# Anthropological evidence of the 15 intended iTaukei Tapa Cloth (Masi) Motifs pre-dating the creation of the Air Pacific/Fiji Airways logo

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#### Abstract:

This short paper examines the history of Tapa in order to show that the fifteen kesakesa designs identified as trade mark worthy by Air Pacific/Fiji Airways are a significant part of the cultural heritage of the iTaukei peoples of Fiji. It will also show that Tapa and the designs/motifs found within tapa are often shared cultural designs across the Pacific. The position taken is that all forms of cultural heritage expressions must remain the intellectual property of their indigenous owners from whom this knowledge, skills and art forms originate. NO COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISE can or should claim the right to this knowledge. Nor should they be allowed to trademark, copyright or patent any such derivative of indigenous knowledge. To allow any forms of external ownership of indigenous knowledge is the equivalent of cultural genocide and the indigenous peoples, as well as the world at large will be the poorer for it.

# 1.0 INTRODUCTION TO TAPA: A Common Pacific Heritage Art

The art of traditional bark cloth making and its ritual cultural use is common across many cultures of the Pacific. The bark cloth commonly known as Tapa was so named by early explorers who derived the term from Tahiti, Samoa and Tonga where the word was used to refer to the white unpainted borders of the finished product. The name Tapa has since become common place with the majority of people using the word to when referring to the finished/painted cloth. Within the Pacific however, the finished product is known by various indigenous terms, specific to each cultural community. Names for Tapa include: Fiji – Masi; Tonga – Ngatu; Samoa – Siapo; Niue – Hiapo and, Hawaii – Kapa to name a few.

Generally the textile or bark cloth is made from especially cultivated Paper Mulberry (Broussonetia Papyrifera : Moraceae) believed to have been brought with early settlers from Asia. Simon Koojiman, the most referenced researcher on Tapa writes: "This plant is not indigenous to the Pacific; it was brought from eastern Asia where it grows almost everywhere in China, Taiwan, Japan and Korea" (Koojiman 1972, p1). His work documents the production and use of bark cloth in seventeen Pacific island countries.

The inks or dyes used in the printing of bark cloth were derived from local plant bark, roots and seeds which through various processes made into long lasting pigments that when applied to the cloth remained vibrant for many years. Designs were imprinted onto the bark cloth using three main methods: use of design tablets (Tonga – Kupesi; Samoa – Upeti; Fiji – kupeti/kuveti<sup>1</sup>); leaf stencils (Fiji – draudaru); and free hand painting. Other forms of coloration included smoking unpainted barkcloth (Fiji – masi kuoni or Masi kuvui<sup>2</sup>), and free hand painting of designs.

There is much ritual involved from the harvesting, through beating of bark to make textiles, preparation of dyes, printing of barkcloth and at completion of the finished product. Once completed the barkcloth is generally either used for an immediate cultural event or stored for future use. The use of bark cloth in pre-contact times fell into three functional categories. These include (a) religious ritual use; (b) daily household use; and (c) socio-cultural ceremonial use.

### **Religion**:

In terms of religious ritual use, it is well documented that bark cloth was the primary fabric of the Pacific. It was used in religious rituals in Fiji to communicate with the gods and believed to be the medium through which the gods entered the temple (Bure Kalou) and spoke through a conduit (the priest – bete).

In the bure kalou, the Fijian temple within which contact could be made with the gods, the priest served as medium between the divinity and the believers. The divinity descended into him, took control of his body, and spoke through his mouth. To arrange for the presence of the god, one end of a long strip of tapa was attached to the ridge of the steep roof, where the god was assumed to enter the bure. The strip of tapa hung down along an angle of the roof, and its lower end reached to the ground in front of one of the corner posts, where the priests customarily stood. In this way the masi formed the pathway along which the divinity descended into the body of the priest (Williams & Calvert 1858, p175)<sup>3</sup>.

In some parts of the Pacific such as Rapanui (Easter Island) figurines of the gods were fashioned from bark cloth and painted in their likeness<sup>4</sup>. Similarly in some parts of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Koojiman 1972 refers to Fijian designs as Kupeti while Spicer & Me 2004 refer to Kuveti.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Literally smoked or steamed bark cloth, Koojiman 1972, p382.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> See Koojiman 1972, p414.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> See for example Kaeppler, Kauffman & Newton 1997, pp121-122.

Vanuatu, the same practice occurred as well as ritual bark cloth masks<sup>5</sup>. Kaeppler, Kauffman & Newton write: "materials that elevated chiefs over commoners or linked chiefs with the gods or ancestors were made of cloth. They were regarded as valuables and were usually the work of women" (1997, p86).

### Daily household use:

When the early lapita settlers arrived in the Pacific, they found a harsh environment vulnerable to the elements and susceptible to natural disasters. In the absence of other textiles, the only fabrics they were able to produce for all their basic needs and cultural uses had to be fashioned out of available resources. The various stages of bark cloth production led to its utility. Soft bark cloth were used for medicinal purposes and in the feeding of infants and the elderly, single layered pieces were used as turbans and shrouds against the wind, heat and cold, and strips were used as bandages and lint. Bark cloth was used as clothing, turbans, bedding, house dividers (curtains) and soft mattresses for babies and the elderly. Two sacred or tapu/tabu uses of bark cloth include sanitary pads and in circumcision. Old tattered bark cloth was used as wicks in traditional lamps and as toilet paper. Contact with the outside world led to the introduction of a variety of textiles and fabrics and soon these domestic uses were phased out as was their religious use with the introduction of Christianity.

### Socio-cultural ceremonial use:

The socio-cultural ceremonial use of bark cloth continues today although its practice has declined in some communities. In Samoa for example, bark cloth exchange has been replaced with the presentation of money and fabrics. In Tonga and Fiji, bark cloth is still a significant part of the cultural economy used to reinforce relationships through their exchange.

Ceremonially, bark cloth was/is used in births, wedding and funeral ceremonies. It was/is used as wedding ceremonial dress and in the gift exchanges between families of the bride and groom. In funerals it was used as an inner wrapping for the deceased as well as the outer wrapping. In many parts of the Pacific, the use of coffins is declining with many returning to the use of bark cloth wrappings. In most significant ceremonies, the bark cloth was/is also used decoratively hanging on walls and as flooring. In terms of cultural exchange, bark cloth exchanges represents the reinforcement of familial and relational ties within and between clans and communities. In general, the quantity and quality of the bark cloth presented at a cultural event symbolically represents the value or closeness of a relationship between the giver and the receiver.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Ibid. pp 211 – 213

# 2.0 Sacred Symbols: The significance of Motifs

Evidence shows that the motifs or designs found in tapa across the Pacific are derived from Lapita pottery and are markedly similar to those designs also found in traditional tattoo designs<sup>6</sup>. Gell (1979) found that the systematic design concept found in Lapita pottery, tapa and tattooing were the same. This grid system of designing was

...based on two-dimensional pattern making applied to three surfaces; pottery, bark-cloth and skin. All these were impressed with designs organized according to the 'zoning' or 'compartment-making' principle. Subsequently, pottery-making fell into disuse in Polynesia (Irwin, 1981) but the design tradition continued in the media of bark-cloth decoration and tattooing (in Gell 1996, pp95-6).

These designs are essentially geometric shapes comprised of lines, curves and dots in a repeated sequence.

Evidence found in various museum collections shows a marked similarity in designs used in Samoa, Tonga and Fiji. This is attributed in part to the extent of cultural exchange between these three groups of islands. In some instances the very same design is found across tapa in these three cultural communities. Similar designs are also found in Wallis and Futuna tapa cloth which is not unexpected due to the historical background of that community and their relational ties to Samoa and Tonga.

Recalling that Pacific cultures are oral cultures with no written language, it is not surprising therefore that the tapa cloth was/is seen as a form of textual language where designs told a story or held a message of significance. Certain designs were created as historical markers of a specific time and for specific recipients while others bore general culturally significant reminders of culturally continuity and relationships.

In Samoa, Siapo designs reflect the deep connection between man and nature with many direct references to ancient gods, myths and legends and family totems. In Tonga, a number of Kupesi (tapa designs) are traced to specific events concerning significant members of the Royal family (particularly of Kings), while others are general designs are derived from nature to represent culturally symbolic metaphors and messages. In the Lau islands of Fiji, designs, names and processes are directly correlational to Tonga given their historical connection. In other parts of Fiji, it is also said that the relationship between man and nature is evidenced in kesakesa designs (tapa/Masi designs).

In all three cultural communities, it is generally agreed that certain designs and types of tapa cloth (Siapo/Ngtatu/Masi) are exclusively reserved for use by nobles/chiefs while others are accessible for use by the general community. For this reason, while much

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> See Koojiman, 1972; Gell 1996; Cowling, 2009.

information has been documented regarding tapa cloth as a significant cultural heritage art form, a lot still remains closed knowledge, the reserved privileged and sacred knowledge of the women custodians within the community, to whom this knowledge belongs. This knowledge is only meant to be passed on through female blood lines within specific clans and should not be communicated to any outsider to ensure its protection and cultural continuity of that heritage art.

It is important to note that indigenous/cultural knowledge is categorized as (1) 'closed' or 'sacred' knowledge; (2) 'open' or common' knowledge; and, (3) 'negotiated' knowledge (Bakalevu, 2002; Nabobo, 2002, Teaero, 2002). Closed/sacred knowledge is that knowledge that is only accessible to specific groups of people such as on the basis of clans or gender for example. Cultural arts and skills are included in this category such as boat building, sinnet lashing, navigation, herbal medicines, tapa making and others. Open/common knowledge is that knowledge that is widely accessible and necessary for routine events. This includes for example language, protocol, seating arrangements in the village meeting space and so on. Negotiated knowledge is less common but is a term that has been used to refer to those situations where individuals may approach a closed knowledge holder/community and through the presentation of traditional gifts and ceremony, may be given permission (or rejected) for 'limited' access to some aspects of that closed knowledge. This could include for example, a woman who has married into a clan with special 'closed' herbal medicine knowledge and has no right of access to this knowledge. If she wishes to access this knowledge and skill, she would need to follow this protocol.

It is significant to note that tapa making knowledge and skills is a form of closed/sacred knowledge that is held by women. While men may assist in the planting of mulberry and in tending to the garden as well as in harvesting, it is the women who prepare the bark cloth and paint the tapa ready for its cultural use. It is also the women who present these at cultural events while the men typically would be part of the formal kava ritiuals. While tapa knowledge is shared and common among women of the wider cultural community e.g. in Fiji, Tonga, Samoa etc - it's cosmological and spiritual significance particularly of designs and their reference stories is closed to outsiders.

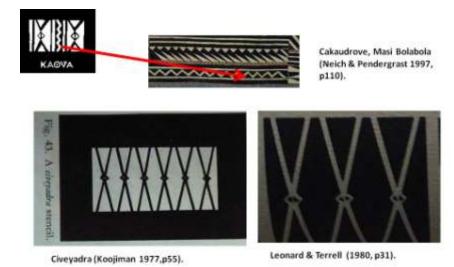
These women (tapa makers) have access to a collection of traditional motifs which may be seen as a cultural database of designs. They may choose to use any of these motifs in its traditional/original format or as the basis for new creations. The ongoing creation of designs and of the combining of two designs to form new shapes and motifs is common practice and as such trade marking any specific design <u>or its derivative</u> would have far reaching consequences across the Pacific.

# 3.0 Evidence of the 15-designs pre-dating 2012

The fifteen designs incorporated within the Fiji Airways (Air Pacific) logo as created by the traditional Masi maker for their use are derived from a rich storehouse of designs within the iTaukei heritage arts. The next section presents each design with published evidence that these pre-date the creation of the airlines logo.

### Design 1: Kaova

The first design titled kaova in the airlines press release is found in Masi photographed in Koojiman (1977); Leonard & Terrell (1980); Neich & Pendergrast (1997) and in Spicer & Me (2004). It is important to note that Makereta Matemosi (the Masi maker responsible for the Fiji Airways logo) was a primary contributor to Spicer & Me (2004) and in that collection she names this same design not as Kaova but as Vakaciveyadra <sup>7</sup>to refer to the knotted X design. When combined with the serrated edge design between two Vaka civeyadra, it is now seen as a new combination. In Neich & Pendergrast (1997) the serrated motif is found in a Cakaudrove piece of Masi while the Civeyadra is cited in a documentation of Masi from Moce (Koojiman, 1977). The design is a combination of two existing designs which falls in line with traditional tapa design practice and therefore cannot be said to be specifically and only used for the airlines logo.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> This is called Civeyadra in Koojiman 1977.

### Design 2: Boi Yawa



This particular design appears to be an original creation by the artist and no previous use was found.

#### **Design 3: Droe**



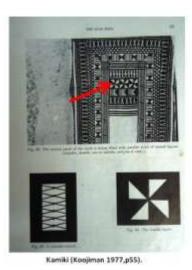
The third design Droe is a derivative of a design documented by Koojiman (1972) from Somosomo in Taveuni. The design element is clear when comparing between the older motif and its newer version in the logo.

#### Design 4: Kaso





Above Koojiman 1972, p376, 377 – Masi from Somosomo, Taveuni with this design dated 1914.



The fourth design named Kaso in the Fiji Airways listing is a common shared motif found in Samoan Siapo, Tongan Ngatu and Fijian Masi. In Samoa and Tonga these designs are referred to as Manulua (two birds) while in Fiji, according to Koojiman (1977) it is known as Kamiki in Moce<sup>8</sup>. In Tonga, the symbolism of two birds is an omen of good luck and it is said that the manulua features prominently in funeral and wedding tapa cloth.

This design also features in various heritage arts including the sennit lashings (lalava), in carvings and nowadays in contemporary tattoos.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Koojiman 1977, (pp 52 – 56).



This design is often called the "Vane Swastika" in western writing and is said to be found also in Indonesian bark cloth<sup>9</sup>.

Samoan Siapo (Neich & Pendergrast 1997, p24)



Shell collage panel at the Basilica Hall in Nuku'alofa.



Tongan Ngatu featuring Manulua

Manulua – a common well known Tongan design (kupesi)

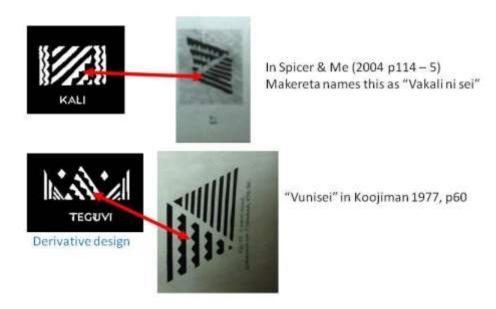


The 'manulua' design features across Tongan heritage arts including weaving. Above woven sinnet on beams at the Basilica in Nuku'alofa made in the 1970s.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> See for example Kramer, 1914; Buck, 1930; Koojiman, 1972; 1977; Neich & Pendergrast 1997.

### Design 5 & 6: Kali and Teguvi

Designs 5 and 6, named Kali and Teguvi in the Airline listing are derivatives from a single design named Vunisea in Moce (Koojiman 1977). In Spicer and Me (2004) Makereta provides the name Vakali ni sei. Kali simply adds a small border design on left and right edge, while Tuguvi rearranges the elements of the original Vunisea motif.



### Design 7: Qalitoka

The seventh design listed is named Qalitoka. This design appears in a Masi bolabola from Cakaudrove as documented by Neich & Pendergrast (1997). This design is also found in lapita and in a number of heritage arts in Tonga. In Tonga heritage arts, this design is referred to as Amoamokofe and is linked to traditional bamboo fence designs.



Masibolabola, Cakaudrove (Neich & Pendergrast 1997, p110).



Lapita excavated in Tonga



Woven Sinnet on Beams at the Basilica, Nuku'alofa, Tonga



(Right) Lalava (sinet lashings) showing the Amoamokofe design at the Tupou College beams at Toloa, Nuku'alofa<sup>10</sup>.

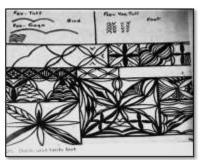
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Photographs of Lapita and sinnet beam lashings courtesy of the author © 2012.

### Design 8: Al Voto



The eighth design listed as Al Voto appears to be an original design created by Makereta as this is not found in any texts on Fijian or other Pacific Masi. The centre star however is a common Siapo design.

The design which looks like a four armed star or four petalled flower in Samoan siapo is linked to a number of birds. Depending on its size and shape, it may be used to refer to the sandpiper or plover, and the tern<sup>11</sup>.



#### **Design 9: Makare**

The design listed as Makere is a common Masi design commonly taken to be a comb or seru. This design is found in Masi from all parts of Fiji.



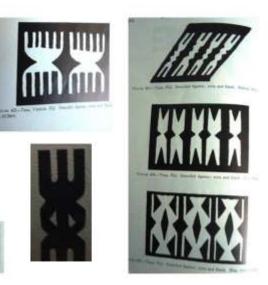
There are many varieties of this common motif. See Koojiman 1972, p402 – 405.

Koojiman 1977, p91

Leonard & Terrell 1980, p91

Spicer & Me (2004, p113 - 115

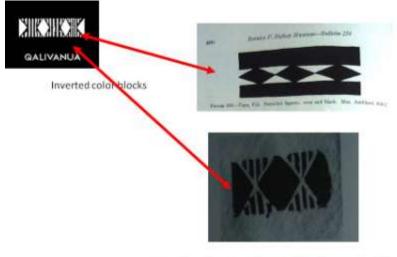




<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> See Pritchard 1994, p57.

#### Design 10: Qalivanua

The design listed as Qalivanua is found in Spicer and Me (2004, p114-5). It is a derivative of a design found in Koojiman (1972, p400).



Drau drau "O" (Spicer & Me 2004, p114-5), Incidently this design was named by Makereta who also designed the Air Pacific Logo and features in this book.

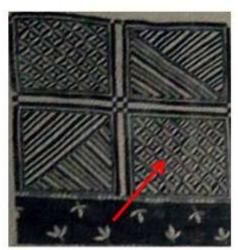
### Design 11: Rova

The design listed as Rova is a derivative of at least two designs – the Vacu ni Tadruku

(Koojiman 1977) and the Manulua. As shown in the Masi from bouma, this derivative of the Manulua has been used in the past.



Outer motifs are derived from "Vacu ni Tadruku" See Koojiman 1977, p53)



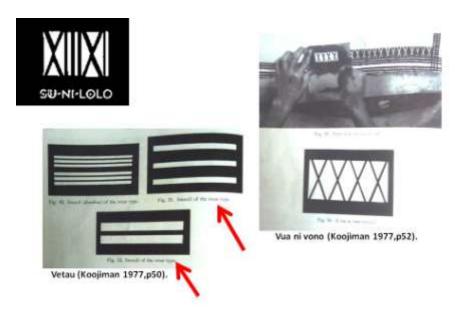
Cakaudrove, 1929 (Leonard & Terrell 1980, p31).

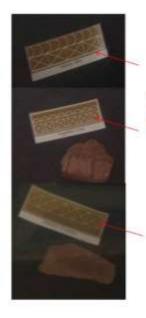


Bouma, Taveuni (Neich & Pendergrast 1997, p114).

### Design 12: Su ni lolo

The Su-ni-lolo is another common design with earliest records found in Lapita from Tonga and in old Samoan Siapo (Neich & Pendergrast, 1997). In the context of Fijian Masi, it is a combination of two designs documented from Moce research conducted in the 1970s. The first a series of lines is called Vetau and the straight X called Vua ni vono (Koojiman, 1977).





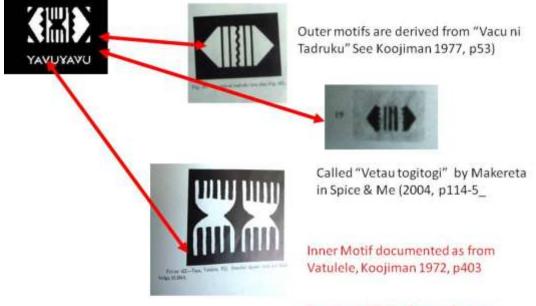
The basic design is found in Lapita pottery. See images from Tonga excavation sites.



Samoan Siapo featuring only this design (Neich & Pendergrast 1997, p33)

#### Design 13: Yavuyavu

The design Yavuyavu is another design that is comprised of a combination of two preexisting kesakesa designs. The outer design is the Vetau togitogi (Spicer & Me, 2004) and the inner is the Seru, documented in 1972 from Vatulele and in 1977 in Moce.



Koojiman 1977 refers to these as "seru" (p71).

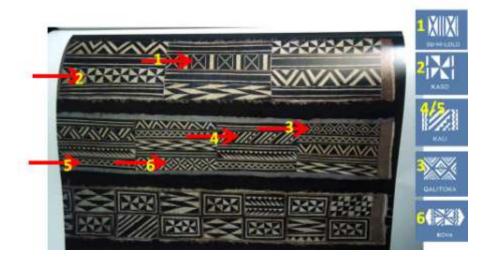
### Designs 14 & 15: Uga and Tama

The final two designs, Uga and Tama are found in Fiji Masi recorded by Koojiman in the 1970s and in Masi Bolabola from Cakaudrove in Neich & Pendergrast (1997). It is also a shared Tongan kupesi referred to as Fakalala. In the Tongan context, this design is reserved for nobles of a particular line of Kings.



The image below showing Masi Bolabola from Cakaudrove includes six of the listed designs.

Masi bolabola, Cakaudrove (Neich & Pendergrast 1997, p110)



## 4.0 The 15 kesakesa designs as Cultural Heritage for Human Security

As shown, 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 trade marking 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 trade mark these designs, this would affect the cultural economy in ways that would ultimately lead to culture loss.

The designs indicated demonstrate the age-old practice of reproducing designs within the cultural design database. An important part of the process of Tapa production (Masi, Kupesi and Siapo) continues to be the rearrangement of these designs into new motifs as shown in a number of identified designs. Through the cultural circulation of Tapa, these designs become formalized and other women begin to use them in their creations. In this way, new derivates become common use motifs. The airline should therefore not be permitted to own the right to these designs as individual motifs because it would affect the livelihoods and cultural heritage of iTaukei peoples as well as other indigenous communities for whom these designs hold socio-cultural and spiritual meaning.

It must also be noted that Contemporary Pacific island artists would also be affected by the trade marking of these designs as many visual artists (e.g. painters and fashion designs) who regularly make use of these and other heritage designs in their art work. For these contemporary artists, the incorporation of these designs are often used as cultural and identity markers distinguishing their art from those by other artists from the region. These designs are also commonly used by tattoo artists across the Pacific. A question that remains unanswered is how would the trade marking affect these artisans? Would they need permission from the airline to use their own heritage designs?

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# Appendices of images showing the wide range of arts that utilize kesakesa designs



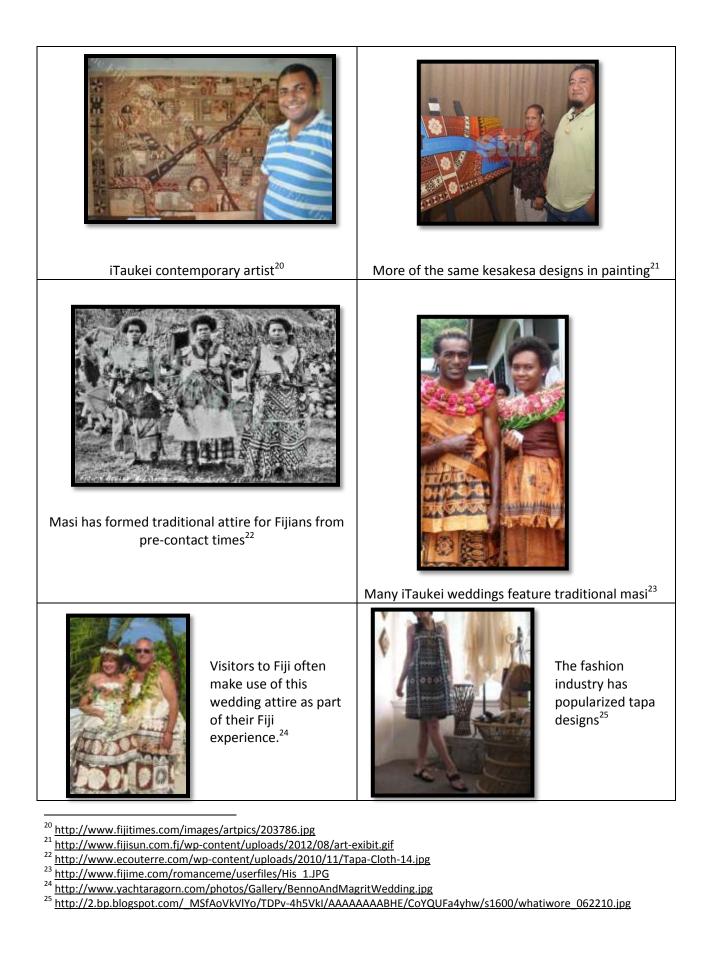
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> http://www.flickr.com/photos/38581051@N02/8158405036/ <sup>13</sup> http://www.tower.com/born-raised-fiji-cassette/wapi/106153435

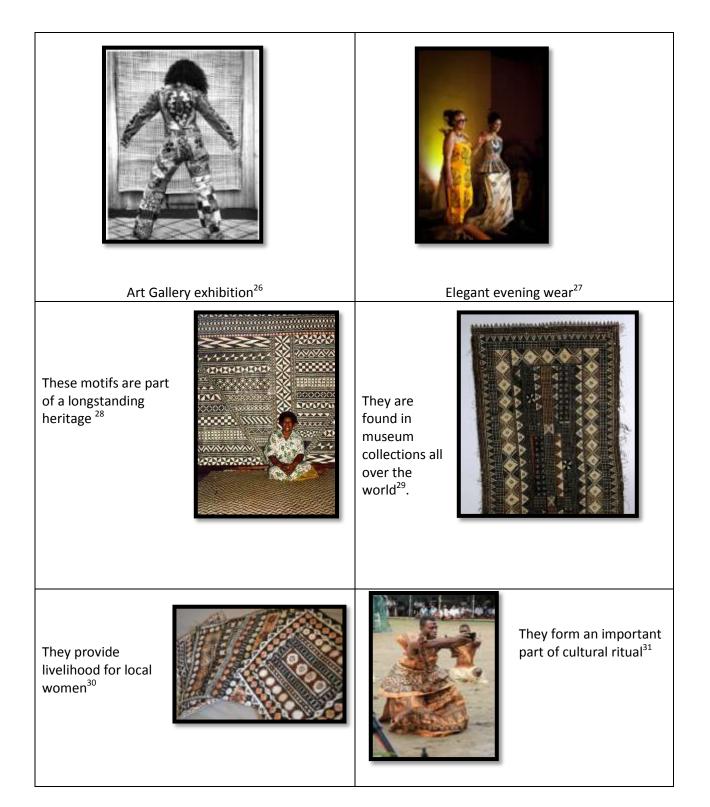
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Masi by Nina Nawalowalo, 2012 <u>http://2012.festival.co.nz/yk-</u>

images/d891fce548a8472dca449055f13ff008/related/Masi TheConch ImagePhilipMerry 11 highresA4.jpg <sup>15</sup> http://sphotos-a.xx.fbcdn.net/hphotos-prn1/c21.0.403.403/p403x403/644277 574903662528747 126642623 n.jpg



 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> <u>http://www.facebook.com/pages/Aaron-Fiji-Art/193032220778251</u>
<sup>17</sup> <u>http://2.bp.blogspot.com/ OY-0d2rKv Q/TGnh 7QP-II/AAAAAAAALXs/LjACHzmQykg/s1600/image004-751674.jpg</u>
<sup>18</sup> <u>http://www.fijitimes.com/images/artpics/103689.jpg</u>
<sup>19</sup> <u>http://images.fineartamerica.com/images-small/pacifica-dreaming-meli-laddpeter.jpg</u>

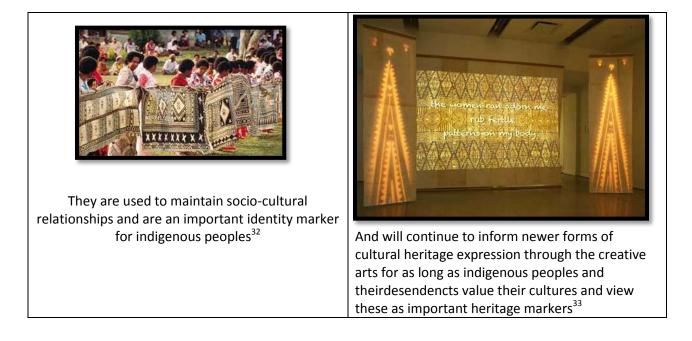




<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> <u>http://www.museenkoeln.de/ medien/ausstellungen/500/939.jpg</u>

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http://cdn.c.photoshelter.com/img-get/I0000gJD6XT1NeXg/s/750/750/Fiji-80874.jpg
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http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/images/h2/h2\_1977.395.5.jpg
http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-Fjv9FBCXASk/TWQNjxjQExI/AAAAAAAAAGw/OJOHLLZKD30/s1600/DSC\_0618.JPG

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> http://media-cache-ec3.pinterest.com/192x/42/2d/c3/422dc352bb0a8bf3b338dbb599ad49af.jpg



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#### About the Author:

Cresantia is a Fiji National of mixed heritage. She lectures in Education and is the Education for Sustainable Development Coordinator at the Faculty of Arts, Law and Education, University of the South Pacific. A secondary school teacher by profession, she worked for the Ministry of Education from 1996 – 2001 in a number of Secondary Schools in Suva. After completing her Masters in Education, she joined the University in 2002 where she has remained since then. Her doctoral dissertation on Tapa and Tattoo practice in Samoa and Tonga is currently with examiners for completion. Her research and community work for over ten years has been in the area of Education and Pacific Arts and Culture and she has worked with the Ministry of Education and with Fiji Arts Council on numerous projects.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-KndoPwvVbhE/UQmWEqxiYOI/AAAAAAAACxQ/l6gh\_ifvjIE/s1600/islandmasi.gif

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Installation view of *Cling to the Sea* by **Rosanna Raymond** (2010), masi (bark cloth made by Adi Liku Vadranalagi, Fiji), video and gobo projection, audio recording [Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver BC, Jan 23- Sep 12] <u>http://www.preview-art.com/previews/06-2010/borderzones.html</u>