwell side at the back of the large room. They break into a gliding form of goose-stepping that is perfectly synchronized. More impressive still, the contrast between Rosanna's white stringy tunic and Katrina's red-earth feathery one seem exquisitely balanced in every way: the performers are earth and sky, mammal and bird, the dark and the light. Then, in the centre of the performance space, Rosanna begins to speak like someone presenting a very personal and particular truth of her lived experience as a Polynesian woman. Her poetic language builds into an epic tone as it resonates with her stylised movements and gestures. Sometimes she uses familiar Haka gestures and at other times Katrina uses equally identifiable bird-like movements but mostly, the words and movement remain highly original.

### ***Fiji***

March 2014 saw the *Masi Maidens* travel to Fiji as an installation in the exhibition *Art and the Body: Exploring the Role of Clothing in Fiji* (see Temporary Exhibitions: Art and the Body, this chapter). Because of the theme of the exhibition and the presence of the installation in the show, the decision was made to activate it during the opening reception

on 19 March. Activating the exhibition as *Masi Maidens* was a poignant moment because it represented ‘the first time Fiji has seen this kind of contemporary art and performance using its own cultural heritage. [Aotearoa] New Zealand and Australia have performances and interventions like this all the time, but not here – it is so exciting that it is finally happening, it is about time!’ (Soro, pers. comm. 19/3/14). Although I have been using the term Urban-Fiji throughout this chapter, it is a relatively foreign idea for most Fijians – the idea that Suva represents a diaspora and that they are living in a bubble of many different regions and vanua coming together to create a microcosm of the country as a whole. Suva society is still conservative in many of its values. While masi is not questioned as an integral component of ceremonial life, its existence and significance had not before been publicly challenged (outside of being used in adapted ways such as in visual arts or fashion; see *Fabricating Fashion? in Fiji*, this chapter). Aware of the potential issues, prior to transforming into the *Masi Maidens*, I asked my family and elders permission to activate the exhibition in this way. If they had had a negative reaction to it, Raymond and I agreed that it would not be carried out. To my surprise, and great pleasure, no qualms were expressed, permission was granted, and support given.

The activation commenced on the verandah of the museum (figure 4.59). Silent and still, the *Masi Maidens* processed across the space in synchronized movement and in complete silence except for the rustling of the raffia. Wrapped and adorned in masi and masi motifs, as living embodiments of the masi that people in the audience had before either made or used or seen, the urban adaptability of the cloth and the motifs was put on display. As the white maiden began her spoken word – ‘Her skin is guiltless...that can be good to attract the gods’ – masi’s materiality, its motifs and cultural significance became part of the activation. As the spoken word closed, the activation continued through the museum’s maritime gallery, gift shop, history gallery, and finally entered the temporary exhibition space where *Art and the Body* was mounted (figure 4.60). The *Masi Maidens* paused in front of each case and acknowledged the masi displayed. Sitting on the floor in front of the *Masi Maidens* installation, the maidens presided over the gallery space while visitors viewed the exhibition for the first time. Then, something that had not occurred elsewhere, people (both Fijian and Pacific) began to sit down with the maidens. Some to have their photos taken, some to look closely at the adornments, and some to touch the motifs. Although this type of contemporary art, activation and performance was alien to many in the audience, masi and its motifs were not, and they were not afraid to touch the ‘cloth’. Masi in Fijian culture is tactile and kinetic in its use. Whether being presented, or

on a body, or being made, it is often in some kind of motion and it is always being touched or situated close to the skin. Fijian visitors knew this and touched or held these living embodiments of masi in the same way that they would masi itself. Not sexual or a form of objectification, it was almost as if they wanted to make up for the lack of connection with the masi displayed behind glass in the cases. While the red maiden was adorned in a malo, it was the motifs adorning her arms and back that hands were drawn to make contact with. The opposite of what happened during the activation and discussion at *EcoCentrix*, where attendees were hesitant to even touch the real masi, Fiji's activation demonstrated masi's continuing relevance in Urban-Fiji. Just as the body is genealogical matter and the shared space of the ancestors, so too is masi. With the end of the activation came Raymond and my disembodiment of masi and re-introduction into the opening event of the *Art and the Body* exhibition. A group of artists attending the exhibition opening and who witnessed the *Masi Maidens* activation were also participating in the *Fabricating Fashion?* workshop being held at the University of the South Pacific (18-21 March) and which opened up space for discussion on masi's materiality, its ability to be adapted and modified in its display, and significance to urban contemporary communities and artists.

### **Fabricating Fashion?**

The workshop *Fabricating Fashion? Curating and Creating Pacific Fibre Arts and Adornments* was first convened at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts (University of East Anglia, Norwich) as an output of the *Fijian Art* research project.<sup>72</sup> The two-day workshop (1-2 October 2012) was conceptualised as a means of engaging with Pacific fashion designers who would be in the UK to participate in the inaugural London Pacific Fashion Show (LFW, 5 October 2012). With three Fijian designers included in the show and nine others from New Zealand, Cook Islands, Tonga, Kiribati and Samoa, the workshop sought to bring together designers, museum professionals, academics and fibre arts enthusiasts to share skills, practices, professional experiences and reflections and weave together a community of shared understandings. While exploring the contemporary relevance of Pacific fibre arts and textiles and how they relate to the body, participants engaged in sessions led by the designers in which the body took precedence over museum care and handling. Sessions on barkcloth, weaving, patterns and fabricating led participants in conversations about masi as a means of wrapping and also the transferability of patterns

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<sup>72</sup> The workshop was organised and facilitated by Rosanna Raymond, Karen Jacobs and Katrina Igglesden.

and motifs. Masi and tapa was discussed in great detail during the workshop as a number of the designers used it in their LPFW collections.

In 2013, in association with the PAA symposium in Vancouver, a second workshop took place at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia.<sup>73</sup> Divided into two different sessions, one was convened for the museum's Native Youth Programme (NYP) and the other was for museum professionals, artists, fashion designers and textile enthusiasts. The three-day workshop was structured similarly to the 2012 workshop; employing an open space methodology the first day was spent discussing fibre, wrapping and patterns, and fashion? – the question mark intended – and the remaining two days were spent making pieces for the final artistic showcase. It was in this workshop that the Urbanesian Pacific Sister lexicon came into use. Emphasising the Pacific and its cultural heritage as living (as opposed to historical or stuck in the colonial past) we spent time doing '-tion' actions: articulation, investigation, reflection, fabrication, curation, installation, creation, and activation. The main difference between this and the first workshop was that in the UK the participants were all practitioners of some kind and therefore wanted to actively fabricate and create, but this time there were no Pacific people as participants, just the organisers. During the workshop we worked alongside participants and the motifs and adornments for the *Masi Maidens* were fabricated.

### ***Fabricating Fashion? in Fiji***

*Fabricating Fashion?*'s third and most comprehensive workshop took place at the Oceania Centre for Arts, Culture and Pacific Studies (OCACPS) at the University of the South Pacific's Suva campus from 18-21 March 2014 (figure 4.61). During the four-day workshop, participants discussed and challenged how textiles relate to the body, how they are cared for/displayed and how they can coexist within themselves as animated beings on the body, as statements made in the fashion and performance world and also as objects in (museum) collections. With access to a wide range of materials from the Suva Flea Market, notions of curation, conservation, cultural heritage and the role that fashion and art plays in each of these was explored while testing and teasing out strands of the lexicon that had been previously adopted. Sessions took place focusing on articulating, fabricating and activating, which had been conceived in the 2013 workshop, with the first day spent

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<sup>73</sup> The 2013 workshop was organised by Raymond, Bethany Matai Edmonds (Maori) and Katrina Igglesden. Funded by the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, it was supported by museum curators Dr Carol E. Mayer and Dr Jill Baird.

discussing wrapping/patterns, fibre, and fashion, and the remaining three days spent making artworks before the final showcase/activation took place on the evening of the final day. With an abundance of fibres, textiles, masi and other natural resources, participants were able to learn about materials they may have been unfamiliar with, try working with them, and also use as much or as little of them as they wished. During the ‘articulating’ phase of the four days, Raymond, Jacobs and I again led sessions on wrapping, fibres, and fashion. After the fibre discussion finished, Miriama Makadre led a demonstration on salusalu making, showing techniques used to plait fibres and flowers together. Ellen Whippy-Knight of Fiji Fashion Week Ltd, which sponsored the materials for the workshop, gave a talk about Fiji’s fashion industry after the fashion? session. The wrapping session focused solely on masi, specifically examples of nineteenth century pieces and the motifs found in museum collections in Fiji and around the world. While there was not a pre-planned masi demonstration, an interactive discussion ensued in which participants engaged with several pieces of masi and talked further about its use and its significance in their own lives; ‘This is the first time in my life that I have seen masi stencilling. I feel like I understand and get its importance so much more now and I will have a greater appreciation when I use it in my designs’ (Wye, pers. comm. 18/3/14). While one of the participants, masi maker Mataivou Talebula, spoke of her experiences, she led an impromptu stencilling demonstration to show the process she followed while doing kesakesa (figure 4.62): [My sister] and I, we work together. When we do the kesakesa, I do the black and she does the red. We always work as a team, just like our mothers and grandmothers did. It’s just how we like to do it’ (Talebula, pers. comm. 18/3/14).

In total, the workshop welcomed nineteen participants ranging from academics, students, artists, fashion designers, dancers, weavers, jewellery makers and masi makers.<sup>74</sup> The open space methodology technique used in the workshop, which initially scared OCACPS and the university because of its lack of rigidity and formalized structure, allowed participants to work at their own speed, come together for engagement and discussion when needed and also work with one another to share and exchange skills (figure 4.63). The most successful aspect of the workshop, it encouraged sharing at a level

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<sup>74</sup> Participants were: Raijieli Fotofili, Mataivou Talebula, Louise Davis, Kamla Naidu, Tomasi Domomate, Harieta Vilisoni, Johanna Beasley, Epele Tuibeqa, Aisea Konrote, Benji Patel, Selai Buasala, Anton Conway Wye, Sarah Hemstock, Hupfeld Hoerder, Lambert Ho, Sanjesh Chand, Christopher Yee, Tevita Tiko and Melanie van Olffen.

that the participants hadn't been allowed before. Talebula's stencilling demonstration inspired a number of the participants to work with masi. Some, like Sanjesh Chand worked with masi for the first time while others, such as Anton Conway Wye, used masi combined with raffia to create a couture gown. Sarah Hemstock learned in one day to talitali (weave) from Raijieli Fotofili and created pair of entirely woven trousers, aptly named 'Pure Pandanus - Carbon Neutral Trousers' as her showcase piece.

The showcase on the final night, sponsored by the British High Commission Suva, was a public event attended by Suva's arts community and invited guests (figure 4.64). Each of the participants created something to present – whether it be an outfit, spoken word, dance, performance – and while each of the resulting artworks was unique, the collaborative energy was palpable when they were all assembled. Masi and its motifs featured heavily throughout the evening, beginning with artist Kamla Naidu. Her artist statement (21/3/14) reads:

The dress is designed using traditional masi and voivoi [pandanus leaves] which are the major traditional elements not only in Fiji but all over the Pacific Islands. The outfit represents a beautiful ladies' gown decorated and using colourful painted masi, patterns made of magimagi and inlaid with shell. The printed fabric designs frilled at the bottom of the dress takes us back to those days when tattoos were used as clothing on a female body to represent the different stages of her life such as turning into an adult. The dress is again accompanied by the beautiful headdress made of vau [hibiscus] and beautiful painted masi folded into flowers. The dress, though modern in design, carries all the necessary traditional elements that represents Fiji and the Fijians.

Selai Buasala created complementary male and female masi attire, deviating from the traditional three-piece isulu ni soqo on the male's outfit. Fusing contemporary and traditional in her creations (figure 4.65), she makes the distinction of only using masi motifs on the traditional attire worn by model Loata. Epeli, her male model, is adorned in a masi liku; however, it is void of motifs and instead adorned with shells and magimagi.

Three of the OCACPS resident visual artists joined together to create works as a team. Called C-TideS (Christopher Yee, Tevita Tiko, and Sanjesh Chand), they fabricated two works made from masi (figure 4.66):

Masi is a traditional object used specifically for special occasions worn, hung, or spread on top of mats. Masi is as important as whales' tooth (tabua) in the Fijian custom and tradition.

The designs on masi are commonly used and are in one or two colours. We create new ideas in using different colours and in not using the ordinary designs. We have designed a [pair of] overalls and a liku instead. We think we can create a different perspective using masi to ignite a pathway to younger generations to up their game in the fashion industry. The technique we used is similar to masi printing with a minor adjustment in using acrylic paint instead of the ordinary paint used on masi. The different colours signify the different ethnic groups and the multi-diversified world we live in. Sawing [cutting up] different pieces painted with different colours ends up forming one whole piece which is the overall. What we have come to believe is, fashion is one main pathway that brings to view different cultures and ethnic groups to allow us to appreciate and share different ideas making one great world of art and fashion. The materials we used signify that we are Fijians. We picked masi to be our main material because many plants will make one whole piece of masi to be printed, and as reason for mentioning different artistic views or cultural backgrounds or ethnic groups, if combined you will create a great masterpiece to celebrate like you have seen today. What we have made here are two outfits by three new artists at the Oceania Centre. (artist statement, 21/3/14)

A fellow OCACPS visual artist, Tomasi Domomate worked alongside C-TideS and stencilled and designed a masi crop top and a 'liku modelled by Ren Slatter. This week I learned that a mini-skirt is not just a nowadays fashion. It is actually a traditional fashion' (artist statement, 21/3/14; figure 4.67). Accompanying Slatter on stage adorned in masi armbands and malo, Domomate's torso was also adorned with masi motifs. Anton Conway Wye and Hupfeld Hoerder showcased masi couture gowns. Hoerder's gown was a bodice and full skirt. The corset-style bodice was made of white masi and decorated using masi flowers made by Hoerder. Embellished with an elaborate headpiece, Hoerder's work was complemented by a black gown whose bodice was woven from voivoi and accented with his signature gold designs. Wye, inspired by his multi-ethnic ancestry, used materials representative of each (figure 4.68):

Culture and tradition have always been a motivation and an inspiration for me. With what may seem 'flat' to the eye of the beholder, fashion – to me – depicts nothing else but pure glamour, ultra-chicness and importantly culture and tradition. Inspired by my rich mixture of Chinese, Fijian and European, this ensemble of Fijian masi and raffia tells it all. Red in the raffia is for my Chinese heritage. Masi is for my Fijian heritage. Peplums for my European heritage. (artist statement, 21/3/14)

Although not featured in the showcase, visual artist and designer Lambert Ho's participation in the workshop was instrumental during the first day's sessions. While talking about wrapping, masi, fibres and fashion, Ho discussed his use of masi in his artistic practice. Adapting traditional cultural heritage to express urban contemporary Fijian issues is Ho's primary method of conceptualisation and creation. As one of Fiji's first contemporary visual artists to use masi as a canvas, he creates works using mainly sustainable, natural and culturally relevant materials. Ho also contributed to *Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific* at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts (see *Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific*, this chapter); not shown in the exhibition but listed in the catalogue, his commissioned contemporary salusalu combined materials from different regions of Fiji used to represent his journey in the twelve months before the exhibition opening (figure 4.69):

I always like to collect things everywhere I go. You never know what will become part of a piece or a painting. When I was sailing on the Uto-ni-Yalo last year making the trip to New Zealand to deliver the cocoa beans, I just kept anything I could find and now I am using them to make this garland for your exhibition. Instead of vau, I used masi to make the framework of the salusalu. The masi is from Kadavu – which is my island – and Vatulele. I got the voivoi [pandanus] from Lomaiviti, and I picked the shells from the Yasawas. (Ho, pers. comm. 3/8/16)

Its volume and depth are reminiscent of garlands made of fresh leaves and flowers instead of the urban contemporary salusalu found throughout the market place in Suva. Artistic, and at the same time an ethnographic combination of components of garlands from across Fiji, the salusalu provided an insight into Urban-Fiji and its contemporary art scene.

In April 2017 Ho began creating a series of works using masi not as a canvas but as an integral part of his art. The first, entitled *Lady In Masi*, featured recycled masi on wood with acrylics and inks (figure 4.70). An indigenous Fijian woman sits in the centre of the artwork in a three-quarter profile position looking directly at its viewer and her entire body has been constructed out of masi. Her skin is white masi peeled from the back layers of a large piece of cloth. Because masi is beaten and felted together, depending on the fineness of the cloth, the layers can be separated from one another. Appropriate because both masi and skin can be peeled to reveal new layers, masi's use as the lady's skin is a poignant reminder of masi's role as a skin or second skin in Fijian and Pacific cultural practices. Her

buiniga (Fijian hairstyle) is made from cut-out vutu ni drali, layered upon one another giving her hair depth and shaped by cut-out vetau strips. On her head, only her eyes are painted, her eyebrows, nose, lips and facial outline are all shaped pieces of masi kesa. Ho cleverly groups together masi motifs in each section of the artwork with vua ni vono, vetau and sore ni iwi making up the imposing Elizabethan-style collar of the lady's dress, vucu ni tadruku coming down her front, and seru outlining her shoulders. The only introduced colour comes on the body of the lady; gold, grey and copper abstract shapes complement accents of the (coloured) vucu ni tadruku masi motif. The space around the lady is blue, gold and copper with sporadic masi vutu ni drali pieces appearing on the right side of the work.

The third in Ho's series, *My Name In Your Mouth* (2017; figure 4.71), again depicts an indigenous Fijian woman. Softer in style and feel and more natural than *Lady In Masi*, *My Name In Your Mouth's* woman is facing front with her head slightly tilted to one side and arms at her sides. Created using recycled masi on wood with acrylics, her face and torso are thin pieces of white masi layered to create a skin-like effect. The only features she has on her face are cut-out lips, black against the creamy white of her skin. Her buiniga is made up of individually cut-out seru motifs and their application on the work creates a natural uneven texture where hairline meets skin. She wears a vutu ni drali tekiteki in her proper left ear, the same motif that is used for her salusalu draping over her acrylic painted chest and resting on her white masi torso. The bottom of the work shows the top of a vucu ni tadruku and draudrau motif liku, curved to match the natural lines of the hips. Unusual for Ho and his artistic practice, *My Name In Your Mouth* also depicts a poem, written by Ho as inspiration during the fabrication process of this piece. Beginning on her neck, travelling down to her breasts and across her upper arms, its presence on the artwork signals the importance of both words and images on skin and as skin.

Two strong portraits, *Lady In Masi* and *My Name In Your Mouth*<sup>75</sup> bring new thought to masi's identity as a woman's product and female valuable. Here, masi is anthropomorphised; masi is the woman, and the woman is masi. They are inseparable. Both artworks evoke the importance of females through masi, from masi's inherent relationship with procreation and fertility and the body (Colchester 1999:62; 2005:148) to

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<sup>75</sup> *Lady in Masi* was purchased in 2017 by a private collector as one of the founding pieces of the new National Gallery of Contemporary Art's collection. The National Gallery of Contemporary Art is proposed to open in 2020. *My Name In Your Mouth* was presented as a gift to me by Ho on 16 April 2017.

‘the crucial role of women throughout the life of an individual...marked at life crises with wrapping, enclosing and separating by means of cloth and mats’ (Hooper 1995:162).

### **SaVAge K’lub**

Founded in January 2010 by Rosanna Raymond while creating works at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia,<sup>76</sup> the *SaVAge K’lub* (figure 4.72) is a response to nineteenth century gentleman’s clubs found across the Commonwealth. Called Savage Clubs, the first was founded in London in 1857 and has its headquarters at the National Liberal Club in Whitehall, there are club chapters in the UK, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa. A male only club, notable members have included J.M Barrie, Dylan Thomas and several members of the British Royal family, one being His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh. Allegedly, the name ‘savage’ was chosen because the founding members did not want the club to be portrayed as pretentious and thought that the term ‘savage’ would evoke a modest perception. A founding member of the club considered the name to be a good choice for the men because ‘we can all call ourselves Savages because we are outside the pale of civilisation’ (Watson 1907:19), implying that people outside of European society were uncivilised and barbaric. Ironically, given the name of the club, only European men were allowed to become ‘Savages’. Club rooms were decorated with indigenous material culture, including kitsch and exploitative objects, and photographs of indigenous people and places. Monthly dinners took place in which European men would take turns dressing up in indigenous regalia, acting out skits and ‘to keep up our character of ‘Savages’ we sedulously practiced a shrill shriek or war-whoop [in a wigwam]’ (Watson 1907:21). The Savage Club room in the National Liberal Club is still decorated in this way, and it is the continued existence of the Savage Club that spurred Raymond’s *SaVAge K’lub*: ‘if you can’t join them, well then, you just start your own!’ (Raymond, pers. comm. 20/11/15).

Raymond’s *SaVAge K’lub* eschews the gendered elitist conventions of the European Savage Club and challenges cultural stereotypes by adapting the name of her club to reflect the Samoan philosophy of ‘va’, the understanding of space as active and activated by people, relationships, reciprocity and things, instead of being passive and inactive. Va is

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<sup>76</sup> In January 2010, Raymond was a visiting artist at the Museum of Anthropology creating works for the contemporary art exhibition *Border Zones*. While there, Raymond found an invitation addressed to Frank Burnett (collector of the museum’s founding collection, which included Fijian material) to attend a meeting of the Vancouver Savage Club on 20 December 1923.

central to the *SaVAge K'lub*, which since its creation has been activated in multiple venues throughout the world. Va creates a context wherein living dynamics are embodied, allowing a true engagement with the past in the now. With its first 'meeting' held in Vancouver on 26 January 2010,<sup>77</sup> Raymond's *SaVAge K'lub* began as a presentation of South Sea SaVAgery in the twenty-first century. Challenging colonial constructions, it influences 'art and culture through the interfacing of time and space, deploying weavers of words, rare anecdotalists, myth makers, hip shakers, navigators, red faces, fabricators, activators [and] installators to institute non-cannibalistic cognitive consumption of the other' (SaVAge Kunst 2015:12; Lythberg 2016:15). It has grown to be an open group of artists - 'membership is fluid, inclusive, semi-automatic – if you have to ask, you're not a SaVAge' (Lythberg 2016:15) - who collectively activate spaces and places and fabricate and create using self-adornment and the body as genealogical matter to communicate social commentary, histories and express the new visual landscape of urban indigeneity - of Urbanesia. Such creations can take effect in diverse geographical and dialogical spaces and are then carried out into the world by the body of the person. By combining historical objects and artworks with contemporary responses and new artworks, performances and spoken word, the *SaVAge K'lub* is intensely participatory in nature. Artworks and objects – especially textiles and fibres, the 'second skins' of Pacific culture – become part of the life of the community, adorn K'lub members, and take the 'display' beyond the confines of a museum exhibit. Raymond's fusion of artistic practice, open space ethos and the power to challenge increasingly antiquated ways of displaying and seeing has instructed the *SaVAge K'lub's* evolution:

Without the living dynamic what you see in [a space] are just inanimate objects. I'm a true believer in having a living dynamic and I've seen it and I've felt it and smelled it when the living reconnect with these Taonga. That's where you get, I mean, it's not magic, but it inspires people to be creative themselves. It is very different than when you are just staring into a case. That has been my issue with many exhibitions. If you just have a gallery, a bit of glass and objects - for me when the artists come in we help transcend that barrier and we take the art out of the space and back into the streets, and then off it goes again in another little cycle. (Jacobs and Raymond 2009:130)

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<sup>77</sup> At the meeting, her first act was to invite Larry Grant, the chief of the Musqueam people (the indigenous owners of the land on which the Museum of Anthropology sits), as the honoured guest. He responded with a poignant speech on the notion of the savage and its implications for life in this century.

Constantly developing, the *SaVAge K'lub* is an open space in which people, relationships and collaboration is at the centre; 'one of the core elements of the *SaVAge K'lub* is to share knowledge and skills to help to encourage the development of arts and culture, through the collaborative process' (Raymond 2015). A microcosm of Urbanesia, – and Urban-Fiji – the *SaVAge K'lub* brings together urban Pacific communities for 'meetings' in different places. As mentioned above, several have occurred since the its origins in 2010, but two will be explored here for their inclusion of masi and masi-related art works.

### ***Aotearoa SaVAge K'lub Meeting***

The *SaVAge K'lub*'s first official members 'meeting' outside of the UK, the Aotearoa New Zealand meeting took place on 7 March 2014 in the galleries of the *Fa'amanaia* exhibition at Auckland's Art Station.<sup>78</sup> Meaning 'to adorn' in Samoan, *Fa'amanaia* examined the concept of adornment and what it means to different people, places and things – as clothing, as the spaces we inhabit, as the simple acts of living and breathing, and as the specific motions and movements in a cultural dance and practice. All are forms of adornment. As a contributor to the exhibition, Raymond used the opportunity to collaborate with local singers, dancers, poets and writers as a means of meeting new artists and strengthening existing connections with others. The *SaVAge K'lub*'s meeting focused on tautoko-ing (Maori; supporting) the exhibition through using words and the body to adorn the show. Hosting a series of interventions throughout the exhibition space, SaVAgers adorned themselves in regalia to showcase their individual talents within the collective effort.

This meeting of the *SaVAge K'lub* was different to those preceding it because it was held in the Pacific and attended by a largely Pacific audience. Not only did K'lub members who were activating the space come adorned in regalia and with cultural practices to share, audience members (who were technically not audience members but active participants in the experience) did as well. Samoan matai and academic Albert Refiti arrived adorned in fronds and carrying coconut oil. As he encountered each SaVAge for the first time, he anointed our hands with oil and greeted us. With that single act, even had we not been beforehand, we were adorned.

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<sup>78</sup> Although it was formed in Canada in 2010, the first organised meetings of *the SaVAge K'lub* did not take place until 2012 in the UK.

Two Fijian artists joined the *SaVAge K'lub* for the meeting. Daren Kamali, a poet, delivered a spoken word piece while adorned in masi and masi pieces. An integral component of his performance, the masi pieces were themselves adorned with words, speaking their mana and sau into the space. Called 'Fa'amanaia Reads Red for Blood' and reading from a masi scroll, Kamali spoke to Samoan goddess Nafanua (portrayed by Raymond in an exhibition installation), intermixing his Fijian heritage with her Samoan ancestry. Born of a bloodclot and buried in the earth, Nafanua 'hangs from the ceiling / Upeti patterns / Reflecting shadows on vulavula canvas' (Kamali, spoken word 7/3/14).

Mereula Buliruarua, an Aotearoa New Zealand-trained Fijian dancer who had just returned from an internship with VOU and performing in *Mataqali Drift*, combined spoken word and Fijian meke choreography to explore how traditional and contemporary intersect in her life. Deeply connected to culture and family while living away from Fiji, Buliruarua's work was evocative of the pull between vanua and diaspora, a rural generation and an urban one. As a means of displaying and presenting her familial support and power, she was adorned in masi kesa during her activation. Buliruarua wore not a traditional three-piece isulu ni soqo, but a full floor-length masi skirt and a masi crop top (figure 4.73). However, on closer inspection, she was indeed wearing the components of the isulu, just in an adapted way. Not tailored and sewn, Buliruarua used folding, wrapping and tying to secure her adornments. The isulu (underskirt) was used as the bottom half of her attire, wrapped around her waist and gathered in the back creating a small bustle nad train. The delana (overskirt) piece of the isulu ni soqo was transformed into the bodice of her outfit, wrapped around her bust before tying the tails at her back and then placing them over each shoulder so that the motifs modestly covered the majority of her chest. When helping her dress for the meeting, I asked her why she chose masi to adorn herself:

Masi is a part of any Fijian person's life, especially us Fijians in Aotearoa because we are so separated from home. Because it is so important in our cultural gatherings and in things like weddings, I wanted to wear it and have it with me during my first performance doing spoken word. It will keep me safe. I am so nervous! And being here with so many other Pacific Islanders and Maori, the designs on my masi will instantly tell people that I am Fijian – they will know I am before even looking at my face...from far away, they will see the masi, the kesakesa, and they will know that I am Fijian. That makes me proud. (Buliruarua, 7/3/14)

The masi and its motifs covered and concealed her, but also demonstrated the urban masi corpus. From Savusavu, Vanua Levu, where there is no masi-making centre, her masi was

stencilled with large and spaced out motifs, not from one place but from various different masi-making hubs. While it is possible that her masi kesa was stencilled in Aotearoa New Zealand, and not Fiji, it is more likely that it was purchased in Suva. The urban corpus demonstrates the notion that perhaps decorating surfaces with shared common designs helps to identify their cultural significance and when using those designs on extended surfaces that the designs themselves were as (if not more) significant than the object on which they are found (Lau 2010:281). Prominently featured on her bare stomach was a painted black cross. Symbolising Christianity, it resonated in her activation as an important part of her family life and recalled examples of masi stencilled with Christian crosses. At the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, masi bolabola from Cakaudrove (Z 3862)<sup>79</sup> shows white crosses on the border of the cloth. Labelled as Tui Cakau's train, the presence of crosses on masi worn by a chief suggests the introduced (and enduring) importance of Christianity in Fijian culture. Buliruarua's black cross can be seen as an extension of this importance and moment in history; her skin an extension of the masi adorning her, motifs painted on her body were no different than those decorating the cloth.

The *Masi Maidens* also activated the space at the *SaVAge K'lub* meeting. Its first activation in the Pacific, coming ten days before the activation in Fiji, *Masi Maidens* adapted to its surroundings and became an altered version of itself. The red maiden still existed with her malo, motifs and red feathery raffia, yet without her cowrie shell mouth and neck adornments. However, the white maiden morphed into the black maiden using her own marks to transform her into a living embodiment of the social fabric of her life in Auckland (figure 4.74). A patchwork of cultures and ancestry, the black maiden was adorned in long flowing black raffia and a leather biker's vest fastened into place by a short black liku overskirt. Truly reminiscent of Auckland and the Urbanesian community in which the meeting took place, the black maiden and her biker vest paid homage to the Mongrel Mob and the proud celebration of its multiculturalism and diversity (Raymond 2003:197). In activating the space, the *Masi Maidens* were surrounded by other Urbanesians (figure 4.75) who, like during *Fabricating Fashion?*, actively shared one another's actions and practices during the ceremony. After Kamali had finished his activation, he and his masi adornments took up residence at the yaqona bowl and extended the collective activation to partake in yaqona with other SaVAges. The *Masi Maidens*

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<sup>79</sup> Collected by Sir Arthur Gordon, first colonial Governor of Fiji, it was presented to him by Tui Cakau at Waikava, Vanua Levu, during the Great Council of Chiefs meeting in 1876.

shared yaqona with Kamali and Buliruarua, subconsciously completing the context of exchange that would also be enacted during ceremonial meetings and exchanges.

### ***SaVAge K'lub at APT8***

The eighth edition of the Asia Pacific Triennale of Contemporary Art (APT8) opened on 20 November 2015 and ran until 10 April 2016 at Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA). As one of APT8's contributing artists, Raymond was invited to take the *SaVAge K'lub* to Brisbane. APT8 allowed the *SaVAge K'lub* to become a physical space, the first time that this had happened, and it allowed for collaboration not only with 'creative natives'<sup>80</sup> but also with Pacific institutions and organisations such as the Queensland Museum (from which historical objects were borrowed) and the Auckland Savage Club (who hold a painting by club member G.P. Nerli in 1897 called 'The Savage Chief', a portrait of a European posing as a Maori standing bare to the waist in a warrior's pose). The K'lubroom's (figure 4.76) inspiration came from the nineteenth century meetings room of various Savage Clubs; in it, historical savagery and cultural heritage met twenty-first century saVAgery and taonga activated by different communities, including K'lub members. From the doorway of the room, straight in front of the visitor was a Victorian display case filled with K'lub members' personal and handmade taonga (Maori; treasures). Tongue-in-cheek labels on the taonga in the case saw them classified as historical taonga relegated as static collections would have been; however, SaVAges in the K'lub room had keys to the cases and were able to engage with the taonga, reclaiming them from the confines of glass and adorning ourselves and others in them. Cook Islander/Canadian interdisciplinary artist Numangatini Mackenzie wrapped the walls of the room in Urbanesian graffiti, except for one in which Eric Bridgeman's geometric Waghi wallpaper created from the patterns on traditional Papua New Guinea shields was applied. Positioned in the middle of Bridgeman's wallpaper was Nerli's painting complemented by *SaVAge K'lub* member portraits; the portraits faced a screen playing two looping films of K'lub members, both shot by Salvador Brown. The vividly colourful and dynamic

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<sup>80</sup> *SaVAge K'lub* at APT8 was represented by the following artists: Margaret Aull, Jess Holly Bates, Eric Bridgeman, Salvador Brown, Emine Burke, Precious Clark, Croc Coulter, Lisa Fa'alafi, Charlotte Graham, Mark James Hamilton, Katrina Igglesden, Jimmy Kouratoras, Numangatini MacKenzie, Ani O'Neill, Maryann Talia Pau, Tahiarrii Pariente, Aroha Rawson, Rosanna Raymond, Reina and Molana Sutton, David Siliga Setoga, Grace Taylor, Niwhai Tupaea, Suzanne and Rameka Tamaki, and Jo Walsh.

collaborations of creatives were juxtaposed by layers of historical black, white and red/brown masi and tapa hanging from each corner. Sixteen pieces in total, they were hung from the ceiling to evoke the white masi that was hung from the rafters of bure kalou as a means of communicating with the gods. Conduits of our ancestors, the masi symbolised and evoked the continuum between ancestors and the living. Reflective of the nineteenth century preoccupation with collecting intricately patterned and stencilled masi – instead of white masi – all of the Fijian masi (not all of the tapa) represented in the K’lubroom was Cakaudrove masi (figure 4.77). Sought after and collected for its bold motifs and associations with powerful chiefdoms, Cakaudrove masi is not easily accessible in Urbanesia and Urban-Fiji and provided a sense of historical grandeur and a reference to the collecting fever of the nineteenth century. In each of its corners, the K’lubroom’s masi pennants swayed in the breeze of bodies moving through the space.

As part of the opening weekend festivities, the SaVAge K’lubroom was opened to the public with a series of activations, performances and spoken word. Raymond’s *Back Hand Maiden* presided over the K’lubroom addressing the crowd with impromptu rhetoric regarding hers and the other SaVAges’ state of ‘dress’, or lack thereof, which concerned QAGOMA’s management. As the first APT which concentrated on prioritising the body and performance in its theme, it was ironic that the Deputy Director of Collections and Exhibitions would take issue and, thus, reinforce the very stereotypes and misconceptions that APT was trying to challenge.<sup>81</sup> Of all of the materials wrapping, adorning, enrobing and disrobing the SaVAge’s that night, *Back Hand Maiden*’s regalia had recently been remade and the original Victorian tapa dress retired. During the opening evening Raymond was dressed by Tamaki and Graham in *Back Hand Maiden* (2.0), while I adorned her head with large white hibiscus flowers. Going from hanging as a display in front of one of the layered masi corners (figure 4.78), to adorning a living and breathing body, *Back Hand Maiden* came alive when the masi dress was fastened down Raymond’s back. Special to this research, *Back Hand Maiden* (2.0) is significant because she was fabricated from masi presented by me to Raymond as an offering of thanks for being hosted at her Herne Hill Home in 2014. As guest presenting host with a masi offering, the notion of ceremonial

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<sup>81</sup> Raymond was not the only artist to be confronted by APT/QAGOMA management regarding body, dress and nudity issues. Julia Mage’au Gray also faced hostility and was reprimanded for her contribution’s costuming and adornments. QAGOMA management took issue with female breasts being visible, as well as both male and female bottoms. The reasoning given was that APT8 was a family venue and that children would be put at ill ease if confronted with ‘unclothed’ body parts; however, from personal experience being there, all children who encountered the space and ‘bodies’ were completely unaffected – it was the adults who took issue.

exchange and performance keeps being returned to. Aware of the significance of masi being gifted, Raymond wanted to use it for her gown and approached me in early 2015:

Because of masi's cultural significance and connection to our atua and ancestors, I want to use it to replace *Back Hand Maiden* [who was slowly falling apart] and create a frock from it. Please can I? Don't be upset – she will be regalia and will be infused with mana because of how you gifted it to me. (Raymond, pers. comm. 2/4/15)

Densely stencilled masi kesa (as opposed to the gatu vakatoga which comprised the first *Back Hand Maiden* frock), Raymond fabricated the gown to feature a stencilled bodice with a white full skirt and sleeves. Open at the back from the waist down, one of the defining contributions to the name *Back Hand Maiden*, the skirt showed off Raymond's marks and tatau on the back of her legs and her bottom. The white skirt and sleeves were created by turning the masi around and having the motifs inside the dress instead of on the outside. Motifs presented to the public, as well as to the body, signified the concealing of mana and also the concealing of cultural heritage. The motifs hidden from view are almost more important than those outwardly adorning the body because they forged relationships with the body, with the skin and created conversations between Raymond's Samoan malu and Fijian draudrau. By showing motifs on the outside, it automatically drew attention to what was hidden on the inside (Croucher and Richards 2014:212).

Regalia, frocks and adornment are not easily activated or enlivened without the body, or a 'body' of some kind, an issue that Raymond had to consider when all of the SaVAgEs had left the K'lubroom. Aside from the opening and closing weekends, K'lub members would not be present in the space to interact with visitors and the treasures in the room. Both an artwork and a remedy to this issue, the moving image series *Bark Waka Bodies* played on the large screen in the K'lubroom for the first half of APT8 before a video of the opening weekend was debuted (see figure 4.76). Shot and directed by SaVAge K'lub member Salvador Brown, and conceptualised by Raymond, *Bark Waka Bodies* was originally commissioned in 2014 by Markus Schindlbeck for the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin-Dahlem (Germany), the moving image series focuses on masi and siapo patterns and designs and their association with the body. The video shows floor-to-ceiling constantly in motion projections of historical masi and siapo chosen from the Ethnologische Museum's collection dancing on a white backdrop. Three characters are

introduced to the viewers and are portrayed by Raymond, Samoan Siliga Sani Muliaumaseali'i and me; each adorned in our own personal masi and siapo, a loosely choreographed routine is guided by the original score and enhances the effects of real masi wrapped around the body, masi patterns projected on skin and historical motifs projected onto and mixing with contemporary ones (figure 4.79). Here, the separation of motifs from masi, from its surface of origin and extended onto other surfaces, and intermingling with patterns on masi 'worked together, in clusters, to reinforce social distinctions within a larger totality' (Lau 2010:281). For the *SaVAge K'lub*, that larger totality was Urbanesia; for Fijians, the totality is Urban-Fiji and the identity which masi provides. Like Buliruarua's feelings of masi being instantly recognisable by those in the larger (Pacific) community because of the designs applied (from the urban corpus), *Bark Waka Bodies* removes the barriers imposed by concepts such as the museum, ethnography, past, present and differentiation, and speaks to the importance of the body (literal and metaphorical bodies, such as vessels or waka) and its ability to engage with what superficially appear as merely just patterns or fabrics or frocks. The lack of staticity, yet feeling of stillness in the moving image series indicates the living aspect of our motifs, bodies, and cultures as well as the role that masi plays in the dynamism of Fijian and Pacific lives.

### **Fashion Events and Beauty Pageants**

Returning to the Fijian fashion industry, while the performance and theatricality of masi in fashion has already been discussed in chapter 3, fashion shows should also be counted as a modified mode of display. Although ceremonial exchanges and solevu have a long history in Fijian society, they are not public events held in spaces where spectators pay money to watch the 'show'. They are attended by those who belong to one 'side' or another, which is usually dictated by kinship links, and people are participants whether they play an active role in the event or not. Fashion shows bring certain elements of solevu presentation, especially with regard to masi couture, to a new level of urban contemporary adaptability because they are open to all of Urban-Fiji to attend and not restricted to indigenous membership, in which only certain groups are in attendance at a given time. And although performance and theatricality is not a new invention when displaying masi, the methods in which it is displayed and performed are new. Thus, creative adaptability is a cornerstone of Urban-Fiji in Fiji. While not yet on the same par in diasporic Urban-Fiji, it is slowly reaching it with Pacific and Fijian fashion being showcased in fashion events in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, the United States and the UK, particularly London.

### ***Fashion Shows***

Masi couture and masi fashion are processed and paraded up and down the catwalk in Fijian fashion shows year after year, but they are also accompanied by elements that enhance fashion as a mode of masi display. In 2012, Fiji Fashion Week's (FJFW) first show of the season called 'Echoes of the Pacific' opened with a performance by the Oceania Dance Theatre and Pasifika Voices. Adorned in tapa from across the Pacific (figure 4.80), including gatu vakaviti from Moce, the singers and dancers set the tone of the evening, imbuing the catwalk (and the audience) with the mana of their masi and their performance. A theatrical production in its own right, 'Echoes of the Pacific' was designed to be more than a mere fashion show. It was a fusion of fashion, song, dance and a showcase of the region's passion for culture. Although FJFW curated its 2012 fashion week to keep all of the 'culture' together in one show and separate from their definition of mainstream culture, when presenting their first show they showcased a cultural extravaganza of old mixed with new, of traditional and contemporary and bright bold prints which evoked the rich and dynamic cultures of the Pacific. Although difficult in that the decision to pigeonhole the Pacific into one category removed it from being categorised as couture, and instead labelled cultural dress, Whippy-Knight considered having a 'Pacific wear' evening a strength of FJFW:

Each year the Pacific show is a category in one of the days at FJFW. Suva is the hub of the Pacific, and who better in the region to take on the role of pulling the frontiers of fashion to the islands. Our Pacific fashion is unique, it is colourful, it is loud, it is proud, it is bold, it is beautiful and is quite unlike anything else offered at the fashion week events in other parts of the world. In planning 2012, we were mindful, that like the character and spirit of our islands, Tribe Echoes of the Pacific needed to be a celebration of not just fashion but also of our cultures so the Oceania Center was the natural partner to make that happen with. (Whippy Knight, interview 18/3/14)

In its later years, FJFW has given designers free rein to curate and choreograph their segments. Epeli Tuibeqa (Kuiviti Couture) regularly includes a performative element in his line. Adorned in masi himself, he enters the catwalk to perform a meke fused with contemporary dance. A long-standing member of the Oceania Dance Theatre, Tuibeqa performed wrapped and concealed in masi during FJFW and Los Angeles Fashion Week in 2015 and again at FJFW in 2017 (figure 4.81). Combining fashion, especially masi

couture, and meke recalls solevu gatherings; as Thomson described in his 1908 manuscript *The Fijians: A Study of the Decay of Custom*, meke interrupted the masi presentations and masi wrapped meke dancers were performers in the choreographed ballet that he viewed (1908:283-284). Adi Koila Ganilau Lee paid homage to her maternal and paternal lineages at FJFW 2017 in her opening segment, taking fashion and interlacing it with meke and vucu to ‘bring value to [her] skills and craft [as well as] to our culture and heritage...Having this mandate from the vanua and my ancestors, I will make all Fijians proud’ (pers. comm. 26/4/17). Collaborating with Master Lai Veikoso,<sup>82</sup> Ganilau Lee’s Cakaudrove masi motifs were supported by masi-wrapped and -adorned singers and dancers. The Bottega Fijian Fashion Festival’s (BFFF) 2019 solo shows also allowed designers greater control over the curation of their collections. Samson Lee (Samson Lee Fiji) and Su Samuels (Lavalani Designs) both showcased elaborate masi couture gowns alongside mainstream fashion collections. Lee’s show took place inside the Grand Pacific Hotel and created an atmosphere of a lounge, where singers serenaded the audience with Fijian songs. Subtle compared to overt displays of culture, Lee let the masi tell its own story, but used popular Fijian music to provide an urban, contemporary and relevant ambience. Samuels employed dancers from AUE Dance Company to introduce the masi couture portion of her show. Prior to the first piece of couture entering the catwalk, the dancers laid out mats and masi for the models to take their first steps on. As masi can act as a pathway for high-ranking members of society, here the masi couture was the high-ranking object and was being treated with cultural reverence and decorum found in village and ceremonial settings but in an urban contemporary context.

### ***Beauty Pageants***

An alternative to fashion shows, beauty pageants in Fiji have gained popularity in the last few decades. With a festival and associated beauty pageant in almost every large town or city, the following crown Kings, Queens, Princes and Princesses: Bula Festival (Miss Bula), Sugar Festival (Lady Sugar), Sinu Carnival (Miss Nasinu), Festival of the Friendly North (Miss Labasa), Coral Coast Festival (Miss Coral Coast), and the Hibiscus Festival (Miss Suva, formerly Miss Hibiscus, and Adi Senikau). Fiji is also home to the Miss World Fiji Pageant, who sends its winner to the Miss World competition. The Hibiscus Festival, founded in 1956 and held every August in various venues around Suva, is Fiji’s

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<sup>82</sup> Master Lai is the Director of the Fiji Conservatorium of Music (established in 2008) as well as master of the meke group Kabu ni Vanua.

longest running festival (figure 4.82). While the variety of different festivals are not of relevance to this work, what is relevant are the designated categories that each beauty pageant conducts in order to judge the contestants. The traditional attire category – called the *Bogi ni iTaukei* – at the Hibiscus Festival, has contestants compete in couture gowns and outfits made from traditional and culturally significant materials. The most popular of the materials is *masi*. *Masi* couture is worn by contestants of all ethnicities. In Fiji's beauty pageants, one needs not be of indigenous Fijian ancestry in order to wear the attire. At the Hibiscus Festival in 2018, six out of the eight contestants were adorned in *masi*. The other two chose *voivoi* couture gowns. Fiji's fashion designers create elaborate *masi* couture for these occasions, more elaborate than seen on the catwalk of Fiji's fashion shows (figures 4.83 and 4.84).

Processed and paraded in the same way that takes place on a catwalk, *masi* couture again mimics the presentation of *masi* during a ceremonial exchange. However, with beauty pageants, the comparison stops there. It is not about the cultural significance of presenting, giving, receiving and distributing. Instead *masi* couture becomes a superficial casualty to the theatricality of the performance. *Masi* and its motifs are not valued culturally when used in beauty pageants in which Fiji competes on a global level. It is slightly different for smaller regional pageants around Fiji because the *masi* still resonates with significance as it is wrapped around contestants. However, when competing in Miss World Fiji, for example, *masi* become a national identifier rather than a cultural one (figure 4.85).

This chapter has provided many examples of contemporary *masi* use, both for cultural and for national purposes. The exploration of 'Urban-Fiji', the premise that urban Suva is just as much of a diaspora of Fijian people as those global Fijian diasporic communities, is significant to issues surrounding being 'Fijian'. Displaying an Urban-Fiji identity through *masi*, and its increasingly modified and adapted modes of display, includes exploring the notion of the materiality, or physicality, of *masi* and the significance of *masi*'s designs and motifs. Cultural and national identity is being increasingly displayed using graphic representations of *masi* motifs; they are used nationally and internationally, sending messages to Fijians and non-Fijians alike about Fijian identity. This presentation of Fijian identity is largely controlled by Fiji citizens of various ethnic backgrounds. This contrasts with some other places, such as North America, where identity markers such as totem poles and feather headdresses are often used indiscriminately by those who have no connection to First Nations communities. The modern urban use of *masi* is part of its

dynamic historical trajectory, although who has the right to use masi and masi designs in modern contexts is not always straightforward, as will be shown in the next chapter when considerations of copyright come into play.

## 5 Global Pathways: Masi on the World Stage

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In this chapter, masi's global footprint will be explored by looking at the international attention that it has been given in recent years. Beginning immediately post-independence, one of the first instances of global interest occurred in 1971 when the UK and US editions of Vogue magazine published editorial spreads featuring masi. Released in May 1971, Vogue UK photographer David Bailey shot model Ingrid Boutling in Korolevu walking beside a bati (warrior) adorned in masi (figure 5.01). However, it was Vogue US which brought attention to masi as fashion when in January that year it published photographer J.P. Zachariasen and model Gunilla Lindblad's images from the Matutu-Natadola Festival. Dressed in several different outfits, Lindblad wears masi-motif printed clothing – in particular, one by Scott Barrie for Barrie Sport and another by Donald Brooks, with the masi-motif print 'designed' by Gilbert Frank. Frank's print features motifs from a number of Fiji's masi making regions, but its overall appearance is reminiscent of the Vatulele style because of the large size of the motifs, as well as their spacing and composition on the material. Unusual though, is the inclusion of distinctly Cakaudrove style motifs in Frank's design (figures 5.02-5.04).<sup>83</sup> Showcasing Fiji's culture and new 'independent' national identity, the Vogue photoshoots introduced and pushed Fiji's national reputation to a new and more widespread audience. Brought out of the Vogue archives and shared with Vogue's current readership in 2015, Archive Editor Laird Borrelli-Persson described Lindblad's look as 'haute hippie' – it is a grass roots bohemian style 'for those who liked the look [of culture] but didn't necessarily want to live the tribal lifestyle' (2015).

Roughly forty years after the Vogue editorials were published, masi's global pathway has become less naïve and more complex, especially when cultural boundaries appear to have been crossed. The following pages will present two case studies and reflect on masi motifs in a global arena and engage with notions of indigenous ownership (Brown 1998, 2003; Pigliasco 2010), both in Fiji and in Fiji's diasporic communities. The question then arises as to what has made these two incidents significant, when there was already a

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<sup>83</sup> As discussed elsewhere in this thesis (see chapters 1,4), it is rare to see distinctly Cakaudrove motifs represented on masi available for urban consumption or in fashion designs, unless the designer has familial ties to the province.

history of appropriation of masi motifs, such as that seen in the Vogue example above, which did not cause controversy at the time?

### **Case 1 – Fiji Airways (2012-2013)**

An official statement issued by Fiji Airways in 2012 read: ‘Fiji Airways was the name of the airline between 1951 and 1970. The name was changed to Air Pacific in 1970 to reflect its greatly expanded regional presence. The new move will see the airline more closely aligned with its proud Fijian heritage and its role as Fiji’s largest inbound and outbound airline. Returning to Fiji Airways will better reflect our role as Fiji’s national carrier, and...so it only makes sense for us to embrace our uniquely Fijian culture and spirit, characteristics which have seen Fiji consistently recognised by consumers as one of the world’s friendliest countries and no doubt helped us win a recent award as one of the top ten small airlines in the world’. Fiji Airways (2012a)

#### ***The rebranding of Fiji’s national airline***

In May 2012, Air Pacific Limited introduced an initiative to restructure the airline’s corporate organisation and strategic plan intended to reverse previous financial deficits and revitalise its global image. As Fiji’s national airline, a key feature of the new initiative was to rebrand the carrier, with the view that such a decision would better connect the airline to its overall business model, its people and its culture (Fiji Airways 2012a). Thus, it was announced that Air Pacific would revert back to its 1951 founding name of Fiji Airways, a name which would ‘see the airline more closely aligned with its proud Fijian heritage and its role as Fiji’s largest inbound and outbound airline’ (Fiji Airways 2012a).<sup>84</sup> Along with other logistical adjustments such as revising flight schedules and improving customer experience, in August of the same year the airline revealed a description detailing the origins of its new brandmark. With the new logo set to be shown on aircraft beginning in mid-2013, the final phase of the multi-year rebranding scheme was to be completed by the end of that calendar year. Markedly different from Air Pacific’s branding of a yellow, orange, red and blue striped tail livery (figure 5.05), which was designed to promote the airline’s connection to and presence throughout the Pacific region, the new brandmark for Fiji Airways was chosen as a means to distinguish Fiji as a nation separate from its

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<sup>84</sup> Although Fiji Airways did not begin trading under that name until the middle of 2013, for continuity and ease of understanding, the airline will be referred to as Fiji Airways from this point forward, including when referencing published press material.

position in the South Pacific (figure 5.06), and to strengthen its international presence in airports around the world (Fiji Airways 2012a).

Conceptualising a new brandmark for the airline required originality, as an already well-known name with much history coming back into use necessitated a new and recognisably Fijian symbol that would best represent the country and its future (Fiji Airways 2012b). The new logo commissioned by the airline was a single and newly created masi kesa design.<sup>85</sup> The teteva, at the centre of the livery (figure 5.07), was ‘designed to represent spirituality, consideration of others, [and] Fijian hospitality...[and] all that is unique about the airline and the Fijian experience’ (Fiji Airways 2012b). Citing masi making as a highly respected and uniquely Fijian art form which has been practised for several centuries, along with requiring its new brandmark be a distinctive Fijian symbol, the airline explained that they carefully chose masi and its manufacture after observing the respect it was given when conducting a research visit in the outer Mamanuca Islands off the west coast of Viti Levu. Seeking to develop a new visual language via the brandmark, Fiji Airways selected and commissioned masi artist Makereta Matemosi to create a piece of masi kesa which featured a striking central design with complementary motifs bordering it (figures 5.08-5.09). Fiji Airways announced (2012b):

Designed by a renowned local Fijian Masi artist, the new symbol in the brandmark brings Fiji’s culture and heritage to life by linking the name ‘Fiji Airways’ with this highly respected and traditional art form...To create this distinctive Fijian symbol, the airline carefully selected celebrated local Fijian Masi artist, Makereta Matemosi, who has been practicing this uniquely Fijian art for 32 years - to create a unique Masi design for Fiji Airways.

Matemosi, who was born on Namuka Island in Lau but was a resident of the settlement of Namuka-i-Lau near Suva, was chosen by Fiji Airways because of her involvement in the 2004 book *Fijian Masi: An Ancient Art in the New Millennium* by Spicer and Me. On its cover is a detailed image of a piece of masi that Matemosi designed and made (figure 5.10); perhaps uncoincidentally, the central motif on the cover of the book is a vutu (rosette/flower) motif, which is also what the teteva is. Once made aware of the book and Matemosi, Fiji Airways sought her out. In the carrier’s 8 August 2012 press release, Matemosi was reported to have stated: ‘What I’ve created is something entirely

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<sup>85</sup> All masi referred to in this chapter is *masi kesa*, and because of its frequent mentioning, will hereafter be referred to as masi.

different, and it has never been seen in any of the Masi designs in Fiji...I hope this Masi symbol means a lot to our nation, our people, and our visitors, because we are proud of our country and proud of the new “Fiji Airways” (Fiji Airways 2012b). In further statements attributed to Matemosi, it was revealed that each aspect of the central teteva design acted as an important component of its overall significance, each specifically created to imbue and connect the airline with distinct characteristics of tradition and culture:

The outer circle with the four crosses at four corners indicated interconnection – just as Fiji Airways connected people to the Fiji Islands. The inner circle reflected the spiritual values of the Fijian people – denoting a culture of caring and looking after each other as a community – just as the airline cared about its nation and strove to improve the quality of life for its people. The middle section of the masi with sixteen petal shapes reflected people working hand-in-hand to create a stronger nation, just as the men and women of Fiji Airways worked as a team to create a stronger airline. The smaller circle on the inside reflected the Fijians’ friendly and welcoming nature to all visitors, and the airline’s role as Fiji’s proud ambassador to the world. Finally... the innermost part of the teteva or centrepiece featured a diamond, which was the most important part of the logo as it represented the love that the airline had for Fiji and all the customers it was privileged to serve. (Chaudhary 2012)

Though attributed to Matemosi, it was difficult to decipher from the *Fiji Times* article whether or not these interpretations were her own words. They followed a quote about the originality and uniqueness of the teteva and the airline by then managing director and CEO David Pflieger. Instead of highlighting the cultural importance of masi making and design, or referencing cultural practices and significances, Matemosi’s descriptions could be read as emphasising the purported importance of the airline to Fijian people. In other words, the descriptions read as strictly commercial and aspirational – prose generated for marketing purposes. Additionally, she was not directly quoted as she was elsewhere by Chaudhary in the newspaper article, so the piece could have been written by Fiji Airways to capitalise on Matemosi’s authentic indigeneity and thus masi’s cultural significance, rather than to promote her own expertise and authority as a masi artist.

Unveiled to the public on 10 October 2012, Fiji’s 42<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of independence from Britain, the livery and interior design of the aircraft received wide approval from communities in Fiji as well as from global audiences (Creedy 2012). It featured a traditional colour scheme of red/brown, black and white, three colours which are distinctive factors in many facets of Fijian culture. Showcasing the central teteva masi

design on the aircraft's tail, four individual motifs created by Matemosi were also introduced as components of the airline's interior and exterior design scheme (figure 5.11). On the fuselage, tail fin and jet engines were motifs called makare and rova. Inside the aircraft, pillows and blankets as well the fabric on the economy-class seats were to be adorned with designs Matemosi entitled qalitoka and kaso (Clark 2012). Like the teteva, all four of these motifs had meanings attributed to them – reportedly by the artist. Makare was said to represent 'clear water flowing on a classic white sandy beach', rova to signify a 'welcome occasion for a visitor to visit a village', qalitoka to symbolise the 'unity of people to one mindset in executing a given task', and kaso represented a 'canoe which carries villagers, farmers, fisherm[e]n and carpenters together for the success of the villages' (Pacific Islands Intellectual Property Services 2013b:3-4). These translations are suggestive and intentionally uplifting interpretations of the precise meanings of these terms. For example, kaso means the cross booms linking the hull to the outrigger of a canoe, not the hull itself, which is the buoyant part of the canoe which actually supports those on board.

Subsequently, high national and international praise was bestowed upon Fiji Airways for its commitment to honouring Fijian culture in its endeavour to become more culturally attuned and responsible. The decision to commission a Fijian artist to create a landmark for a Fijian company was commended and a reinvigorated sense of Fijian cultural identity was accorded to the company. As a result, the airline's goal of creating a flying cultural billboard, 'Fiji's flying ambassador to the world' (Fiji Airways 2012b), became a source of pride within the nation. Matemosi's teteva represented a symbol of Fijian culture that was recognisable, yet cutting edge, and traditionally relevant in contemporary Fiji. Then Permanent Secretary for the Fijian Government's Ministry of Public Enterprises, Tourism and Communications, Elizabeth Powell, was reported in a magazine as saying that the masi design on the plane was a source of joy for Fijians and that 'The fact that the design is authentically ours and proudly tribal is a matter of great pride...' (Lee 2013).

### ***Makereta Matemosi – masi artist***

Born and raised on the island of Namuka in the Lau Group of eastern Fiji, at the time of being commissioned to create the Fiji Airways masi, Matemosi had been producing masi for over three decades and had become a celebrated artist while living in the Namuka-i-Lau settlement of Veisari, Lami, outside of Suva. Matemosi was one of many Lauan islanders who have left the outer islands to reside in urban Suva in order to find better

opportunities. Matemosi was quoted as saying that she learned masi making ‘from my village and I use the knowledge to practice this art form or to create new, distinctive and original designs which belong to me’ (Pacific Islands Intellectual Property Services 2013b:2). Working with both traditional Lauan kesakesa motifs as well as contemporary adaptations of traditional designs, these more contemporary versions have often been commissioned by commercial corporations in Fiji, as well as by collectors or art dealers in other parts of the world. In a newspaper article, her daughter Koto was reported as saying that as an artist Matemosi valued the tradition established in the art form and imparted the knowledge of masi making to her daughters (Koto and Ilisapeci), as her mother had done to her (Nasiko & Moceiwai 2015). Although making contemporary pieces, she concentrated on using two design components that were typical of Lauan masi in her pieces: a flower pattern and straight-edged designs. To produce pieces of masi for sale, Matemosi used between twenty-four to twenty-eight different stencils (Spicer & Me 2004:63). Intricately layering the different shapes and patterns, the recognisable designs known to be Fijian masi motifs emerged to create finished compositions.

### ***Masi motifs: Trademarks and reactions***

On 25 January 2013, the Pacific Islands Intellectual Property Services<sup>86</sup> issued fifteen advertisements in several of the country’s newspapers, one being the *Fiji Times*. The adverts gave public notice of Fiji Airways’ application to register individual masi motifs as trademarks, which would give the airline legal ownership of them (figure 5.12). The application, ranging from numbers 732/2012 to 761/2012, was filed under the Republic of Fiji’s Trade Marks Act (Cap. 240) and concerned the masi designs created by Matemosi the previous year. Each motif was being registered as a trademark under two classifications: class 38 which encompassed cabin crew and sales agent attire and promotional merchandise (‘clothing; footwear; headgear; uniforms’), and class 39 which covered printed paper materials (figure 5.13), including:

Paper, cardboard and goods made from these materials, not included in other classes; printed matter; printed publications; books; magazines; in-flight magazines; catalogues; calendars; guides; pamphlets; brochures; newsletters; passport holders; bookbinding material; photographs; stationery; tickets; baggage tags; instructional and teaching material (other than

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<sup>86</sup> The intellectual property division of Suva law firm Siwatibau and Sloan Barristers and Solicitors.

apparatus); industrial packaging containers of paper; plastic materials for packaging (not included in other classes) in class 39. (*Fiji Times*, 25 January 2013, pp.46-47)

Until this date, while it was public knowledge that Matemosi had been commissioned to design an exclusive piece of masi for the airline, there had not been any indication from Fiji Airways that it would take measures to obtain legal ownership and rights over the designs she produced. Although several of Matemosi's individual motifs had been underscored as key components of the airline's rebranding and new brandmark in press releases and during promotional events the previous year, the remaining eleven designs had been largely ignored, save from presenting them as elements of the overall piece of masi. The teteva, which was created as the central symbol of the airline's new image, was not advertised with the fifteen motifs nor had it been publicly advertised to be trademarked at any time prior to that. The designs undergoing application were as follows: kaova, boi yawa, kaso, kali, teguvi, qalitoka, al [ai?] vato, makare, droe, qalivanua, rova, su-ni-lolo, yavuyavu, uga and tama. A formal period of objection was announced beginning on the day of public notification. In accordance with the Trade Marks Act (Cap 240), any formal opposition raised in regard to the application had to be filed in writing within three months and was to be lodged with the Administrator General of the Fiji Trade Marks Office located in Suvavou House in Suva.

In the following days and weeks, negative reactions to Fiji Airways' trademark application surfaced. Popular support shown to and for the airline and Matemosi in 2012 began to waver as informal opposition views were voiced. While the decision by Fiji Airways to use a traditional Fijian art form and promote it through recognising the work of a local artist continued to be commended, the action of applying for ownership of cultural property was questioned:

We strongly urge Fiji Airways to withdraw their application, and urge the Administrator of [Trade Marks] to dismiss their application if it is not withdrawn. We also urge relevant authorities to create public awareness on this issue which will dissuade other entities from attempting to corporatize public and cultural designs. (*Fiji Women's Rights Movement* 2013)

The questions raised came from different levels of Fijian society. Group representatives from rural areas challenged the claim that Matemosi's designs were original. Indigenous Fijian members of society in urban areas such as Suva, Nadi and

Lautoka raised concerns regarding the lack of engagement between the airline and Fijian people, while large organisations and companies also made formal objections. Local and rural level concerns were heard when an article published by the *Fiji Times* on 10 February 2013 focused on masi producing women in the province of Cakaudrove and the fear they expressed that they may be at risk of losing the ability to continue making masi if the trademarks were imposed. Rawalai (2013) reported that members of the Soqosoqo Vakamarama of Cakaudrove claimed that the airline's 'new' designs infringed informal (and unwritten) rights of design use because several of Matemosi's motifs contained designs which were believed by them to be sacred to Cakaudrove. It was stated that such designs, referred to as masi bola ni Cakaudrove, were used by women of the province to identify their masi as distinctively from Cakaudrove. Soqosoqo president Dimitimiti Lewenilovo stated, 'We are worried as once this is officially patented, we cannot use most of these designs and it is the sacred identification of the vanua of Cakaudrove' (Rawalai 2013). Two of the designs being referred to by Lewenilovo were named walu and ceva in Cakaudrove, and resembled those called kaso and droe, respectively, by Fiji Airways and Matemosi (figure 5.14). Lewenilovo elaborated:

We have seen it on the newly designed logo of the airline company and this is a concern since these are designs that are ours alone, something that has been part of our identity and we have never been approached or consulted by the company that now lays claim over it. The ceva design consists of the four triangles whose apexes meet at the centre to form a square and is a native bola design of Cakaudrove, which is widely used in Fiji. The walu design which is portrayed as a long block of triangles...usually of black and white colours [and] is [also] being patented here which is a worry. (Rawalai 2013)

Reactions to Fiji Airways' application did not only affect rural masi makers. Urban makers and vendors had opinions about the matter as well. Makers were less vocal on the subject, though they initially expressed concern about the effect trademarking might have on their livelihood (Rayawa, interview 3/2/13). However, quietly continuing work as normal and not becoming stressed by the situation filled their days. Rayawa explained that 'making masi has been part of the Fijian way of life for hundreds of years and it will take more than a big company to stop me from doing it!' (interview 3/2/13). In contrast, vendors – particularly Indo-Fijian male vendors – used the international coverage of the situation to their advantage when cruise ships visited Suva. One day, while simultaneously

conducting fieldwork and looking for masi to purchase for the *Fijian Art* research project's first exhibition in 2013,<sup>87</sup> I watched Harry Prasad, owner of stall 56 in Suva's Government Handicraft Centre, successfully spend a day convincing groups of American tourists that because of Fiji Airways' application to trademark Matemosi's newly created designs, the practice of masi making would be extinct within the year because women would no longer be able to use any of the fifteen contested motifs. 'You'll never be able to buy these again!' (Prasad, interview 4/2/13). The clear implication was that they should purchase masi while they could, and at whatever price it was available, before the application was approved and masi making ceased forever. Bombarded by requests from numerous stalls trying to get my attention, I explained that along with doing research, I also wanted to buy large quantities of table mat-sized masi to be sold in Cambridge in the gift shop of a museum where a big exhibition was being held. I was told that masi would soon be disappearing forever and that I could only buy it at inflated prices because no more stock would be coming in. Approximately three weeks later, I saw Prasad again at his stall where he had even more masi than he had earlier in the month. When asked why he was telling tourists (and others) stories about masi disappearing, he replied that he told 'the stories which will get me the most money – there are a lot of people selling, so I have to make my story the best!' Because of this he said he regarded himself a good businessman (Prasad, interview 4/2/13).

The potential illegality of using these traditional designs on masi, whether for sale or personal use, created a concern that was voiced not only by Soqosoqo Vakamarama members in Cakaudrove and by makers/vendors in urban markets, but by cultural and social activists. In mid-February 2013, Manoa Rasigatale called for parties involved with the trademarking application to work with the vanua to find an amicable solution to issues being raised.<sup>88</sup> Calling motifs and designs vakamata, he agreed with Matemosi and Fiji Airways that each individual motif had a story behind it, but that the stories showed traditional links between villages and provinces (Vuibau 2013). Therefore, it was the responsibility of the airline to consult with masi-making regions, the vanua, in order to

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<sup>87</sup> *Chiefs & Governors: Art and Power in Fiji* was held at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, from 7 June 2013 to 19 April 2014. Curated by Dr Anita Herle and Dr Lucie Carreau, the main focus of the exhibition was the period 1875-1880 and the relationships forged between Fiji's early colonial administration and Fijian chiefs.

<sup>88</sup> Rasigatale, from the island of Kadavu, is well known throughout Fiji for his knowledge of Fijian culture and tradition. He is the founder and former director of the Arts Village Cultural Centre in Pacific Harbour. The Arts Village was created as a means to disseminate information about Fijian culture to both tourists and the local Fijian population.

smooth over issues that had arisen, whether it was establishing an agreement between Fiji Airways and the vanua or was an arrangement guaranteeing payment for using designs that belonged to them.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, due to the airline being a Fijian company using what they deemed a distinctly Fijian art form and design, Rasigatale called for the airline to follow the proper traditional channels of acquiring the permission needed to move forward with the final stages of their rebranding initiative (Vuibau 2013). Organisations and businesses also raised opposition to Fiji Airways' motives concerning its brandmark. The Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) was particularly vocal in its objection to an implied infringement of women's rights and the discrimination against women resulting from potential direct and indirect economic, cultural and social risks involved in 'such an illegal and unethical trademark system'. In addition, the FWRM executive director Virisila Buadromo declared that the airline's attempt to trademark cultural designs was also in direct violation of numerous articles set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Fiji Women's Rights Movement 2013).

During the three-month period during which objections could be lodged, social media websites such as Facebook were utilised to raise awareness of Fiji Airways' attempt to trademark the masi designs. While many pages and groups were created, both nationally and internationally, two of them grew quickly and became the main avenues to learn about, rally against and/or attempt to enact change in the growing trademarking issue. A page called 'Na Noda Masi [Our Masi] – do not TM our cultural heritage' (figure 5.15) and a group entitled 'Stop Air Pacific Stealing Traditional Pacific Masi Motifs' were created on 29 January 2013 and maintained by Pax Viti ['Fiji Peace'], an anonymous individual living in Suva. 'Na Noda Masi' focused on raising awareness of the significance of masi making and the role of masi in Fiji, evidencing this significance by providing historical documentation as well as obtaining statements of support from prominent members of Fijian society, local artists and Western scholars. The administrator of the page also created a list of frequently asked questions which supplied general knowledge about masi and provided templates of objection/opposition letters, encouraging letters to be sent to Members of Parliament, government officials and Fiji Airways executives via the addresses provided on the page. Along with encouraging supporters to file formal

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<sup>89</sup> Vanua is defined by Capell (1980:255) as being a land, place or region. Vanua can also refer to the people of a place, or chiefdom, the keepers of the land. As in the meaning implied here, people who share values, beliefs and common ways of doing things. The concept of vanua is intrinsic to the Fijian way of life (Ravuvu 1983:76; see also Hooper 2016: 85-88).

objections to the Administrator General, and having a following of several thousand people, the ‘Na Noda Masi’ administrator created an online petition addressed to the Prime Minister of Fiji, The Hon. Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama. The petition requested that Bainimarama’s government put an end to the airline’s application. Like the informal objections of more rural areas, the petition (and petitioners) supported the use of masi and its designs as the brandmark for Fiji Airways, yet opposed the notion of trademarking them.

### ***Formal objections to Fiji Airways’ trademark application***

By the time the three-month objection period had ended on 21 April, it was confirmed that five formal objections had been lodged with the Registrar of Trade Marks, four of which were made known to the public. All of the objections were filed by companies, institutions and/or organisations: the University of the South Pacific, the Fiji Museum, the iTaukei Affairs Board (by the Permanent Secretary on behalf of the Moce Tikina Council) and the Institute of Indigenous Studies at Fiji National University. While the objections took different forms, for example the University of the South Pacific’s complaint took the form of an academic paper whereas the Fiji Museum opted to write a letter, their contents largely corroborated each other.

The authors of objections filed by the University of the South Pacific, Fiji Museum and the iTaukei Affairs Board (on behalf of the Moce Tikina Council) all argued a similar point: that Matemosi’s designs strongly resembled those documented via the oral histories of the Moce Tikina Council and the fieldwork on the island of Moce Island by Dutch scholar Simon Kooijman in the 1970s.<sup>90</sup> The University of the South Pacific’s submission which was authored by Cresantia Frances Koya Vaka’uta (2013), alongside Seni Nabou and Dr Akinisi Kedrayate (Dean of Arts), it provided information on the importance of masi in numerous aspects of Fijian life and culture, as well as illustrating photographic evidence of each individual design that the objecting party believed was derived from a traditional motif. Those which they did not solely attribute to Moce (Kooijman 1977) were also given a Cakaudrove provenance (Kooijman 1972:375-79; Neich & Pendergrast 1997). The basis of Koya Vaka’uta’s paper was that although all masi designs can be considered

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<sup>90</sup> See chapter 1 for a description of the masi motifs Kooijman recorded during his fieldwork on Moce. Moce is a close neighbour of Namuka in Lau, with much intermarriage between clans. They have recognisably different design styles, with Namuka’s being more dense and detailed, with greater use of black.

unique, the knowledge that Matemosi combined in certain motifs to create new ones endangers those components from being utilised in the future:

The production of bark cloth is a common shared heritage art across the Pacific Islands. Processes, motifs and uses are also markedly similar across these cultural communities. The fifteen kesakesa designs identified by Air Pacific/Fiji Airways for trademarking is part of a long history of cultural knowledge and closed sacred heritage skills specific to women from specific communities and clans. If the airline were to be allowed to trademark these designs, this would affect the cultural economy in ways that would ultimately lead to culture loss.

(Koya Vaka'uta 2013:15)

To conclude the objection, she highlighted the growing numbers of art forms which employed traditional masi motifs, ranging from traditional crafts such as carving and mat plaiting to contemporary tattooing, visual and performance art and fashion.

Fiji Museum's objection letter, written by museum director Sagale Buadromo and dated 12 February 2013, focused not only on the impact which trademarking cultural property would have to Fiji and Fijians but also to the Pacific region as a whole. It stated that due to migrations during the peopling of the Pacific and subsequent regional voyages, such patterns and designs travelled, adapted and evolved depending on the time period and geographic region. She asserted:

Such motifs cannot be used and controlled solely by any corporate body, government, or other institutions as a trademark or logo; it is a part of a living and dynamic culture which is still being modified, adapted, used and continually evolving as an identity mark...Unfortunately, skills such as masi making have already disappeared in parts of the Pacific and, for the sake of our thriving Fijian cultural identity; it cannot happen here in Fiji where the method in which we decorate masi is unique. Fijian masi is the only type found in the world in which stencils are used, making it an endemic phenomenon, which has the potential to disappear if such motifs are no longer available to be used. (Buadromo 2013)

The final section of the Fiji Museum's two-page letter compared, in list form, the fifteen contested Fiji Airways masi designs with those found on Moce Island. Complementary to the University of the South Pacific's objection, the Fiji Museum also noted that many of Matemosi's commissioned designs featured a combination of two to three well-known Moce Island designs which had been documented by scholars and in

research conducted by past and current Fiji Museum staff members. In considering the four motifs originally unveiled by Fiji Airways in 2012, Fiji Museum identified the following:

Makare is the Moce motif called seru taba i dua

Rova is a combination of the two Moce motifs kamiki and veitauqaqa

Qalitoka is a modified combination of two Moce designs, daimani and kubunitova

Kaso is a modified version of the Moce design called kamiki

While the iTaukei Affairs Board (on behalf of the Moce Tikina Council) made an announcement regarding their opposition to Fiji Airways allegedly using Moce motifs, authored by then Permanent Secretary Savenaca Kaunisela, they did not make the precise contents of their objection public, nor did the Institute of Indigenous Studies at Fiji National University. By the time all of the objections were processed, it was one month after the objection deadline had passed. It was announced by the Registrar of the Trade Marks Office, Mr S.K. Seeto, that Fiji Airways had 21 days in which to prepare and file their counter statements, making the last day to present them 24 June 2013 (Fiji Intellectual Property Office 2013a). All of the complainants were listed on the announcement; with only four present, it was confirmed that the fifth (previously unknown) complainant had formally withdrawn their complaint.

### ***Fiji Airways' counter statement and supporting documents***

On 11 June 2013, Fiji Airways applied for an extension to file their counter statement. The Trade Marks Office granted their request and extended the lodging period for one month until 24 July (Fiji Intellectual Property Office 2013a). During that period, to create further national and international awareness of the situation, the University of the South Pacific objection team began to work in partnership with the 'Na Noda Masi' Facebook page. It was through the Facebook page that, on 26 July 2013, followers were provided with an official document from the Pacific Islands Intellectual Property Services stating that Fiji Airways had been granted a second and final extension to submit their counter statement (Fiji Intellectual Property Office 2013b). Approved by Attorney-General of Fiji and Acting Administrator General of the Trade Marks Office, The Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Fiji Airways was given an additional two months, until 24 September, to proceed with the objection process. Finally, on 23 September 2013, Fiji Airways countered the formal objections made against them. In their counter statements to the University of the South

Pacific and the iTaukei Affairs Board (on behalf of the Moce Tikina Council),<sup>91</sup> two significant documents that pertained to Matemosi being commissioned and the finished masi product were released by the Solicitor General of Fiji: the first was the Artist's Commissioning Agreement and the second was the Statutory Declaration of Makereta Matemosi.

Acting as supplementary evidence for the airline, the Artist's Commissioning Agreement was signed between Fiji Airways and Matemosi on 12 January 2012. Highly prescriptive, the document was very transparent in what it wanted and expected from the exercise of working with Matemosi. It gave background information of the work being created, guidelines on aesthetic expectations of the produced work and a schedule of completion. It also outlined nine contractual items on which both parties were to agree, including commission to be paid to the artist. However, further information on this was left out of the counter statement documents (while 'Schedule 2' is listed as being part of the agreement, the document provided by the Solicitor General finishes with 'Schedule 1') except when mentioned in item no. 4 of the contract. It stated that upon any form of remuneration for the commission, Matemosi had to assign all rights to the work to the airline, to consent and authorise Fiji Airways to reproduce, exhibit and edit her intellectual property (which includes to 'photograph and/or record the Artist's image, voice, video and name') and agree to 'not reproduce all or any relevant part of the Work for any purpose without written consent of [Fiji Airways]' (Pacific Islands Intellectual Property Services 2012:1). It appears that by signing the agreement Matemosi relinquished all rights to her intellectual and cultural property in relation to this masi and indirectly to her masi making art form. In addition, Matemosi was required to agree to make herself available at any time to create and execute any further pieces for the airline 'without any reasonable delay' (Pacific Islands Intellectual Property Services 2012:2). By the agreement, she was also obligated to act as:

A brand ambassador until such time that either party provides 30 days notice to the other wishing to cease such services. Services required may include, but are not limited to participation in interviews, public relations, media and promotional opportunities and attendance at events, for the purpose of education and promotion about the Work, the [Fiji

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<sup>91</sup> Counter Statements issued to the Fiji Museum and the Institute of Indigenous Studies at Fiji National University were not made public.

Airways] brand and the masi craft, for an annual retainer fee for such services. (Pacific Islands Intellectual Property Services 2012:2)

The remaining five pages of the agreement detailed unusually precise instructions for creating the iconic Fiji Airways piece of masi, including multiple renderings of the desired design composition. The overarching briefing for the commission was:

The work involves creating an original traditional Fijian Masi, which reflects Fiji's culturally and naturally rich environment. The artwork should welcome a visitor to Fiji with a sense of warmth, earthiness, intimacy and spiritual feeling. The Masi will need to feature a distinctive and unique symbol as a centrepiece along with a range of border motifs which welcome, but also tell the story of Fiji's diversity and natural beauty, the warmth and culture of the local Fijians and the experience of discovery and connection when travelling. (Pacific Islands Intellectual Property Services 2012:3)

On the following page, it was reiterated that the centre of the masi had to feature a circular motif which represented a unique abstract design and carried multiple meanings: 'The Masi will need to feature a distinctive circular symbol at the centre, which is recognizably Fijian, exotic, handmade and authentic' (Pacific Islands Intellectual Property Services 2012:4). Further, 'These meanings may be inspired by a variety of Fijian experiences such as the welcome garland, Tagimoucia, the islands, kava bowl, hawkbill sea turtle...It may capture all of these aspects or just a couple' (Pacific Islands Intellectual Property Services 2012:4). The airline required that the symbol be balanced, symmetrical, abstract (for example, not a naturalistic flower design) and incorporate triangles where possible. The illustrated example given of the ideal centrepiece symbol is the exact motif of Matemosi's that is on the cover of Spicer and Me's book. Surrounding border motifs, of which there were to be fifteen, had to be highly detailed and their meaning needed to support the overall story of the masi. Examples of existing masi motifs used in certain masi making regions were provided using illustrations – examples that were all listed as part of Matemosi's repertoire in *Fijian Masi* - and it was demonstrated how they could be interpreted as components of three key themes: natural beauty, culture/my home and travel experience. There had to be five motifs represented by each theme and each had to have its own meaning, which reflected the theme (Pacific Islands Intellectual Property Services 2012:6). It is not clear who the design advisers for Fiji Airways were; not in the public

domain, it is possible that design advisers were actively guiding the process prioritising corporate objectives rather than following cultural protocols and practices.

A staged process of overall completion, each motif and its associated meaning had to be approved by Fiji Airways before they could be composed to make a whole design. Once approval was granted, Matemosi had to create five different compositions and apply them to five pieces of masi, each with the same central motif, in order for Fiji Airways to choose their preferred option. Specific deliverables ordered by the airline for the fifteen individual motifs required that black and brown colours were to be used and that an even weight of positive and negative space was preferred. Selected motifs were allowed to be incorporated into the overall masi piece, but they also had to be able to be printed separately as independent motifs (Pacific Islands Intellectual Property Services 2012:6). The timetable for completion iterated that creating the masi was of immediate priority, which was reflected in the commencement of sharing initial design concepts on 17 January 2012 and presenting a completed piece of masi to Fiji Airways by 20 February 2012 (Pacific Islands Intellectual Property Services 2012:7). A very short amount of time in terms of the average time it takes to create five pieces of masi, it is possible that Matemosi was selected, as well as her motifs stipulated in the agreement, so that the process would be faster than if another artist with less experience was engaged.

The counter statement issued to the Permanent Secretary of the iTaukei Affairs Board (on behalf of the Moce Tikina Council) incorporated the Artist's Commissioning Agreement as an appendix to the main document. However, rather than serving as a second appendix, Matemosi's Statutory Declaration dated 17 April 2013 was instead used by the airline as its primary evidence in support of its trademark application as well as act in opposition to claims made by the Moce Tikina Council. The declaration which Matemosi signed stated that 'No evidence has been provided by the Opponent in its Notice of Opposition to substantiate ownerships of the marks by Moce people and neither has the Opponent provided pictures of prior existing masi designs...to establish prior use and existence of the marks by the Moce people [for] generations' (Pacific Islands Intellectual Property Services 2013b:1). Continuing in the same hard tone, it was asserted that being from Namuka Island, she had learned masi-making from her village and that all of her commissioned designs were based on the masi art form. She then referred to her inclusion in a book on masi, in which she was classified as a celebrated artist who commands 'the knowledge, skills and cultural appreciation of the ancient art form' (Pacific Islands Intellectual Property Services 2013b:2). In the nine-page document, she went on to

explain, in relation to the remaining items and accompanying illustrated evidence, her role as the commissioned artist. This included the responsibility to create original designs that had never before been used in Fiji by using her prior knowledge and expertise of the masi art form; designs which, once created, belonged solely to Fiji Airways and would be used at their discretion (Pacific Islands Intellectual Property Services 2013b:2). Item no. 7 (2013b:2) of the declaration defined the rules surrounding the creation and existence of individual masi designs. Matemosi, most probably through Spicer, explained her role as an expert motif designer:<sup>92</sup>

As an experienced Masi artist in Fiji, with extensive understanding, expertise and appreciation of the ancient art form, I disagree with all the assertions made by the Opponent, and respond and explain the originality of my designs and interpretation of Masi Art as follows:

- (a) A masi design cannot be seen in isolation or broken down into components but it is interpreted in totality as a picture, that tells a story.
- (b) The meaning of a masi design changes completely if the arrangement is altered and or inverted and the new inverted or arranged creation becomes a new design with a new meaning making it original to the artist.
- (c) My marks are original and I have only used my skills and knowledge in the ancient Masi Art form to create new designs specifically for the Applicant and the new designs that I create are my own and I can deal with designs as I wish to do so.

Following the description of each motif Matemosi created for Fiji Airways (figure 5.16), item no. 14 acknowledged the often lacking historical and contemporary documentation concerning masi designs and thus compared three of the new Fiji Airways designs (su-ni-lolo, kaso, kaova) to established Moce designs recorded by Kooijman (1977). Finding the differences greater than the similarities, the same exercise was performed in item no. 15 using *Fiji Masi: An Ancient Art in the New Millennium* (Spicer

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<sup>92</sup> Possibly without her own trusted legal representation (and having counsel provided by Fiji Airways), Matemosi was represented as an artist by Catherine Spicer, one of the authors of *Fijian Masi* (2004) in which Matemosi and her work was featured. Spicer, a New Zealander who emigrated to Fiji after participating in a handicraft course in 2000, assisted in navigating the commissioning process and presumably provided counsel regarding the entire process. Contextualising the situation, Spicer also had much to gain from this exercise as she and her book were used as authorities on masi by Fiji Airways and, association, the Fijian Government. As Matemosi's agent, Spicer represented the artist at all times 'leading up to [her] engagement with [Fiji Airways]' (PIIPS Statutory Declaration 2013b:2). It is entirely possible that Matemosi found herself in an alien corporate environment, unaware of the possible cultural and national implications of what she was signing.

and Me 2004), the book in which Matemosi and a number of her Namukan designs were featured (Pacific Islands Intellectual Property Services 2013b:6).

In the counter statement received by the University of the South Pacific, Fiji Airways also relied upon Matemosi's Statutory Declaration. However, the airline focused heavily on the Trade Marks Act (Cap 240) to support their application. The document defended, in a less combative tone than the Statutory Declaration, the application to trademark the masi motifs as it was viewed as a method of protecting the motifs internationally and safely promoting Fiji and its unique culture in a global arena. Fiji Airways also indicated in its statement that its company and overall business plan was essential to the nation's economic development and to the Fijian tourism industry, indicating that even if the objection caused their application to be rejected the Fijian government would have final authorisation to step in and grant the application itself. Convinced that its application could be passed on the grounds that the motifs are registerable under sections 8, 11(2), 14 and 20 of the Trade Marks Act, the airline disputed the University's assertion that each of Matemosi's motifs can be broken down and compared to Moce design elements. Fiji Airways argued:

The Applicant humbly submits that the evidence provided by the Opponents in fact shows that they have identified particular individual strokes of masi designs created by other masi artists and are claiming that the Applicant's marks have been in prior existence...The Applicant humbly submits that a Masi Artist is allowed to use their knowledge of the ancient art form and create designs, and the intellectual property rights in their created designs does not belong to the community but the artist itself. (Pacific Islands Intellectual Property Services 2013a)

Fiji Airways are here making a socially divisive statement because masi making, which includes knowledge and use of motifs to make designs, is a communal activity and is not 'owned' by individuals. The relationship between individual and communal rights is increasingly contested in Fiji. In a village context, communal rights are acknowledged and take precedence. In new urban contexts where the cash economy holds sway, these old conventions are open to challenge. The concept of communal ownership is more difficult, and enables less accountability, when one is not residing in the place they are from; for Matemosi, not being on the island of Namuka enabled a lesser obligation to fulfil traditional vakavanua roles. 'This move away from the traditional closed community network of masi kesa production to a more open and geographically mixed [urban]

network is symptomatic of the increased intermixing within Fiji...It is also strongly associated with the increasing influence of the cash economy' (Forsyth & Farran 2015:215).

Not included in the airline's counter statement to the iTaukei Affairs Board, but present in that to the University of the South Pacific, was item no. 7(b) in which Fiji Airways guaranteed that the airline had no intention of prohibiting any masi artist from using their traditional motifs to create new designs. The final item, which had the power to influence future progress in the case, stated that any costs incurred in the current and ongoing proceedings of this matter be met by the opponents of the trademark application. Cost had already played a large role in the objection process. In order to file a formal complaint, a standard fee of \$11FJD was charged per motif (The Trade Marks Act (Cap.240). Therefore, if all fifteen motifs were being disputed, \$165FJD had to be paid before the objection could be processed. This was not affordable for many Fijians, especially those on outer islands. To provide perspective, a minimum wage of \$2FJD per hour was only established in 2014.<sup>93</sup>

### ***Fiji Airways: masi and fashion***

During the period between January and September 2013 the rebranding initiative continued with the decommissioning of old aircraft and the arrival of new ones. On June 27, the airline launched its new website and officially began trading as Fiji Airways (Fiji Airways 2013a). The brandmark, which was finally adorning all aircraft in the airline's fleet, was receiving international acclaim as one of the top six airplane liveries in the Pacific Rim (Valemei 2013). This response probably encouraged the company to unveil the final component of its rebranding: the new Fiji Airways uniform. However, its launch in July saw concern raised yet again over the airline's decisions regarding its rebranding strategy. Aqua and brown, chosen to represent the sky, the ocean and the notion of respect, the new uniforms incorporated various motifs created by Matemosi (Fiji Airways 2013b). Designed by fashion designer Alexandra Poenaru-Philp, the sulu jaba and bula-wear-style uniforms prominently featured the qalitoka (which was also used in the aircraft's interior), tama and droe designs (figure 5.17). The use of the motifs was not formally opposed, although this remained a sensitive subject due to the ongoing trademarking application. Concern surfaced instead from the airline's selection of a foreigner to design the attire. Poenaru-

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<sup>93</sup> In 2019, the minimum wage set by the Fijian Government is \$2.32 FJD per hour.

Philp, married to Fiji-born Olympic athlete Tony Philp, was a European designer who had been living in Fiji since 2010 and worked mainly on international fashion labels (Fiji Airways 2013b). While Fiji Airways was still receiving praise for embracing a Fijian art form and commissioning a piece of masi that was produced by a Fijian for its new landmark, it was asked, ‘Why a non-Fijian, who engaged little with the mainstream Fijian fashion industry, would be commissioned to design uniforms for this new, distinctly Fijian, company’ (Wye, interview 15/12/13). This question was especially poignant because this was occurring concurrently with Fiji’s fashion industry flourishing and gaining international recognition for using masi and masi-motif printed materials in its creations. Both Hoerder and Wye, along with other Fijian designers discussed in chapter 3, applied for the opportunity to design Fiji Airways’ uniforms but were not chosen.

### ***Trademarked masi?***

In the sixteen months that followed Fiji Airways’ counter statement, little publicity or attention was given to their application to trademark the motifs. It was not clear what happened to the case and whether or not the fifteen masi motifs belonged to the airline. The threat of trademarking the masi designs had created a great deal of national attention in the immediate aftermath of the process being made public, prompting strong support for and acknowledgement of the importance of traditional Fijian art forms. But then things went quiet. With the upcoming 2014 general elections in Fiji, the first elections in the country in over a decade because of two coup d’états (2000, 2006), government officials were most likely preoccupied with readying themselves for campaigning

It was reported by *Fiji Live* on 20 January 2015 that the trademark application made by Fiji Airways in 2013 had still not been processed. The report stated that opponents of the application had not been interviewed for the story, with the exception of the Moce Tikina Council, and Fiji Airways declined to comment on the situation because the application was still in process. The Moce Tikina Council alleged that it was not only the general public that had not been notified of the case proceedings, but that they too had had no communication since they filed their claim and received the counter statement. According to Mr Savenaca Kaunisela, Permanent Secretary to the iTaukei Affairs Board, the people of Moce are still claiming that Matemosi’s ‘original’ motifs, including the *teteva*, belong to them and are demanding to be recognised and compensated as owners of the designs (Fiji Live 2015). Kaunisela noted, ‘What the designer of the Fiji Airways Teteva did was put together a number of designs...but it has now caused problems,

because the people of Moce are now demanding that they be paid for the use of their designs' (Fiji Live 2015). The iTaukei Affairs Board stated their belief that it would now be difficult for the airline to patent the designs because they are not thought to be unique, and include designs which belong to a different iTaukei group. The Ministry of iTaukei Affairs announced that it recognised the claims of the Moce Islanders and had decided to educate Fijians about their culture and discuss ways to preserve each area's unique cultural aspects, so as to avoid situations like this in the future (Fiji Live 2015).

The *Fiji Live* report in January 2015 was the last documented information provided to the public regarding the case. Within the regulations of the Trade Marks Act (Cap. 240), there are guidelines regarding the time period between application and approval of a trademark (three months), the length of time a trademark is granted for (14 years) and the time frame followed when registering a trademark. However, there is no information on the expiry of an application when a stalemate between the applicant and opponent is reached. As Fiji Airways has not released any further statements, nor made any public announcements of withdrawal of their application, it appears that the airline remains committed to trademarking the masi motifs. It is probable that the primary intention of Fiji Airways was not to enforce the trademark regulations on Fijian masi makers and artists, or create the controversy which ensued, but instead they were acting on a standard international legal procedure meant to protect any corporate brandmark from appropriation or registration by third parties. It is likely that cultural naivety and ill-considered business practices, plus a lack of appropriate consultation, led to Fiji Airways being backed into a corner. Inactivity was probably the best course of action. Fiji Airways continues to use its livery and uniforms, no masi producers have been threatened with litigation and the stalls of Mr Prasad and other handicraft sellers in Suva maintain a plentiful supply of masi.

### ***Further Complications***

As an unfortunate coda, Mrs Makereta Matemosi passed away aged 54 in her home at the Namuka-i-Lau settlement on 26 April 2015 after a short illness, before the trademark case could be formally resolved. The artist's death has left a cloud over the affair since news of it broke. Because she died so quickly and because of the negative circumstances surrounding her role in the Fiji Airways trademarking controversy, much has been said about her passing being a direct result of her lack of cultural respect and neglect of vakavanua protocols. Although praised and acclaimed during the early announcements of the Fiji Airways rebranding exercise, Matemosi faced growing scrutiny as the airline's

attempts to trademark her masi motifs were revealed. She was caught in the middle. At heart an islander who wanted to promote her skills and raise masi's profile, she became embroiled in complex legal proceedings which must have as alien to her as they were personally distressing. Many Fijians believe that she suffered from draunikau (black magic) for her role in the trademarking scandal, causing her to pass unexpectedly. Jealousy over her imagined income from 'selling' traditional designs will also have been a factor. Her family hasn't spoken of her cause of death but prior to her passing Matemosi herself 'confirmed the terrible impact the Fiji Airways trademark claim had had on her reputation and on her business. She said that people came to see her in her home and told her that they were not happy with her because now Fiji Airways could stop them from using masi' (Forsyth & Farran 2015:218). The Fijian government calls the claims surrounding Matemosi's passing mindless kakase (lit: back-biting, slander, gossip; Capell 1991:80) and has rebuffed the notion that her death was related to the trademarking saga (Khaiyum, pers. comm. 17/11/17).

## **Case 2 – Nanette Lepore (2013)**

There was limited international media attention during early to mid 2013 when Fiji Airways was countering opposition to their application to trademark the fifteen masi motifs. However, while the company was later engaging with additional objections to their rebranding initiative in July, Fijian masi designs were beginning to receive international attention for an unrelated reason.

### ***Lepore's Spring/Summer 2013 collection***

In the July/August 2013 issue of USA's *Women's Health Magazine*, a piece from fashion designer Nanette Lepore's new line was featured in a pictorial essay entitled 'Passport to Style' (figure 5.18). Focusing on the global and cultural influences that were increasingly inspiring fashion designers, the essay presented an around-the-world journey of new fashions influenced by different cultures. The first page, and also the cover page for the fashion spread, began with a journey to Africa illustrating one of Lepore's dresses as an example of powerful tribal prints highlighted and accessorised by strings of colourful beads and jewellery. The combination of the prints and accessories was reported by the magazine to 'showcase the self-celebration of African dressing' (*Women's Health Magazine* 2013:136). Lepore, an established American fashion designer based in New York City, was known for creating high-priced ready-to-wear lines regularly shown at

New York Fashion Week, as well as for dressing some of America's fashion elite including former First Lady Michelle Obama and other celebrities.<sup>94</sup>

Lepore's 'African' inspired dress, as described and photographed by *Women's Health Magazine*, was not considered by Lepore to be African, but instead was named the Aztec Dress (figure 5.19).<sup>95</sup> The dress was only one of three pieces in the Aztec series; the fabric used for the dress was also made into a blouse and a skirt. The garment, manufactured from linen material, was a mid-thigh length sleeveless shift dress with a v-shaped neckline. It featured large and bold horizontal geometric designs with the majority placed on the bodice, running from the bottom of the v-shaped neckline to the bottom of the hips. A wide band of identical designs also featured at the hem of the dress as well as a single row across the top of the shoulders. Consisting of a black base colour, the designs on the dress were white, with only two rows of a red triangle and dotted line motif placed on a white background (figure 5.20). From top to bottom the different designs can be described as: rows of triangular shaped white lace waqani (lauci), elongated horizontal ovals with lines through the middle (sinucodo), abstract circular flowers (vutu ni drali), white zig-zag lines (sui ni gata), white crosshatching (laca) and facing red/brown triangles with vertical dotted lines (vacu ni tadraku). Selling in retail establishments such as Bloomingdales and Saks Fifth Avenue, as well as in online shops and Lepore's own brand website, the Aztec Dress was priced at \$398USD (c. \$760 Fijian in 2013).

### ***Lepore's Aztec Dress in Fiji***

On 5 August 2013, after a trip to New York City where she saw Lepore's Aztec Dress in the Bloomingdales department store, Fiji Fashion Week Ltd's Managing Director Ellen Whippy-Knight issued a statement via her company's social media pages informing Fiji's thriving fashion industry (as well as the world) of her experience overseas. Expressing disappointment over Lepore's lack of regard for cultural and intellectual rights when both constructing and naming the Aztec Dress, Whippy-Knight further stated that the 'fabric is unmistakably Fijian and which [sic] is a look many of us in the region associate with the cultural heritage of the Fijian people...Fiji Fashion Week is shocked that...a designer can use the traditions of an entire race without permission and compensation and misappropriate another culture' (2013). Entitled 'Cultural Misappropriation', the statement

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<sup>94</sup> For more information, see Lepore's brand website ([www.nanettelepore.com/about-us/](http://www.nanettelepore.com/about-us/)).

<sup>95</sup> The Aztecs were a Mesoamerican culture which flourished in what is now Mexico from the thirteenth to the early sixteenth century.

concluded with the request for Lepore to acknowledge the source of the designs used on the fabric of her dress.

Simultaneously, The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)<sup>96</sup> made a public announcement encouraging Fijian people, as well as the global community, to contact Lepore and the retailers selling her Aztec Dress to inform them of both the misattribution with respect to the designs but also the implications of such a misattribution. Culture Adviser for the SPC, Dr Elise Huffer, wrote a letter to Revolve Clothing, an online retailer selling the dress, and began by informing the company of the great shock experienced in Fiji in finding Lepore's misappropriated dress for sale on their website. In addition, she noted that the Aztec and Fijian cultures have no relation to one another, and that Lepore had taken a print that comes 'entirely from Fijian masi design which is a traditional design owned by communities of Fiji and passed on by specialized knowledge holders to family and clan producers – it is not in the public domain contrary to misguided belief' (Huffer 2013). Calling Lepore's use of Fiji's masi designs commercially beneficial solely for her brand, Huffer equated it to a form of profiteering from a Fijian cultural expression: 'Additionally, Fiji is an island in the Pacific which bears no relation to Aztec culture. Commercially benefiting from others' cultural expression without consent, acknowledgement or recompense is considered by some as a form of exploitation' (Huffer 2013). As with Whippy-Knight's statement, Huffer concluded her letter requesting that Lepore acknowledge the source of the motifs on her Aztec Dress. Further, she offered the SPC's assistance in helping the designer to communicate with masi makers and artists in order to find out more about their communities and share with them some of the monetary benefits of using their traditional designs (2013). Revolve Clothing promptly replied to Huffer's letter advising their lack of control over the issue regarding the dress design as they were not its manufacturer, but that her concern would be expressed to Lepore and also to the clothing company's buying department.

Further to her 5 August statement declaring blatant cultural misappropriation on the part of Lepore, *Fiji One News* reporter Halitesh Datt interviewed Ellen Whippy-Knight on 18 August 2013. In speaking to Datt she asserted her, and Fiji Fashion Week Ltd's, support of masi makers and artists as owners of their designs. Touching on intellectual and cultural property rights, she told Datt that in fashion 'one can take a copy of any design, but you must make at least six changes before being able to call it an original design' (Datt, *Fiji*

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<sup>96</sup> Now called The Pacific Community, but still uses the acronym SPC.

*One News*, 18 August 2013). She also noted that in 2009 Fiji Fashion Week Ltd broached the subject of Fijian designers using masi designs in garments, but at that time the resources and higher-end fabric types were not available to the majority of local designers. In preparations for the upcoming annual Fiji Fashion Week shows, taking place in October 2013, Whippy-Knight had 'just learned that some of the Fijian designers had just started incorporating masi motifs onto their fabrics using screen printing. However, I am unsure if this will still take place due to negative attention given to Lepore's Aztec Dress' (Datt 2013).

### **'Passport to Stealing' – an open letter**

Lepore's misappropriation of Aztec and Fijian culture came to international attention after a New York City-based Pacific Islander artist wrote and published an open letter to the designer on 14 September. Vaimoana Litia Makakaufaki Niumeitolu is an American Pacific Islander of full Tongan ancestry, having been raised in the state of Utah before moving to New York City to further her career. Self-classified as an artist, poet, educator and activist, in introducing her concerns regarding the Aztec Dress, she related herself to Lepore on a different artistic level: as a fashionista. Addressing the fact that she was wary of calling herself a designer, she introduced her own emerging clothing line called respect, which she labelled as an urban indigenous line. The letter, she continued, was written from one artist to another and that its purpose was not only to educate Lepore about misappropriation but to make a difference in the designer's creative work and 'positively impact, inspire and move [her] into action' (Niumeitolu 2013). In reference to the pictorial essay in *Women's Health Magazine*, Niumeitolu began discussing the topic of misappropriation by addressing its title - 'Passport to Style.' By titling her own letter to the designer 'Passport to Stealing,' Niumeitolu stated that she wanted to 'call something what it is: stealing' (2013; figure 5.21). Reiterating numerous times that shaming Lepore was not the intention or goal of her letter, but that she was endeavouring to make an impact for all parties involved in the situation, Niumeitolu wrote that one thing would make a global difference. She wanted the designer to take responsibility for her actions and, in turn, be accountable to Pacific Island and Fijian communities. While in the letter Niumeitolu expressed that shame and guilt were not intended as the end result, she accused Lepore of stealing in a much stronger way than had been discussed by Whippy-Knight and Huffer in Fiji. Although Niumeitolu's entire letter was forcefully worded, the second page employed a stronger and harsher tone. She brought up the subject of accountability again, comparing

Lepore's lack of research into the fabric and the designs to herself as a university student going on an exchange in Italy to study the Italian Renaissance and not learning the language because she thought they spoke French (2013). On the second page, she bluntly states:

I must acknowledge that you have been stealing. The designs and patterns you have been using, which are shown in the 'Passport to Style' fashion spread and on your website, Facebook page and elsewhere, have all been stolen. You took these designs and patterns from the islands of Fiji and the Fijian people and did not acknowledge them. These are not yours. I do not understand why you claim they are yours. They are not... You also claim, or have shared, that they are 'African' and 'Aztec'... I must say that your claim that you designed this yourself and that this is 'African' and 'Aztec' is absolutely ludicrous... I understand that Fiji and Africa may be foreign and exotic places to those who have never been to or live in Fiji or Africa... Fiji and Africa are 2 distinct places. They have similarities and differences but they are distinct from each other. Fiji is a country. Africa is a continent... Those designs and patterns you have claimed to be yours are from Fiji. You may not know this because I understand, you may not be familiar or knowledgeable about Fijian language, culture or art. I get it. You just didn't know. Well, knowledge is power, so let me offer you some power. (Niumeitolu 2013)

To help Lepore learn about Fijian people, art and culture, Niumeitolu concluded the letter by inviting her to engage with the diasporic Pacific Islander community in New York City. She assured Lepore that to learn from them would involve being connected to a community of love, generosity and kindness. Finally, in the last lines of her letter, Niumeitolu stated that an apology from Lepore was not needed. What was needed, again, was accountability for her actions. In order to become accountable for her previous decisions, Niumeitolu left Lepore with four requests that she believed necessary to accomplish: public acknowledgement that the designs on the Aztec Dress were stolen and that they belong to Fiji; that Lepore no longer steal Fijian designs and patterns and refrain from appropriating any from other cultures without consent; the money already received from clothing adorned with Fijian designs be donated to Fijian artists; and that Lepore travel to Fiji and have conversations with at least four different artists and upon returning to New York City be able to say why knowing about Fijian art and culture is important to her.

Approximately two weeks after publishing the letter, Niumeitolu was a guest on Radio Australia presenter Isabelle Genoux's talk show where she was interviewed in person about the letter and Lepore's response to it, if one had been given. Echoing her previous sentiments of not wanting to vilify Lepore, but instead create awareness and make a difference, Niumeitolu confirmed that Lepore's assistant had recently contacted her with the news that the designer had read the letter and wanted to meet with her in New York City at her convenience. The meeting was set for 27 September in Lepore's showroom. Returning to her statement from the letter that knowledge is power, Niumeitolu told Genoux that learning about the Pacific Islands from Islanders would give Lepore not only conventional knowledge but the realisation that 'our culture is not a 'hip' thing...it has sustained our community for centuries, for thousands of years' (Radio Australia Interview, 23 September 2013). In preparation for the meeting, Genoux asked what would happen if Lepore did not agree to her list of requests, to which Niumeitolu replied that she did not need Lepore to agree with everything she said in her letter. The most important thing, according to Niumeitolu, was that Lepore be accountable, 'I'm really looking for accountability...I want her to be interested in that' and be interested in issues surrounding indigenous appropriation, including the difference between creativity and stealing (Radio Australia 2013a).

### ***Mobilisation of the global Pacific Island community***

In the ten days between Niumeitolu delivering her letter to Lepore and appearing on Genoux's Radio Australia talk show, numerous displays of solidarity for Fijian people and their designs were expressed around the world, most publicly by diasporic Pacific Islander communities. The mobilisation of Pacific people began just hours after the letter was made public, with the help of social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter.

On 15 September, an online petition was created as a direct result of Niumeitolu's letter which called on Lepore to stop appropriating traditional Fijian masi designs and motifs or claiming that they are anything other than Fijian.<sup>97</sup> Initiated by Katherine Lobendahn, a Fiji national of Tongan heritage residing in Honolulu, the desired goal was to reach one thousand signatures by 21 September (figure 5.22). In an article published by online magazine *Tautalatala*, when asked how it was certain that the designs on the Aztec

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<sup>97</sup> In both the Fiji Airways and the Nanette Lepore case, the petitions started were created using the website [www.change.org](http://www.change.org); the use of an online petition allowed wider dissemination and a stronger chance of achieving the largest number of signatures.

Dress were Fijian, Lobendahn was reported as saying that one only had to first look at a piece of Fijian masi and then look at Lepore's dress to know that they are the same thing and not Aztec or African as originally labelled. Alleging Lepore as culpable of theft and fraud, Lobendahn made reference to Fiji Airways announcing their plan to trademark masi motifs earlier in the year; she noted that there was great outcry from within Fiji due to the airline's attempt to trademark cultural designs, creating formal complaints which up until that time had halted the application process, 'so if Fiji's national carrier can't even do that, where does Nanette Lepore get off thinking she can get away with this?' (Mata'afa-Tufele 2013:3).

Despite originally arguing on social media that her design was not reminiscent of Fijian masi because there was more colour in her design than was found in masi, Lepore quickly backed down after receiving harsh criticism and a barrage of social media protest from Pacific Islanders and other supporters of Niumeitolu's letter. Lepore issued a statement of apology on her website and social media pages on 16 September, stating 'I am truly sorry for misnaming the Aztec Dress. I respect local artists everywhere and I apologize for any offense this has caused' (Field 2013). While Lepore apologised for her actions, she did not prevent the dress from being sold by retailers (although she did remove it from the Spring/Summer collection on her website) nor change the name of the series to correctly reflect the source of the motifs, as she had been requested to do. It was then that Niumeitolu and New York City's Pacific Islander community began to plan a protest against the Aztec Dress. Eventually, it was decided that the protest would not take place because of Lepore's cooperation and willingness to meet with Niumeitolu and the Pacific Islander community. This, however, did not stop them from coming together to meet one another. On the morning of 27 September, Pacific Islanders gathered using song and dance as their platform to communicate with one another. Not only did diasporic New York City Islanders take part in this unique social gathering, but visiting Pacific Islanders did as well, including Ngāti Rānana [London Maori Club] members who were visiting New York to perform for a United Nations event (Waimaio, interview 9/10/13). Representing the solidarity and closeness of the community, *Tautalatala* reported Niumeitolu as saying that 'Whether the whole world has heard it or not, Oceania solidarity is in full force' (Mata'afa-Tufele, *Tautalatala*, September 2013:2).

## ***Lepore and Niumeitolu – meeting in New York City, 27 September 2013***

Following Niumeitolu's announcement on Radio Australia of Lepore's agreement to meet with her, much of the media attention on the topic evaporated. However, on 30 September, Lepore participated in a brief telephone interview with Isabelle Genoux on Radio Australia to follow up the conversation conducted between Genoux and Niumeitolu seven days previously. Only five minutes in length, Genoux focused on the outcome of the meeting (and protest) in New York City and any reflections that Lepore had made on the decision to choose the name Aztec Dress for her piece. In response to Genoux's first question regarding boundaries for inspiration and artistic license in a globalised world, Lepore noted that in a world that is getting easier to traverse technologically, boundaries will be tested in new ways and situations such as this will occur more and more frequently. She affirmed that, for herself and her brand specifically, she will 'do a little more research into something if I find something that is beautiful and feels...like [it is] in the universal consciousness' (Radio Australia 2013b). Lepore elaborated by saying that when looking at the designs, she felt the lace-like motifs were familiar but did not realise that they were part of such an important cultural print, one that was iconic to Fiji. Lepore then revealed that the meeting had been a success. She explained to Genoux that she now understood why Pacific Islanders are so passionate about cultural symbols and art and why the diasporic community, especially, were so vocal in their objection to the Aztec Dress. At the meeting, although Niumeitolu acted as the voice and the vehicle for the global Pacific community's protest, other Pacific Islanders also participated by explaining their feelings and the importance of some of the ceremonies that are performed in their diasporic communities, where the meanings and significance mirror those felt in their cultural homeland. Subsequently, Lepore revealed that she and her company were able to talk to Niumeitolu about where the masi prints on the material came from. For the first time publicly, she told Genoux:

And I got the chance to explain to her that I bought the print from a legitimate print dealer and had no idea the roots of the print and the depth of the meaning. And I just thought it was beautiful – I changed it up a bit and ran with it. And I was completely caught off guard by the reaction and where it went from that point after we shipped the dress...the fabric was printed in China and then the dress was cut and sewn and manufactured in New York City. (Radio Australia 2013b)

In discussing the global reaction to her garment(s), Lepore reported that she had never before experienced anything like that in her career. She continued by explaining that she and her team usually re-colour a design or change key design features if it is something they find in a flea market or get from a print dealer where it is known not to be an original piece. However, the masi printed fabric was ‘...so pretty, we didn’t have the heart to change the colour...which probably if I had made it pink and green would have had a completely different impact on the world’ (Radio Australia 2013b). When questioned about the requests which Niumeitolu made at the end of her open letter, Lepore said that she thought working in a collaborative way with indigenous artists would be a great thing because it would be an amazing way to develop products that would be commercial. Prior to concluding the interview, Genoux asked again about Niumeitolu’s requests, specifically referring to whether Lepore would consider donating the proceeds from the Aztec Dress to Fijian artists, to which the designer replied ‘we’re working on something now’ (Radio Australia 2013b).

After nearly a week of little to no international attention on the Aztec Dress, aside from Lepore’s Radio Australia interview, the Fiji Broadcasting Company (FBC) published an article on 6 October which saw Niumeitolu interviewed by Elenoa Turagaiviu. She reported complementary information to Lepore, saying that the meeting went well and that Lepore’s company apologised again for using the masi printed material. Niumeitolu elaborated, ‘they were just very apologetic. They were apologising and said it was a total accident and they were not aware that it was Fijian masi design’ (Turagaiviu 2013). Lepore then asked if she could sign the petition herself in order to be accountable for her actions and to use that as a commitment to be more aware in her business practices in the future.

The FBC article also announced an upcoming cultural event which would address the use of indigenous design motifs. To be convened at Columbia University in New York City, the idea arose during the meeting between Lepore and Niumeitolu. Entitled ‘Passport to Endurance: Global Indigenous Communities & Fashion Industry in Dialogue’ Lepore’s and the global experience concerning her Aztec Dress would be used as a case study and a platform to begin dialogue on the use of indigenous designs. As published by FBC, Niumeitolu is reported as saying that the event would concentrate on bringing together both designers and indigenous communities. Also, an emphasis would be placed on using technology and social media outlets to engage not only with those in New York, but also with artists, academics and educators around the world (Turagaiviu 2013). To date, this

event has not been convened at Columbia University. Both Lepore and Niumeitolu have spoken publicly since 2013 about their experiences relating to the Aztec Dress, with Lepore working closely with Columbia University on a number of projects, but a cultural event discussing indigenous design motifs has not taken place.

### **Two Case Studies: discussing Fiji Airways and Nanette Lepore**

The two case studies presented above highlight the concept of design and its components in distinctive ways. On one level, the appropriation of masi designs by both Fiji Airways and Nanette Lepore has drawn attention to masi motifs and the variations in design composition between masi-making regions. Many scholars have tried to engage with masi designs in both a regional context and by examining their meaning (Kooijman 1977; Colchester 1999; Ewins 2009; Hulkenberg 2009). Taking masi from being rooted in vakavanua (land) to vakabisinisi (business) has created a potential blurring of the domains of knowledge in which masi is situated. For marketing and promotional purposes, Fiji Airways has elevated the meaning which Matemosi reportedly assigned to her motifs, meanings which were stipulated in her contract of employment. From examining and illustrating the two case studies, it has been demonstrated that meaning and significance of masi designs comes from the fact that the designs are important components of Fijian cultural history and are considered to have been continuously passed down for generations. A specific meaning does not have to be clear for a design to resonate culturally; here, it is the significance of the presence of the design that is important. As Ewins (2009:144) notes, the design name often has no original relation to the importance of the design but over time can become associated with it on a deeper level.

On a second level, the case studies have brought the concept of indigenous rights, ownership and responsibility into play. Such rights do not only affect masi making on a heritage level by involving makers and artists, but engage with metropolitan organisations and businesses, the government on a national level and with internationally sanctioned laws pertaining to copyright and intellectual property.

### **Ownership, copyright and intellectual property**

Both cases occurred at a time when international attention was hyper-focused on the appropriation of cultural designs, resulting in a heightened dialogue about ownership and intellectual property, most notably in the fashion and clothing industry. In August 2013, the company Nike released a line of women's exercise wear which included a pair of

running tights adorned with the patterns of the pe'a, a traditional Samoan tattoo reserved only for males of chiefly lineage (Field 2013). Immediately following Nike's apology and removal of the disputed exercise wear from sale, a Turkish designer created controversy at London Fashion Week in September 2013. Gul Agis was reported by the Australia Network as saying that her collection 'Tribal Attitude' was inspired by Turkey's heritage; however, she was accused of basing some of her designs on Maori design and stealing traditional knowledge. Aroha Mead, Programme Director of Maori Business at Victoria University in New Zealand stated that 'there's a big difference between being inspired by something and then outright stealing it. Unfortunately, Pacific designs are not protected by intellectual property laws or copyright, so international designers have been able to use them without permission' (2013).

As highlighted by Mead, although various acts [legal frameworks] exist in Pacific nations, they generally do not acknowledge indigenous copyright or intellectual property, or support cultural art forms. They instead reflect the rights and regulations of colonial powers which settled the Pacific (Strathern 1999, Geismar 2013, Talakai 2015). Haidy Geismar (2013) and Malia Talakai (2015) show that British common law forms the basis of copyright and intellectual property laws in Aotearoa New Zealand, Vanuatu and Tonga, respectively. In Fiji, the Copyright Act 1999 is also based on nineteenth-century British statutes and was passed by the government a decade later with an addendum entitled Copyright (Amendment) Decree 2009. While legally related, the Western definitions for ownership, copyright and intellectual property do not synergise with Pacific ones. 'Ownership' in the indigenous Pacific often refers to a mutual sense of communal belonging, creating and teaching, which are directly related to concepts of land. Traditional knowledge, and therefore ownership, is often conditioned by social organization in a community or area because access to it may only be available through a limited number of its members, who are specialists in the practice and have particular social status (Forsyth 2012:195). Alternatively, in Papua New Guinea, tapa and claims over its ownership do not serve to reify culture but instead reify the capacities held within persons; social relations are manifested by action, not by the existence of tapa itself (Strathern 1999:14-16). Strathern examines ownership further and breaks it down into categories, the first two of which are of most concern here: collective life (cultural property), usable knowledge (intellectual property), professional commitment, and the body (1996:21).

Talakai's doctoral thesis examines how ownership and copyright in Tonga relates to traditional and contemporary Tongan society. As in Fiji, Tongan tapa making was and is

female work and knowledge and skills of this type of productive work is restricted to women from select groups. The benefits of production were and are for the group, not for the individual knowledge holders. Tongan kinship relations also provide a kind of social security and communal welfare system, which ideally promotes equal and fair distribution of resources and wealth. Such transactions and relationships often conflict with the Western notions of ownership. In common with Fiji, 'Individual ownership, competition and economic accumulation were not the main goals of knowledge holders in traditional Tongan society' (Talakai 2015:146) and do not fit into the culture's cornerstone principles which enable key individuals to control and hold the specialised knowledge for the interest of the collective group's success and prosperity (Talakai 2015:147). Shifts in contemporary Tongan viewpoints can be attributed to the introduction of a cash economy and other factors such as lack of jobs and a growing population that puts pressure on land. Claims or disputes over ownership of traditional knowledge and practices have the potential to create tensions within a community or country, especially when economic benefit is at stake (Forsyth 2012:206). But even if a group of 'owners' can be identified within a community, which is difficult to do when knowledge and practices are communal in nature, how does one identify group membership? Can this be unequivocally determined? Who has the right to speak as a representative of a group or a country, and what happens when or if there are power inequalities within a group and different interests present themselves (Strathern 1998:217).

In both the Fiji Airways and Nanette Lepore case studies ownership was difficult to prove because there was no evidence of formal – and here 'formal' refers to Western introduced - ownership rights to masi design motifs. When reviewing the unspoken subtext in Matemosi's Statutory Declaration in response to the iTaukei Affairs Board objection on behalf of the Moce Tikina Council, she implied cultural knowledge of the patterns created and used by each island (Namuka and Moce). Historically, certainly during the last one hundred and fifty years, masi from Namuka and Moce has been quite distinctive. While more difficult to discern in contemporary masi, that difference is still recognisable if one is familiar with Lauan design motifs. Moce and Namuka are connected through Fijian systems of kinship and compete commercially in the masi-making and sales field. In recent decades the designs of the two islands can be differentiated. Namuka style has a darker overall design with more densely packed black designs, while Moce masi designs are more open with more white space. During her fieldwork, Hulkenberg (2009:104) reported observing that women from Namuka and Oneata (another island in the Lau Group)

differentiated printing masi for sale and printing it for their own traditional use by decorating commercial pieces with Moce motifs so as to protect and safeguard their own designs.

Hulkenberg's observation is intriguing as it illustrates Fijian women actively appropriating Fijian designs themselves, albeit from places closely related to them through kinship. It also corroborates the Moce Tikina Council's claim of appropriation. Some urban-based masi makers have begun to choose masi motifs to use in their own pieces based on beauty and artistry; women use designs that they like and think are pretty instead of only using those from their own region (Forsyth & Farran 2015:216). This has been made easier because of the less rigid ceremonial protocol found when not living in one's natal place. It has contributed to the urban and national design corpus (see chapter 1), one which largely resembles Vatulele masi, which is a corpus in its own right too.

As claimed in the formal objections lodged in the trademarking case, Selai Buasala, a masi maker from the island of Moce now living in Suva, also noted the similarities between Matemosi's Fiji Airways commissioned piece of masi and Moce design motifs. She also spoke of the pressure to conform to urban ways and produce masi with motifs that people wanted to see and buy: 'It happens all the time now. Big shops know what they want and they don't just take what you make anymore – they tell you what to put on the masi and you do it so that you can get paid' (interview 18/2/14). Whether enforced by consumers/commercial enterprises or performed by the volition of masi makers, urbanisation has affected the inherent cultural values associated with masi and its manufacture. When considering design owners, the two islands of Namuka and Moce, as well as Cakaudrove Province and the island of Vatulele, have distinct design patterns which they each view as specific to those locations and which it is believed would be disrespectful to copy.

The notion of respect plays a significant role in Fijian culture and may be a means by which ownership rights were and are controlled. Ravuvu (1983:103) states that behaviour, especially of women, is very important in Fijian society. The most important term to describe ideal behaviour is vakaturaga, meaning that one's actions and behaviour are 'chiefly' (turaga = chief), implying that they conform to idealised high standards, whether by chiefs or non-chiefs. Included in this broad category are behaviours such as veidokai (respect), vakarokoroko (deference), vakarorogo (attentive, compliant) and yalo malua (humility). When embodying the concept of vakaturaga, specifically veidokai, one is generally quiet and speaks in a soft and hushed tone; one's 'cultural infallibility and

individual arrogance should be suppressed or tolerated for the sake of achieving and maintaining *duavata* (solidarity) and *veilomani* (affection for)' (Ravuvu 1983:103-5). Behaviour is enacted for the good of the group and not that of an individual. The words attributed to Makereta Matemosi in the Statutory Declaration were not an example of such behaviour and therefore not a reflection of this significant Fijian concept. The situation as it developed lent itself to the application of individualistic Western legal procedures to traditional Fijian communal ways of thinking and living. Historically a communal activity (Kooijman 1977), even in urban Suva, women still decorate *masi* (no matter the size) together instead of completing the task alone (Talebula, interview 19/3/14). Fiji Airways' counter statement to the University of the South Pacific's objection therefore raises the question of individual versus communal rights and ownership of both land and creative activities. When the airline asserted that (newly created) designs belong solely to the artist and not to the artist's community, they broached the long-standing contentious question in Fijian cultural life concerning individualism versus communalism.

Has the existence and slowly growing acknowledgement of copying by *masi* makers themselves, regardless of it potentially being culturally disrespectful, signalled that - in urban centres at least - *masi* making has shifted from a *vakavanua* (land) practice to one defined as *vakabisinisi* (business)? For example, if ownership cannot be established in law, does that mean that traditional ownership practices no longer need be acknowledged, especially in an urban context? Intellectual property, as it relates to copying in Tonga, has been highlighted by some Tongans because they believe that their traditional motifs are owned by all Tongans and should be available for all Tongans to be used and accessed without needing permission. Outsiders, on the other hand, are still not allowed to use or copy designs. However, others such as well-established artists who have developed their work based on specific cultural motifs and traditions, feel that copying 'is seen as taking what they as creators should own individually' (Talakai 2015:150). This is not to imply that Fijian artists (heritage and contemporary) should claim individual ownership, or copyright or trademark their works, as there is a general view that knowledge should be for the benefit of the collective group and not for individual gain. Talakai (2015:165-66) observes the ramifications that have occurred since Tongan contemporary artist Tomui Kaloni patented three-dimensional embossed *tapa* – when Tongans have argued that this practice was in place before Kaloni started his creative process. I refer back to Ganilau Lee's decision to copyright/trademark *masi* motifs from her paternal province of Cakaudrove and question the implications of that decision for Cakaudrove *masi* makers in

coming years. As evidenced in urban centres in Fiji, copying has become normalised and a shift has occurred from vakavanua to vakabisinisi, or from traditional cultural expression and social value to monetary value and public notoriety.

A common definition of intellectual property by Phillips and Firth (2001:3) refers to all creations that ‘emanate from the human brain’. Talakai (2015:17) states that intellectual property has traditionally been broken down into two categories. The first is copyright (and with that ownership) and neighbouring rights (intellectual property) and the second is industrial property. The World Trade Organisation’s Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement categorises intellectual property to include ‘copyright and related rights, trademarks, geographical indications, industrial designs, patents and layout designs’ (Talakai 2015:17; Geismar 2013:13-14). These categories encompass both tangible and intangible property and can be justified in terms of economic and natural rights. The TRIPS Agreement, for example, has made intellectual property a global concept and indigenous people have become required to participate in ‘international process[es] of contestation’ (Talakai 2015:23) when their cultural intellectual property is compromised. The internationalisation of intellectual property and the public domain has generated consequences, often negative, for indigenous peoples because the Western definition limits the broader nature and scope of cultural property and intellectual property. Cultural property is often seen as only things that are displayed in a museum or gallery, but the category actually encompasses ‘the intangibility of culture theory that holistically defines collective identity through a wide array of symbolic expression and which acknowledge[s] the dynamic power relations that underscore the value that is culture’ (Geismar 2013:2). Additionally, concepts such as the public domain conflict with the principles of respect and informed consent found in indigenous communities, such as Fiji (Talakai 2015:23-26).<sup>98</sup>

Mead (1996:4) argues that Western law’s separation of cultural property and intellectual property does not work for indigenous cultures in that they do not separate ‘culture from intellect or intellect from culture.’ Accordingly, physical property and intangible property, such as knowledge systems and expressions of culture, should not and

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<sup>98</sup> While the public domain will not be discussed here in detail, except to note that public domain developed out of copyright law and is where works (including intellectual property) are said to be preserved, it is important to note that caution should be taken when it is used to refer to indigenous contexts. This is because although scholars such as Brown (1998) use the term in a positive manner, it may imply that because indigenous and traditional knowledge is readily available within their own communities, then that should excuse misappropriations (Talakai 2015:26).

cannot be separated. Referring to them holistically instead encompasses the tangible and intangible, the fluid and interconnected, and reinforces the need to move from reference only to ‘intellectual property’ and move instead to ‘cultural and intellectual property’. Vanuatu and Aotearoa New Zealand have been the location of highly charged issues in this area, and although Fiji’s issues are not the same, lessons learned from ni-Vanuatu and Maori intellectual property rights are valuable to Fiji’s growing advocacy of Fijian cultural and intellectual heritage. ‘Copyright and trademark regimes in Vanuatu and [Aotearoa] New Zealand demonstrate how discourse of cultural and intellectual property are being used to challenge the relation between the local and the global and to explore the limits of both state and indigenous sovereignty’ (Geismar 2013:4).

Although steadfast in her later conviction that there was a difference between cultural and commercial masi, and that in commercial arenas one could mix and match masi designs and motifs as one pleased, Matemosi admitted that things could have been handled better, as Forsyth & Farran (2015:218-219) noted:

She has subsequently been told by many people that she should have asked permission to use the designs that she based her [Fiji Airways] designs on. While she remained of the opinion that she was free to draw on them owing to her family heritage, and that she had created new designs, she did acknowledge that involving either customary bodies or the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs could have avoided the situation she [now] found herself in.

On signing the Artist’s Commissioning Agreement, Matemosi lost her intellectual and cultural rights to her Fiji Airways masi. Considered retrospectively, Fiji Airways’ control over every aspect of the masi design process – including their spoon-feeding of the exact motifs they wanted to see (and which were produced in only a slightly altered state) – suggests that it was the airline that actually created the masi. The stipulations for Matemosi to create the masi were so prescribed that there was little chance that the masi would have looked very different if another artist had designed it. The way in which Fiji Airways conducted the commissioning suggests that they wanted the masi made in the way they envisaged but needed a ‘Fijian’ name as the creator/author so that it would have cultural credibility and be viewed as a source of cultural pride. While no disrespect is intended towards Matemosi and her skill, it seems that she became entangled in corporate activities of which she had no experience. Such interference with intangible cultural heritage in order to create a brand is also reflected in other areas of Fijian culture. Guido Pigliasco

discusses the firewalking ceremony of the Sawau people of the island of Beqa, describing that ‘Over the last two centuries the ceremony has been shaped by the requirements of tourism as well as those of colonial pomp and circumstance, finally emerging as a signature brand statement of Fijian national culture’ (2010:161). He observes that the popularisation of firewalking in the 1950s-70s was a means of both making Fiji’s unique culture and national identity known on an international level and helping Fijians make money and contribute to the economy (Pigliasco 2010:164). However, while sharing cultural practices and knowledge can be regarded in a positive light, their integrity also needs to be safeguarded. Masi making follows this same trajectory and in doing so has had some of its cultural significance and identity adapted to national agendas. In the twenty-first century, although more urban focused, masi and its manufacture has realised a new sense of cultural identity through urban contemporary adaptations such as fashion and modified modes of display.

### **Diasporic communities vs. source communities**

A significant difference in the two case studies is evident in the communities who actively engaged with them. In the Fiji Airways case, while there was international attention and interest, it was local Fijian people and organisations who actively engaged with the situation. Of the four finalised objections, all were lodged by indigenous Fijian, locally based organisations or institutions. Concerned about threats to cultural practices and cultural continuity, complaints were made and filed and nationwide support was obtained via social media and extensive newspaper coverage. Although a heated topic to those involved in the legal action, Fijian behavioural codes prevailed and the case was largely conducted with humility and respect. In accordance with a Fijian preference for communal or group, rather than individual, action, none of the objections filed were by a single person, each worked with others to achieve their end goal. This strategy appears to have worked as the legal proceedings seem to have lapsed and nobody has been prevented from producing masi.

The controversy surrounding Lepore’s Aztec Dress predominantly involved non-Fijian activists. In the forefront of the fight were members of the world’s global Pacific Islander communities, with support being shown from Europe, Australia, New Zealand and North America. It was notable that when Fijians were involved in the dialogue, they were diasporic Fijians. Katherine Lobendahn, of Hawaii, was the only named Fijian involved in Niumeitolu’s campaign to educate Lepore on cultural appropriation and to voice concern

in the international arena. Niumeitolu promoted Oceanic and Pacific solidarity in her approach to the case. Teaiwa (2005) and Hall (1990) examine the experience of diasporic communities and their need to explicitly assert their own cultural identity in a place that is not their own. With diasporas come new and adapted cultural identities; all people ‘...come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation’ (Hall 1990:225).

If Lepore had not been generating commercial revenue, but was instead giving away her dresses and designs, would there have been a different reaction to the Aztec Dress? Cultural significance of masi to Fijians and Pacific Islanders was at the heart of the controversy, but money and profits drove much of Niumeitolu’s concern. As the Aztec Dress remains on online shopping websites, the use of what Niumeitolu called a sacred masi design (2013) appears not to have been the principal concern for her and the diasporic Pacific Islanders. As a Tongan, she appears to have asserted the sacredness of the masi design without reference to any Fijian statements on the matter. This no doubt gave rhetorical force to her pronouncements, but exploitation appears to be the bigger problem for opponents of Lepore, because of the designer’s alleged use of the designs for financial or other gain. In the only formal indigenous Fiji-based complaint regarding the Aztec Dress, Ellen Whippy-Knight stated that Fijian designers should be the only people using such prints because they have the cultural right to do so (Whippy-Knight 2013). She did not mention masi makers or artists in her statements, solely Fijian fashion designers. Viewing the situation from a business perspective, Whippy-Knight asserted that it was her company’s objective to promote masi designs internationally and that Lepore needed to acknowledge the source of the designs on her dress. Whippy-Knight’s statement accusing Lepore of cultural misappropriation received feedback from members of Fiji’s fashion industry, with some pointing out her own lack of regard for the cultural significance of masi, while others defended Lepore and her choice of fabric. Robert Kennedy, a fourth-generation Fijian of European ancestry and fashion designer, who would soon begin using masi motifs in his own fashion designs after stating the year before that he would never do that, noted that the fabric Lepore used for her dress is readily available in fabric stores in Suva, across Fiji and around the world. Cloth printed in China can be found almost everywhere in Suva. No local textile factories remain in Fiji, so all masi-printed material has to be imported. Furthermore, Kennedy observed that it is not only indigenous Fijians who have access to masi printed material in Suva; ‘This sort of cultural exploitation of our culture is everywhere in Fiji and nothing is done here. How do you stop it now anyway?’

Isn't Nanette just ignorant and using a print that is readily available anywhere?' (Whippy-Knight 2013). Kennedy implied that if people who do not have indigenous claim to use masi-printed material, but are locally based in Fiji, can use the fabric without any objections, why does a different rule apply for those who use it overseas.

Coming back to the beginning of this chapter, in 1971 Vogue published two editorials featuring masi in its UK and US magazines. The former featured a Fijian man in ceremonial masi attire, while the latter depicted Swedish model Gunilla Lindblad in two masi-motif printed outfits, both designed by Americans. Neither printed outfits were attributed to Fiji, nor did Vogue mention that the designs were significant to Fijian culture; nothing was mentioned at all. In contrast to 2013, in 1971 there was no opposition or criticism of Vogue or the fashion designers. One question arises: why? The answer may come from Fiji's history. While masi production and use has been ongoing in Fiji for centuries, its role in society has shifted and adapted over time. In the nineteenth century masi was a symbol and identifier of cultural significance and indigenous ceremonial ritual. In the 1950s and 1960s, but especially after independence from Great Britain in 1970, racial and ethnic tensions – as well as a nation searching to define itself – have led to a perceived need for a national identity. The ubiquity of masi in the commercial market lends itself to masi becoming Fiji's national identifier. The Fiji Airways promotional statements linking masi designs to all kinds of emotional states and attitudes towards Fiji and travel have little basis in historical fact. They are largely dreamed up by public relations consultants and provide further evidence that masi and masi designs are increasingly being recruited to nation-building causes. In her own research, Geismar asks the important questions: 'what would happen if the indigenous became mainstream?' (2013:20) and what would cultural and intellectual property mean to us if we considered it as coming from the Pacific instead of being an introduced concept? (2013:5). She makes reference to the existence of these concepts frequently being disallowed by the state. However, with Fiji Airways and Matemosi's masi motifs, it was a state-owned company which thrust the indigenous into the mainstream, all while seemingly attempting to remove its inherent indigeneity to make it a national identifier.

Finally, after multiple political disturbances and government changes, masi has once again come to be a significant cultural identifier for Fijians. Thus, in the 1970s, masi motifs being promoted on the global stage was a celebration, not an insult. In late 2013 and early 2014 respectively, Marks & Spencer and H&M both marketed clothing with masi motifs printed on them. There was some negative comment about them, but coming so

closely on the heels of the two case studies considered here, they seem to have avoided the wrath of the entire Pacific. As discussed in chapter 4, these case studies demonstrate the growing difference between and separation of masi the cloth and masi motifs. This could also point to a reason for the lack of reaction to Vogue in 1971: at that time, the motifs signalled a national Fijian identity, so seeing motifs everywhere was a positive event. The physical masi itself was still highly significant in ceremonial and ritual contexts. Moving to the twenty-first century, as masi itself has adapted to the urban sphere and fewer large-scale ceremonial rituals occur, the motifs and designs have perhaps come to have more explicit cultural identity and significance than in the past because they are part of ‘tradition’ – which has now become a reified ‘thing’, a commodity, in a way which was not the case in the nineteenth or even the twentieth century.

The two case studies show different interpretations of outcomes in controversies surrounding masi design motifs. The fact that so much time, effort and money were expended in these situations shows that designs, especially masi designs, matter to Fijians. As neither of these cases considered the materiality and physical qualities of masi, and instead only concerned masi design motifs, a question meriting further discussion and examination reveals itself: to what extent will masi-printed material and other masi-printed mediums overtake masi and replace it completely in urban Suva?



## 6 Always Traditional, Always Contemporary

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### **Conclusion: 'Buli Bridal' and urban contemporary Fijian masi**

On the evening of Saturday 8 June 2019, as part of the Bottega Fijian Fashion Festival, in the Britannia ballroom of Suva's Grand Pacific Hotel, Samson Lee Fiji's solo show closed by launching a special bridal collection that the designer had been working on since opening his bridal shop twelve months prior. Gliding down the runway, one after the other, was his new 'Buli Bridal' collection of gowns of varying styles and designs (figures 6.01-.04). Showcasing specialised masi couture creations, Lee's inaugural bridal collection combined masi, European fabric, and vau (hibiscus fibre) and was embellished with shell and magimagi patterning. During the show, the striking presence of the bold black and white, with some red/brown, motifs could not be mistaken for anything other than Fijian masi. Using two different types, masi kesa from Lau and masi bolabola from Cakaudrove, the collection reflected the cultural significance of Lee's decision to use masi to create his first couture bridal line. It also demonstrated masi and masi couture's significance in contemporary Fijian fashion. Called 'Buli Bridal', Lee's collection of gowns not only evoked Fiji's cultural past and continuity into the future while also recalling the high-status and ceremonial significance of masi, it also paid homage to two great chiefdoms in Fijian culture, both of which actively continue to use masi in traditional contexts.

The word buli is a play on meanings in Fijian. When viewing the collection parade up and down the catwalk, the triple entendre of its name would have been clear to all speakers of Fijian. Buli means a cowry shell, which is widely associated with chiefly status, and Buli is also a traditional title of certain chiefs.<sup>99</sup> Alongside the correlation between the white cowry and the significance of the colour white to Fijian chiefs as well as Western wedding beliefs, the third definition of the term buli translates as 'to form, shape, create, manufacture' (Gatty 2009:31-32; Capell 1991). Lee had previously hesitated to use masi in his design practice, but he now chose to unveil the use of masi by creating a collection for a type of dress (or more aptly a type of ceremonial exchange, for that is what the act of a wedding/marriage represents) that has masi use, presence and adornment deeply rooted in its protocols. All of his pieces made in Suva, how did Lee acquire Cakaudrove masi for his

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<sup>99</sup> The title Buli was also borrowed by Fiji's colonial administration to designate a local government official (an indigenous Fijian) who administered a Tikina (a division of a province; see Roth 1973:143-46).

creations when it is known that he has no familial connections or kin obligations to the region? As we know from earlier in this study, Cakaudrove masi has not been previously available for sale at all in Suva's urban market place; however, 'the Cakaudrove [masi] was bought from a guy named Lui [who] has a stall at the Flea Market' (Lee, pers. comm. 7/7/19). With Lee finding Lui, who is the vendor and not the maker of the masi, only a few months ago, and large sheets of Cakaudrove masi seemingly available to anybody with the funds to purchase them, a new dialogue opens up as to both the future of masi's urban pathways as well as the continuity of its traditional ones. At the same time, it opens up further questions: who is Lui acting as a vendor for? Is the Soqosoqo Vakamarama now involved in the sale of Cakaudrove masi, or has it been acquired from elsewhere, such as from pawn shops or previous owners who no longer have use for it?

Lee's 'Buli Bridal' collection, therefore, highlights a uniquely Fijian story about masi. Wrapped into the folds of his first bridal line lies culture, tradition, making, identity and urban contemporary adaptability. It is a story that is not new in Fiji (or Urban-Fiji), but it is a story that is now being publicly explored in contemporary contexts and is one which will continue into the future.

### **Masi's continuing use and value**

Masi making (and barkcloth in general) has long been a subject of interest, which is evidenced by the amount of scholarship that has been dedicated to it. However, while its making and use have been well documented in rural or traditional contexts, few studies have been done on the urban reach of masi as a cloth and the urban impact on masi's motifs. Investigating 'traditionally contemporary?' masi manufacture, decoration and use has drawn out revealing information and illuminated previously unconsidered factors relating to masi's ongoing role in Fijian life. Thus, this research has attempted to answer specific questions on enduring significance, masi's place in the 'market', gender challenges and cultural identity for urban and diasporic Fijians. The thesis has been constructed and laid out in the way it has to highlight contemporary Fijian issues. A number of themes have developed and emerged from this study and, while not diametrically opposed to the past or historical records of masi making and use, they share the dynamic and constantly shifting story of masi in Fiji.

When beginning this study, I did not expect to encounter masi decoration, motifs and use so deeply connected with urban Fijian contemporary fashion. In fact, fashion was not even considered as an interest or priority in 2011 when conceptualising the project. But as

the research progressed and fashion came to my attention, the focus of the study slowly shifted and adapted. Initially, masi's presence in Fiji's fashion industry and its use by Fijian fashion designers appeared relatively superficial and transparent. It did not seem more significant than that the motifs were being used because of their aesthetic qualities. Masi cloth itself first was used because it was a novel textile which has become synonymous with both Fiji and the Pacific over the last four decades. However, looking at urban contemporary Fijian fashion now, it has become evident that the microcosm of Fiji's fashion sector has the ability to illustrate the overall ongoing significance of masi for urban Fijians. For within the fashion industry, questions regarding commodification, gender, modes of display and cultural/national identity for Fijians living in Fiji and in diasporas around the world are addressed.

Cakacaka vakavanua and cakacaka vakabisinisi and their associated social tensions are part of the daily lives of all Fijians. In urban contemporary Fijian fashion, strain arising from the tension of 'doing' in the way of the land versus in the way of business/money is alleviated, in part, by the re-gendering of masi. The Fijian fashion industry and designers have, over the last four decades, slowly but firmly participated in the urban re-gendering of masi decoration, wear and use, in that the non-gendering or gender fluidity of it allows for greater societal inclusion and acceptance, as well as introduces a relief from the constant social tensions generated by vakavanua concerns and vakabisinisi practices. The dissociation with strict gender roles in urban masi has allowed for distinctions to be made between the two realms and also for lateral extensions to be made regarding the urban role of masi for all Fijians. In urban contexts, the cash-driven economy has changed the way in which Fijians engage with masi on a regular basis. On the one hand, its pervasiveness is now not only as a form of cultural wealth, but also as a commercial entity. Thus if by becoming a form of adaptation by deviating from traditional practice to operate in the cash economy is accepted, as it appears to have been, and masi is produced vakabisinisi, not following culturally dictated methods of design and decoration (and in turn, using designs that one may not have access to in a vakavanua context), then its existence as non-vakavanua can be overlooked. Thinking about fashion, this speaks to the affordability of masi couture and its role in the blurring of boundaries between vakavanua and vakabisinisi. While possibly not a salient example, looking back to solevu presentations and exchanges which take place between groups, masi was affordable to those who may not have had the financial means to acquire masi outside of their kin networks. But if you are not obliged to kin who have connections to masi, then how is it engaged with? One

answer to this has shown to be masi motif material; using the material which is culturally relevant and significant because it bears masi motifs occurs frequently. Lee and Hoerder, for example, consistently give discounts to kin (or family friends) who come to them to purchase masi couture. Not only discounts, but they will also trade or exchange their services for something from their customer in order for both parties to benefit. This too, can be likened to *solevu* practice because they are conducting an exchange of ‘specialised’ goods/offerings that each party does not directly make or have access to. Thus, even though tensions between the two categories exist, fashion demonstrates the adaptability that occurs with urban masi

Gender roles in masi-related contemporary fashion have challenged traditional gender roles in a number of ways. Originally, and possibly ignorantly, I had simply and directly assumed that the roles had ‘flipped’ and that men were designing and women were wearing. I now understand that masi’s role in fashion has, instead of reversing gendered work and remaining strictly entrenched in male/female roles, become non-gendered and more inclusive. Thus, the re-gendering of urban contemporary masi in fashion is, instead, the act of de-gendering it. Much like its regional design variations/affiliations have become more fluid in twenty-first century Fiji, and particularly so in urban Suva as reflected in the urban corpus of masi motifs, so has the approach to gender and inclusion in fashion-related masi use and wear.

Contemporary masi use, both for cultural and for national purposes has been explored through the notion of Urban-Fiji, a concept borrowed from Auckland’s large and diverse Urbanesian community. ‘Urban-Fiji’, the premise that urban Suva is just as much of a diaspora of Fijian people as those global Fijian diasporic communities, is significant to issues surrounding being ‘Fijian’. Displaying an Urban-Fiji identity through masi, and its increasingly modified and adapted modes of display, includes exploring the notion of the materiality, or physicality, of masi and the significance of masi’s designs and motifs. Cultural and national identity is being increasingly displayed using graphic representations of masi motifs; they are used nationally and internationally, sending messages to Fijians and non-Fijians alike about Fijian identity. This presentation of Fijian identity is largely controlled by Fiji citizens of various ethnic backgrounds. The modern urban use of masi is part of its dynamic historical trajectory and is being adapted creatively in a variety of different contexts. When thinking about both historical and contemporary (including urban) situations where groups of people or artists ‘perform’ culture or identity, and in this case masi, it must be understood that performance and performativity refers to both staged

activations, installations, events and displays, as well as the enactment of everyday cultural life.

Returning to the title of this chapter, while the categories of traditional and contemporary are seemingly opposed, they are in fact intertwined with one another. These categories of masi which each give relevance to the other and contribute to the enduring use and value of masi for Fijians in Urban-Fiji. In ‘traditional’ use, masi conjures up for people reassuring aspects of cultural identity, respectful protocol, distinctiveness and valued heritage. But if it was just fixed in use for these purposes, it would probably die out over time as redundant and no longer relevant to modern Fijian life. But contemporary uses of the material and the designs appear to invigorate masi as a dynamic aspect of being Fijian in the modern world, allowing younger generations to engage with it outside of ‘traditional’ weddings, funerals and other vakavanua occasions.

This traditionally contemporary quality of masi seems to be nothing new. In the eighteenth century it was a valued cultural product with a deep time-depth connected to the ancestors, yet it was also amenable to the adaptations and variations in form and design which we see occurred in the 19th century – especially Tongan-style gatu forms which became so fashionable in mid-nineteenth century Fijian chiefly display. Dynamic adaptations have continued since then, for example with adjustments to market opportunities for masi sales, design innovations and branding. The story being told here is not new or radically different from the past, but its relevance in urban contemporary Fiji resonates as an ongoing story of creative adaptation, anchored in concerns which remain profoundly important for Fijians. Traditionally contemporary masi, of which all masi in Fiji now is – whether produced in rural or urban areas – has become firmly rooted in Urban-Fiji through expressions of tradition, culture, gender, identity and performativity. The story of masi in Fiji, both material and designs, is unlikely to end soon.



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