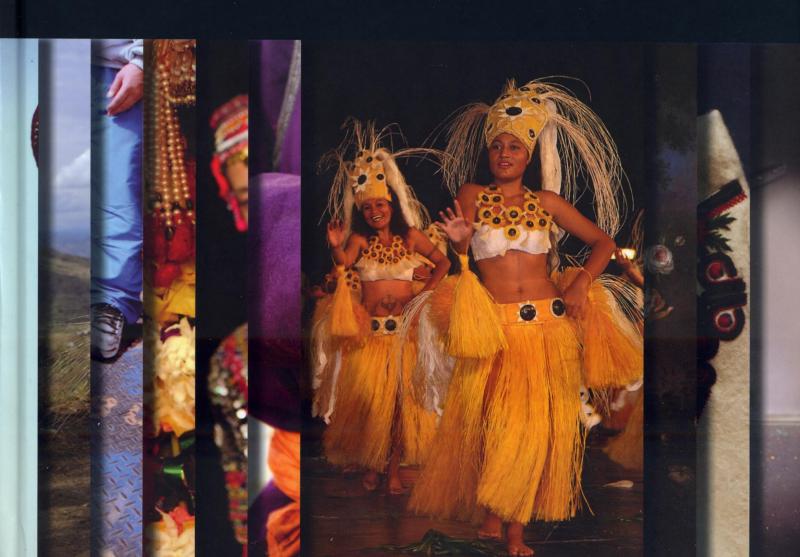
Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion

# Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands



# EDIA DRESS AND FASHION

# Volume 7

Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands

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### English edition

First published in 2010 by

### Berg

Editorial offices:

First Floor, Angel Court, 81 St Clements Street, Oxford OX4 1AW, UK 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010, USA

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Berg is the imprint of Oxford International Publishers Ltd.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978 I 84788 396 4 (volume 7) 978 I 84788 104 5 (set)

Typeset by Apex CoVantage, Madison, WI.

Printed in the USA by Courier Companies Inc., Westford, MA.

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# **Economies and Cultures of Dress**

- Economies
- · Cultures and Status
- · Body, Gender, and Behavior
- · Cultural Exchanges and Identity

he economic and cultural history of dress in Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific is extraordinarily complex and varied. The region spans highly industrialized nations, communities based on subsistence living, and intermediary economies. Shifts in cultural attitudes toward dress and the body and alteration to economies over time have been accentuated by trade with Europe, the United States, and Asia. Clothing demarcating gender and age differences must be acknowledged, as well as cross-cultural influences and consciousness of national identity. The issue of prestige and status is pertinent across the region, though expressed in vastly different ways. Indigenous peoples customarily fabricated body wear and painted and incised their skins with materials from plants and animals, mostly but not entirely from their own locality. Contact with colonial cultures began the process of introducing European textiles, clothing, and associated behaviors, many class-based. The interplay that subsequently occurred between daily and ceremonial clothing made from local materials and traded or imported goods is significant and ongoing. Generic imported dress in some places intermingles with customary clothing on a daily basis. In all forms of everyday and indeed celebratory attire, there appears to be a continuing but altered link with the past.

The rise of China in the twentieth century as a modern engine of clothing and textile production, plus low costs of making garments in India and Vietnam, means the global economy has strongly impacted on the textile, clothing, and footwear industries of Australia and New Zealand. Australia's policy of multicultural tolerance changed focus early in the twenty-first century. While economic globalization increased cosmopolitanism, it also encouraged more divisive attitudes toward minority ethnicities. For Australians of European origin and many who wish to blend in with the culture, the overarching style of clothing is Western, with dress and hairstyling characterized by informality and ease of wear. Urban business attire is an exception. Nevertheless, the dressed visibility of Muslims, and occasionally Africans and Indians, is still evident.

Localized dress is found throughout the region. In places like Fiji many ethnic groups wear Western dress (primarily locally made), but differences persist even in towns, though these differences are most obvious in rural areas, particularly among women. Yet some urban Fijian men prefer the cloth kilt (sulu vakataga) with shirt, jacket, and tie for formal wear, Indian women wear saris for social events, and urban Fijian women may wear the Chinese-like cheongsam, a dress with diagonal front closing, standup collar, and side slits. This ethnic mix occurs elsewhere. Pacific Islanders who have moved to Auckland, New Zealand's largest city, may mark out their street identity with T-shirts declaring

their island of origin, frequently with political messages, or to satirize well-known brands in island terms. Elsewhere, specialties for tourists like colorful, even glittery, island-designed Hawaiian T-shirts with local imagery, T-shirts and scarves printed with Aboriginal designs, and in New Zealand paua shell jewelry are niche market products and valued as souvenirs. In the twenty-first century Western dress, ethnic specificities, tourist products, localized groups, and subculture clothing, sometimes reclaiming or rewriting the past, provide a dynamic picture of dress.

### **ECONOMIES**

If we look across Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands, we find vast differentials of economic prosperity. Whereas Australia ranked 11th in the World Bank's scale of gross national



Fijian High Chief Rātū Mitieli Narukutabua, his wife, Lavenia Lave, and young son Rātū Meli, on their way to church in 1993. The men wear modern formal Fijian dress kilts with white shirts, which do not indicate their status. Rātū Meli wears typical men's leather sandals, but his waistcoat is unusual. Lavenia's clothing is a typical formal ladies' layered dress, a short-sleeved frock with an underskirt or long half-slip made of shiny material. Photograph courtesy of Roderick Ewins.

# Fijian Dress and Body Modifications

- Body Alteration
- Face and Body Painting
- Hair (Drau ni ulu) and Grooming (Qaravi ulu)
- Personal Ornament (luku-uku)
- Masks
- Female Clothing
- Male Clothing
- Dyed and Figured Barkcloth
- Missionary Intervention
- · Fijian Clothing in the Early Twenty-first Century

G eographically, Fiji sits where the arbitrarily defined three triangles of Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia intersect, and it shares many cultural elements with its neighbors on all sides, though Polynesian elements predominate. Bodywear has always been strongly differentiated in terms of age, gender, and social status. Nineteenth-century Christian missionary and colonial government intervention altered every aspect of custom, including bodywear. Items with any symbolic connection with the old religion and warfare were abolished, while age and gender differences were modified, sometimes reversed, to fit acceptable European values. What was customary bodywear up to the midnineteenth century and what is considered "typically Fijian" in the twenty-first century are as dramatically different as bodywear in medieval Britain compared with modern styles, but even many of the changed forms are distinctive and recognizably Fijian.

From first contact in the eighteenth century many Westerners described Fijians as being "naked" or "near naked." Actually, both men and women used an extensive array of bodywear. Early Wesleyan missionary Thomas Williams (in Fiji 1845–1873) noted that in Fiji's climate, dress was unnecessary for utility, and he credited Fijians' modesty for such covering as they did adopt. He opposed the imposition of European mores, but his church did make it a condition of conversion that Fijians transform most of their customary wear. Prudery and conservatism played their part, but even more critical was the fact that the old religion underpinned almost all cultural and social matters, including bodywear. Eliminating people's ancestor-based religious beliefs included removing the potent visible symbols of these that they carried on their bodies. The incoming British colonial government supported many such bans, since warfare and cannibalism were also both integral to Fijian religion, but unacceptable in the new civil order.

### **BODY ALTERATION**

Commencing in early childhood, both males and females practiced many body alterations, dictated by their religion and occasioned as mourning sacrifices for chiefs or relatives. Any who



"Modes of painting the face," drawing by Thomas Williams, published in Fiji and the Fijians: The Islands and Their Inhabitants (London: Alexander Heylin, 1858). This drawing shows the many styles that Fijians use from a combination of colors, techniques, and patterns. Drawing by Thomas Williams. Courtesy of Roderick Ewins.

shirked these obligations could anticipate such savage retribution at the hands of the guardians of the path to the afterworld (bulu) that everyone submitted to them. The most basic was the amputation of successive joints of little fingers. Even in the twenty-first century one name for the little finger is ilolokunimate, or "sacrifice for the deceased." After them, little toes could be amputated. The arms, back, and breast could be burned with firebrands to raise rows of cicatrices or scars (imacamaca). Perhaps most immediately noticeable was the vertical slitting of one or both earlobes to insert ornaments (isaunidaliga), first a plant stalk or leaf, then a "spring" of rolled leaves or barkcloth to distend the hole, through a variety of objects up to purpose-made disks over two hundred millimeters (7.9 inches) in diameter. Most prized were plugs carved of whale-tooth ivory, an attractive material with surpassing spiritual significance for Fijians. Curiously, ubiquitous as they were, only a handful of ear ornaments have survived in museums. Totally absent from collections are the bones or carved

wooden dowels reportedly worn through the nasal septum by some Vitilevu highlanders, who exhibited more Melanesian traits than their lowland and small-islander neighbors.

Finally came genital alteration, by which boys and girls were initiated into adulthood on the occasion of the death of a senior relative or important chief. Boys about the age of puberty were circumcised (teve) as a group, their foreskins cut off by a priest and buried with the deceased, along with amputated fingers of both sexes and, in the case of important males, with wives who were strangled to accompany them into the afterworld. Circumcision, "validated" by Judeo-Christian practice, was the only form of body alteration not suppressed by either Christian or government edict.

On the same occasions girls who had reached or were approaching menarche began a lengthy process of tattooing (veiqia), by at least one account accompanied by clitoral mutilation. Female tattooing is common in Melanesia, whereas in Polynesia male tattooing is the rule, but not in Fiji. Paradoxically, Samoa and Tonga credit the origin of their male tattooing to Fiji, with curious legends to explain the gender reversal. Female elder experts presided. Their instruments were little adze-like tools (iqia) with bound-on citrus thorns or twin-toothed picks of tortoise shell or bone. A stick or tiny paddle tapped the heel of the adze to drive the pick into the skin, blood was mopped off with a barkcloth swab, and soot obtained by burning candlenuts of the lauci tree (Aleurites triloba) was rubbed into the wounds. This apparently had antiseptic properties and remained ingrained as a permanent tattoo.

There were regional variations in tattoo detail, but the essentials were universal. The primary target was the pudendum and extended outward from there. It might extend to the upper thighs, hips, and buttocks, up as far as the waist, giving the external appearance of blue-black shorts visible above and below their fiber hip-girdles (*liku*). Frequently it was less extensive, largely concealed by the liku. Designs comprised patterns of straight, diagonal, circular, and spiral lines and dot patterns. Choice was reportedly dictated solely by the initiate's fancy, and no symbolic meaning was ever recorded for the motifs themselves. It seems probable that it was the totality of the tattoo that carried meaning, which is consistent with the figuration on barkcloth.

Also tattooed were the backs of the hands and knuckles, lines up the arms and across the chest above the breasts, and lines from the small of the back to the top of the shoulders. Some groups had bands encircling the mouth and/or small clan insignia such as stars on the cheeks. Clitoral mutilation may also have taken place. When the whole process had been completed, small semicircles would often be tattooed at the corner of a girl's mouth to signify that she was now complete and eligible for marriage.

By the second half of the twentieth century, virtually no one, even in remote areas, still bore bodily evidence of the old ways. While some young people today have their ears pierced or affect very small tattoos, these relate to world fashions and not at all to Fijian custom, unlike the resurgence of tattooing in Samoa, New Zealand, and elsewhere.

### FACE AND BODY PAINTING

Fijians have always rubbed scented coconut oil (waiwai saluaki) on their skin to keep it soft, supple, and sweet-smelling. On special occasions people of all ages glisten with oil. Formerly, however,

men and women also had what numerous observers noted as a "passion for daubing the face (veiqisa) with colored powder"—particularly but not only for festivals, rituals, or war. Their palette was limited to red earths (qeledamu) and the golden yellows and oranges of turmeric (rerega), carbon black (loaloa) from soot or fungus spores (qumu), and kaolin clay or burnt-coral-lime white (vulavula), all mixed into a binder of oil.

Brilliant vermilion (kulakulā) in particular was keenly sought in trade with Europeans, and once the lipstick plant (Bixa orellana) was introduced, its brilliant seed coating was preferred to muted red clays. Women frequently painted their faces uniformly red, sometimes with a fine black line around each eye reminiscent of the kohl eye-lining of Asia, while men painted their faces using combinations of colors in individualistic and endlessly creative patterns of waves and stripes, circles, spots, and stars, as well as simple vertical and/or lateral subdivisions of the face. Descriptions and illustrations call to mind the face and body painting still practiced in parts of New Guinea. For war, black predominated, also rubbed on arms and torsos. Where it occurred naturally, antimony (Vatu resse resse) could be rubbed on the skin, imparting a metallic sheen, and the washing-blue introduced by Europeans proved irresistible, as it did to other Pacific Islanders.

This painting was more than mere "daubing," however. Colors had symbolic denotations, and by painting themselves Fijians assumed the splendor and protective aura of their cosmology. The auratic power of golden turmeric was also invoked in childbirth;



A Fijian man with an ornate hairdo and wasekaseka, a sawn whale-tooth gorget, Levuka, Fiji, ca. 1890. Photograph by John Waters. Courtesy Rod Ewins Collection.

mother, baby, and their clothing were smeared from head to foot with it, and in death the deceased was often liberally coated in turmeric. The faces and torsos of great warrior chiefs were also painted black, ready for battle, and with favorite weapons at hand they were deemed ready to confront the terrors of their afterworld.

Missionaries and colonial administrators had the same problems with face and body painting as they did with body alteration, and it survived only in vestigial form. Modern dance performers often wear black spots on their cheeks, foreheads, and chins, and less often smeared on arms and chests. But these are mere tokens of the wonderful multicolored body artistry of their ancestors. In the twenty-first century, however, such cosmetics as are worn by Fijian women are those developed for African Americans.

### HAIR (DRAU NI ULU) AND GROOMING (QARAVI ULU)

Reflecting their genetic history, Fijians' hair ranges from frizzed like their Melanesian neighbors to the northwest, to curly or wavy like their Polynesian neighbors to the east. The head throughout Polynesia is regarded as sacred, particularly in the case of chiefs and priests, and taboos include the hair and anything placed in it or used to dress it. Men and women frequently bleached their hair with lime and/or colored it wholly or in sections. Young girls have always worn their hair no more than two centimeters (about three-quarters of an inch) long. During their teens it is allowed to grow. Formerly they grew long locks (tobe) to hang down on one side, but by the mid-1980s only a very few girls in the southern islands of the Lau group followed the custom, and it may since have vanished altogether.

These "virgin plaits" were cut off by the husband on the nuptial night. In the nineteenth century his womenfolk would crop the bride's hair close the following day, and she thenceforth wore it fairly short. Drawings and descriptions reveal that most commonly, it resembled the top of a barrister's wig, cropped over the top but slightly turned up around the edges. However, while their menfolk were abandoning their elaborate hairstyles, Christianized women increasingly wore their hair long, and by the twentieth century "Afro-style" hair was the female norm. Some men also followed this fashion, particularly policemen (who actually had to get permission to cut it), but by the 1980s very few men still wore long hair. By then some young urban women started wearing their hair short, but following modern Western, not historical Fijian, styles.

With women's access to extravagant headdress circumscribed, Fijian men had the field to themselves. Described repeatedly by outside observers as dandies, they were normally full-bearded and very meticulous about their coiffures, with all classes spending much time and trouble on it. Even small boys had their hair cut in fanciful forms, and as they grew into manhood they became increasingly particular about its length and styling. To tease it out they (or in the case of chiefs and priests, sanctified attendants) used objects like long knitting needles, made of wood and called balabala after the black tree fern used (Cyathea lunulata), or of tortoise shell or human fibulae and called iqeu. These were "parked" in the hair and beard, where they served as scratchers (imilamila) of resident vermin.

Hair could reach a meter and a half (about five feet) in circumterence and be sculpted into elaborate shapes. A chief's complex

hairdo might take two full days to dress, so he took great care to preserve it for days. This was assisted by Fijians' use (like their neighbors on all sides) of quite tall headrests (kali) made principally of timber or bamboo, which kept the head off the ground during sleep. In addition, chiefs alone were permitted to wrap their hair in a fine gauzy barkcloth hair scarf (isala). They are often called turbans. This is misleading since they were not thick and coiled like a turban, their large size due solely to the great mop of hair they enclosed.

Delicate combs (iseru), with teeth of coconut leaflet midribs (sāsā) or wood, were for fashion, not function. These and other ornaments, generically called itekiteki and often decorated with shells, beads, or feathers, were also stuck in the hair or beards. Once they started wearing their hair longer, women also appropriated these ornaments for dance and ceremony. A visitor even described seeing young women impaling fireflies on sāsā to stick in their hair for a nighttime dance performance, where they continued to flash for hours.

Some chiefs wore frontlets (ornaments or bands on the fore-head) made of the prized scarlet feathers of the *kula* parrot (collared lory—*Phigys solitarius*), and there is one illustration of a splendid chief's woven feather headdress with a corona of flight



Tobe virgin plaits worn by Lefila Takayawa, Fipe Jeni (both seventeen years old), and Korovou Neimani (twenty years old) on the way to a friend's birthday party, Namuka Island, 1985. Short jackets and matching skirts are popular formal dress among young Fijian women. Photograph by Roderick Ewins.

or tail feathers, reminiscent of those of eastern Polynesia, though sadly none appears to have survived. In some places chiefs alone might stick in their hair the paired trailing tail feathers of the lawedua, or white-tailed tropic bird (Phaethon lepturus). Other warriors would use the graceful red and black tail feathers of the toaniveikau tagane, or jungle fowl cock (Gallus gallus).

Male dandies affected wigs, much as their European counterparts had in the eighteenth century. Large ones were particularly in vogue in the Colo Highlands of Vitilevu, and they earned the men there the European sobriquet of "Big-heads." Made of human hair, often colored in whole or in part, sometimes with ringlets (qaliqali) cascading from them, wigs were ingeniously fashioned on frames of basketry or coconut-coir sennit cord. They could also serve to partially redress the temporary disfigurement caused by the mourning custom of cropping the hair and shaving beards. (In the twenty-first century most men lack long hair or beards, so in yet another reversal they neither shave nor cut their hair for about three months as a sign of respect, until a lifting of mourning ceremony normalizes matters.) The hair for wigs was cut from slain enemies, hence their common name ulumate, or "dead-head." The sacrilegious violation of one's head and hair was a final and particularly extreme insult to inflict on the victim. As warfare and cannibalism ceased, and the ready supply of human hair with it, horsehair was sometimes used, and large imposing wigs could even be made of tightly packed leaves, fastened to the frame and singed on the outside to quite convincingly resemble tightly curled hair.

### PERSONAL ORNAMENT (IUKU-UKU)

Both sexes have always frequently worn vines, green or colored leaves, and perfumed flowers on their heads and bodies for dances and ceremonies. Flowers (seni) are worn either singly or as woven garlands. Simple daisy-chains (called sinucodo) of several flower species may be worn in the hair and around the neck, arms, or wrists. As well, armlets, wristlets, and leg ornaments (vesa) may be made of specially woven vine, black sennit, or pandanus, sometimes ornamented with beads or shells. There are also barkcloth versions, cut into strips and lacy fringes. Male leg ornaments are worn just below the knee, female ones around the ankles. Larger flower constructions called salusalu are similar to the lei of Hawaii and like them are particularly a token of welcome and farewell.

Formerly, on arms and/or wrists, both sexes wore bangles (qato) made by cutting rings from large trochus or cone shells, and finger rings (mama) made by heating and curling strips of tortoise shell (taku). Necklaces (itaube) were and still remain popular. They are made by threading a great diversity of things onto string made from the inner bark of several plants. Most common are many hard seeds of different colors and a variety of small shells. Particular favorites here as elsewhere are the shiny red seeds of the red bead tree (diridamu—Adenanthera pavonina) and small white to yellow necklace shells (vocovoco—Melampus luteus). Most valued were the small bulileka white cowries (Cypraea luponia), a full necklace of which (tababuli) was considered equal in value to two or three muskets.

Pieces of shell used to be ground into small donut shapes that were threaded together—work so painstaking that it explains the eager uptake of European colored beads. Teeth were also favored, from small whale teeth to those of dolphins, sharks, dogs, even rats, and finally humans, which, like the hair in wigs, had the

added zest of deriving from enemies' heads. A number of particularly valued shells were worn singly as pendants (*itaubebuli*), such as the white egg-cowrie buli qaqau (Ovula ovum). Considered potent charms like other white cowries, they were also used to decorate temple finials, canoes, and the cords on kava bowls (tanoa). The rare golden cowries bulikula (Cypraea aurantium), being gold to orange, were reserved for chiefs' pendants, as were *isōvui* (Gloripallium sp.), also in the red-orange spectrum. A prized warrior's chest pendant was a boar's tusk that had grown into a circle or spiral (*itaube batinivuaka*).

An object of unique symbolic power in Fiji is the *tabua*, the tooth of the sperm whale (*Macrocepohalus physeter*). Teeth were originally obtained from beached migratory whales, but the advent of Yankee and other whalers improved access enormously. Large teeth have holes drilled in the ends and a thick sennit cordattached, but contrary to popular belief they are seldom worn and almost certainly never were. Tabua are the most valued object for ritual presentation, and the thick square plaited cord, so unsuitable as a neck strap, actually plays a symbolic role in presentation rituals.

However, tabua could be fashioned into a variety of objects intended to be worn. Small teeth were either threaded as full necklaces (sisi) or tightly bound to a woven sennit band to make choker-style necklets (vuasagale). The most prized form was made of tabua carefully sawn lengthwise into strips, which were ground to a fine taper and bound together. Called wasekaseka, these were worn with the points outward. Linguistic archaeology indicates that these were developed in Fiji but later adopted by Tongans, Samoans, and other neighbors. Before the nineteenth century Tongans of the Ha'apai group had become specialist workers of whale-tooth ivory and effectively cornered the trade in these and a variety of other ivory articles exported to the virtually insatiable Fiji market.

Most exotic and prized of these were discoid breastplates (civavonovono), generally around fifteen to twenty centimeters (5.9 to 7.8 inches) in diameter (the size of a bread-and-butter plate), made either completely of cut ivory pieces impeccably jointed and bound together, or more commonly of pieces of ivory attached to and/or inlaid into large black-lipped pearlshells (civa—Meleagrina margaritifera). They probably evolved from the huge whalebone breast-shield discs Tongans had earlier developed, perhaps as protection against Fijian war-arrows. The spiritual weight of the tabua version made them highly prized chiefly objects in Fiji, and importation was so voracious that few if any remained in Tonga, so they have been widely accepted as Fijian artifacts. There can never have been more than a few dozen made, each so distinctive in design that individual museum specimens can often be identified in early field photographs, worn by chiefs.

### MASKS

While tourists eagerly buy the carved wooden masks on offer in shops and stalls, these are purely tourist articles dating from the 1950s. Fijians never carved or wove masks like those of New Guinea or Africa. However, they did formerly make masks to be worn by special (male) performers in certain dances associated with first-fruits ceremonies. Very few survive in museums, and descriptions are sparse.

The main type was named matavulo, from mata, or face, and vulo, the fibrous gauze wrapping the leaf bases of coconut palms



Matavulo helmet mask, collected in Fiji, 1840. The mask is usually worn by "gremlin" dancers in first-fruits ceremonies. National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

from which they were fashioned. The simplest were flat sheets of vulo, cut to size and with holes for eyes, nostrils, and mouths, and frequently warrior face paint, tied to the face and worn in conjunction with a wig. An elaborate helmet version was fashioned over a basketry frame. It roughly resembled a human face, with an integral human hair wig running into a mustache and beard. Armed with clubs or spears, the performers wore leaves from neck to foot, recalling the Green Man of Celtic lore, with whom they shared other qualities, since they were held to embody the mischievous and often malevolent jungle gremlins called *veli*, *qica*, or *driai*. The masks and clowning antics of these *velinimeke* (gremlins of the dance) enhanced the illusion of possession and tinged audience amusement with fear. As with all Fijian spirits, veli were ancestral beings, zealous guardians of crops, and their compliance was necessary to free the first fruits for use.

### FEMALE CLOTHING

Clothing, like body alteration and decoration, was sharply genderdifferentiated. Female clothing was the ultimate in simplicity and brevity, while full ceremonial male clothing was extensive. The only thing males and females shared was that both went naked in childhood. Broadly, this persisted until they underwent the genital alterations described previously, initiating them into adulthood. However, at between eight and ten years of age girls were given an interim garment consisting of two short fringed panels with ties at each end. The two minimal components were worn back and front, tied together at each end and leaving both hips bare.

Their tattooing complete, girls could at last don the liku. It was still very brief, both shorter and stiffer than those they would later wear as married women. Girls' liku had a waistband about fifty millimeters (two inches) in depth with a fringe about ten centimeters or so (four inches) in length on the lower edge. The waistband on a mature woman's liku was about 125 millimeters

(4.9 inches) in depth with a longer fringe that increased in length with their age but seldom exceeded twenty centimeters (7.8 inches), giving a total length of only about thirty centimeters (11.8 inches) for matrons.

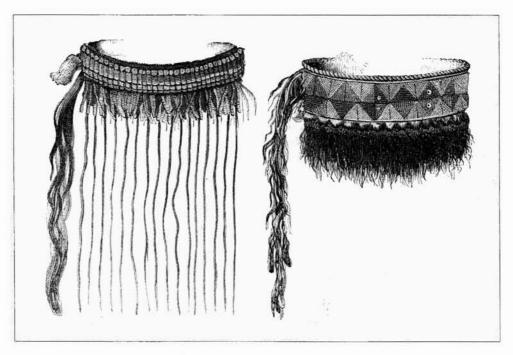
Manufacture was fairly standard. They were intricately woven from any combination of the processed inner bark or bast of the wild hibiscus (vau-Hibiscus tiliaceus) and/or sennit, sedge (kuta—Eleocharis dulcis), and other fibers, even strips of barkcloth. Thirty or forty centimeters (11.8 to 15.7 inches) of loose fibers at either end served as ties. The waistband was robust, often multicolored and patterned, and its weave was somewhat elastic. Only this allowed them to stay in place, since they were worn slung low as hip-girdles, appearing to both restrict the legs and stay in place precariously. Observers were unanimous, however, in saying that women contrived by their actions to maintain total modesty. On special occasions several liku might be worn tiered, their colors and patterns carefully chosen. Such carefully woven items were valuable, and when engaged in rough work such as gardening or fishing, females instead wore work girdles (isuai) made of banana leaves.

### MALE CLOTHING

Male clothing proclaimed manhood, incorporated cosmology and group identity, and defined social status. Boys had no intermediate garment, going from nudity to the *malo* loincloth only following circumcision, an event that prompted rituals, gift exchanges, and feasts. The malo (its name throughout Polynesia) was the primary garment. It was a strip of barkcloth or *masi*, a fabric beaten out from the white inner bark (bast) of saplings of the paper mulberry (*Broussonetia papyrifera*). Manufactured solely by women, who were forbidden its use as clothing, it was critical to male rites of passage. It has always been recognized as the most important women's valuable, and they had charge of masi when first dressing boys following initiation, or men in new malo in the renaming ritual after killing their first enemy. Women still retain this ownership in ritual presentations and exchanges.

A single beaten-out bast constitutes the delicate gauzy fabric used for isala or vesa, but for robust cloth such as that required for malo, two or more basts are felted together during beating. The height and girth of saplings used dictates that one piece of felted cloth is normally about two meters long (six and a half feet) and half a meter (twenty inches) wide. Typically, for commoners' malo, two of these were end-joined, producing a cloth about four meters (thirteen feet) by half a meter (twenty inches), and there are numerous pieces of masi of roughly that size in museum collections. It was worn like a T-bandage, wrapped around the waist and brought up between the legs. The free ends hung down in front and behind, and in the case of chiefs (and only chiefs), much longer malo were made, so that the rear free end formed long trains (malo yara or itini yara) to drag along the ground. One or two throwing-clubs, without which no adult male felt fully dressed, would be thrust into the waistband.

Essentially the same type of cloth could be wrapped around the waist as a cummerbund (ioro). When going into battle this was tied high around the ribs as a sign of challenge. But when ceremonial gift presentations were being made, enormously long masi might be wrapped around the torso, sometimes looped downward and caught up again, the whole affair so cumbersome that the bearer's arms stuck out akimbo. Yet so cunningly



A drawing of *liku* (women's hip-girdles) by Thomas Williams, published in *Fiji* and the *Fijians: The Islands and Their Inhabitants* (London: Alexander Heylin, 1858). The *liku* on the left is worn after completion of tattooing, and the one on the right is a mature woman's girdle. Courtesy of Roderick Ewins.

was it arranged that a single tug could release the whole thing to the ground, the wearer stepping out to leave their gift. There was a term for a 100-fathom- (185-meter-) long cloth of this sort, katudrau. No one could wear that without buckling under the weight, and others would assist.

A surviving chiefly prerogative is to wear a sash (*iwābale*), a single two-meter (6.5-foot) length of masi worn over one shoulder. In some places, if the wearer's highest rank came from his father, it is worn over the right shoulder, if from his mother, over the left shoulder. In the rare event that they have equal status, he might wear two sashes, bandolier-fashion. In the twenty-first century noble women may also wear sashes.

Finally, warriors had their own form of liku, which they wore over their malo into battle, ritual, and dance. This was a kneelength fiber skirt, more sparsely and simply plaited than women's liku. The most valued material for these was the rhizomorphs ("roots") of a plant fungus called wāloa (Armillaria sp). With a hard outer skin these resembled long black bootlaces, and the resulting skirt was called liku wāloa.

### DYED AND FIGURED BARKCLOTH

The symbolism of masi was carried in its coloration and/or figuration. The vast majority was left white (masi vulavula or seāvu). However, that intended for chiefs might be either rubbed with coconut oil and turmeric to dye it golden (masi vakarerega), or then smoked over a slow-burning fire to a rich golden-brown color (masi kuvui). Red through gold, the colors of gods and chiefs, may be applied to any or all chiefs' garments, including the hair scarf, sash, cummerbund, loincloth, and arm and leg ornaments.

In addition to dyeing it, there were several technologies employed for figuring cloth, of which two are still commonly used. The generic term is *masi kesa* (painted barkcloth), the act of figuring kesata. The method most common here, but quite unique in the Pacific, is stenciling. Designs are cut into leaves (or, in the twenty-first century, other stiff materials—light cardboard or even X-ray film), and color is daubed through these holes onto the cloth. As with face painting, the colors used embody Fijian cosmology: The sacred red-browns and black (the color of the temporal world, night, and death) are both applied to cloth, the natural white color of which signifies day, light, life, and the spirit world. In addition, black is the female signifier, white the male.

The small motifs are exclusively geometric, mostly triangle-based with some rectangles, chevrons, and zigzag forms. Though nicknamed for various things they are imagined to resemble, there is no evidence that they ever depicted anything in that literal way. They actually comprise that far rarer thing, a highly sophisticated abstract design system, the totality of which carries meaning. The regional and clan identity of the users was conveyed by which particular motifs were used and by the overall design arrangement on the cloth. Much of this group specificity is progressively being lost, submerged in a sort of pan-Fijian masi design system in which makers freely borrow motifs from one another and employ new motifs derived from playing-card suits and lace-paperdoily patterns. However, it is still possible to identify several broad regions by the figuration of their cloth.

A related form of printing, in which the large motifs are plotted by folding and lining the cloth and painted on using a coconut leaflet as an edge-mask rather than a cutout stencil, is almost obsolete, practiced only occasionally and only in northeastern Fiji. It is called bolabola. The second still-common system of figuration came from Tonga and is found particularly in the areas of strong Tongan influence. It uses a sewn plate (kuveti) of pandanus leaves (voivoi) with pieces of string (wāvau), sāsā, or pandanus sewn to the surface to create complex and relatively organic patterns. The barkcloth is placed over these and rubbed over with a swab



Curu Malaka of Moce Island, Fiji, stenciling a *gatu vakaviti* ceremonial cloth in 1985. She wears a work shirt over her *sulu* (skirt) and is sitting on the *tasina* section of the cloth, which has been rubbed in the Tongan manner. The stencil is made of X-ray film, with several motifs cut into it, and it is being used to stencil one of the groups of three spots called *tusea* that are scattered across the *tasina*. Photograph by Roderick Ewins.

carrying rather watery red-brown paint, quite like doing brass-rubbings in the West. This method of printing is used in particular for large cloths called *gatu vakatoga* (Tongan-style cloth), or, in hybrid form, half-rubbed and half-stenciled, *gatu vakaviti* (Fijistyle Tongan cloth), the Tongan word for barkcloth, *ngatu*, being spelt *gatu* in Fijian. Being a reddish-brown color overall, the former are still adopted for spiritually significant rites of passage and, for the same reason, in the late nineteenth century became very popular among high chiefs as wraparound "togas." The large gatu vakaviti were formerly used as mosquito nets (*taunamu*—an alternative name for them in some places) and were and still are important ceremonial curtains, especially indispensable in marriages.

While both the manufacture and figuring of the cloth in these two technologies is exclusively women's work, a quite unique type of figuration was formerly produced by Vitilevu Highlands men, though women still made the cloth. "Rollers" or "liners" were made from single sections of bamboo or wooden cylinders, with raised encircling lines created either by binding with string or by carving. The form called lewasaga had fine lines and grooves with solid and groove about equally wide. Another form called noa had most lines spaced that way, but periodically a number of much wider raised bands. The band count was said to indicate the number of itokatoka or extended families in the geopolitical entity (vanua) of the maker group. As in the Tongan style, figuring was by rubbing, but here the lewasaga was rolled along progressively beneath the cloth, first totally in one direction, then in another,

and so on, the rubbing creating a dark-toned cross-hatch. Finally the noa was used, rolled in one direction only and with intervals between, creating a series of broad bands. This very dark cloth was made for malo and also for mosquito curtains and screens. It was called *liti*, and it could have areas left plain and then either painted with solid red, figured with short lines using special wooden combs dipped in red or black paint, or even stamped with simple wooden blocks with carved patterns, reminiscent of potato cuts. Very few of either of these tools survive, and this highland men's printing has been obsolete for half a century.

### MISSIONARY INTERVENTION

From just before the middle of the nineteenth century, the missionary project (primarily Wesleyan Methodist, with some Roman Catholic) became well established. Above all intent on stamping out "heathen" practices, they imposed a number of drastic changes on converts, despite the greater understanding and empathy of a few missionaries. Ear ornaments, the docking of digits, cicatrisation, and tattooing were all abolished. Face and body painting (construed as war-related) were permitted only for dance. The long and ornate hairstyles of men were discouraged, along with the wearing of wigs. Finally, men were required to abandon the malo, the essential symbol of their manhood, in favor of a Tongan vala, a wraparound garment. The generic term for clothing in Fijian is isulu, and they called this alien new garment isulu vakatoga (Tonga-style garment), usually abbreviated

to sulu. Contrary to what some have suggested, Fijians did not meekly adopt this change. In fact, having to dress "like women" was an enormous impediment to conversion for many men.

While their old religion forbade women the use of masi, the new one required that they wear skirts instead of skimpy liku, and as masi was the only cloth readily available to them, they too started wearing masi sulu. Malo cloth was too narrow for this and longer than necessary, so instead of end-joining masi to make it double-length they started edge-joining it during manufacture to make it double-width, for both male and female skirts. The only reminder of the liku of women and of warriors was the colored pandanus dance skirts.

While many men and women continued to frequently wear nothing above the waist for decades, this too was discouraged. Men wore handed-down singlets (siqileti, a name now also applied to T-shirts) or shirts (sote), while women added to these handed-down dresses dubbed vinivō, from pinafore. These were typically not ankle-length and were simply pulled over their sulu, which became a sulu-i-rō, or underskirt, the resulting layered effect perhaps reminiscent of their previous layered liku. This layering has persisted ever since in women's formal attire.

For ceremonial dress a further masi overskirt was often added, and sometimes a cummerbund as well. Alternately, they might wear a blouse and shift (*tatara*), with layers of masi over that. In the twenty-first century masi makers sell sets of three masi

as mataisulu tolu—three-layered skirts. 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.

## FIJIAN CLOTHING IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

For casual wear around the home both rural and urban women commonly wear a short-sleeved cotton frock (sometimes with puffed shoulders) or a blouse or T-shirt outside or tucked into a sulu, and in cooler weather a sweatshirt. They go barefoot or wear plastic flip-flops (sabisabi), eminently practical when protocol is to remove shoes before entering a house. For more formal occasions they favor the layered dress and underskirt, commonly called sulu jiaba (from the word jumper). The underskirt is frequently a fabric with a sheen and is invariably worn long. The overdress ranges from plain to brightly patterned and may be of various lengths, from thigh to knee to calf. Some urban women now affect a garment remarkably like a Chinese cheongsam, with slit skirt. Also popular is a jacket that comes down to the hips, worn with a matching long skirt. For formal or office wear urban women use a full range of modern female footwear, with either the formal styles just described or a range of Western dresses, even these often modified to local taste. Pantsuits are rare. Recreationally,



Ceremonial barkcloth worn by William and Louisa Nanovo, Vatulele Island, 1993, at the ceremony of recognition by their chiefly clan. Note the virtually identical "unisex" barkcloth *mataisulu tolu* (three-layered skirts). William also wears an *iwābale* sash and an *itini yara* train of red-brown barkcloth, *masi kuvui*, held by an aunt. Photograph by Roderick Ewins.

urbanites may wear T-shirts and jeans, though skirts remain common, more so perhaps than in Western countries.

Trousers (tarausese) gradually replaced isulu vakatoga for men, and in the twenty-first century the latter are mainly worn casually in the home or village, in the evening after work, or when sitting and idly talking with friends around the kava bowl. In the village khaki shorts or long trousers and T-shirts are the usual daytime dress, and like women they either go barefoot or wear flip-flops. Where the terrain is harsh, some wear sneakers.

For formal wear the sulu went up-market in the form of a very smart kilt of heavier cloth and with pockets (sulu vakataga), buttoned at the waist. For soldiers and policemen the lower edge is cut into a row of triangles to make a very distinctive garment, isulutavatava. Worn over underpants (sapota) or shorts (in this application called koniveredi), with a business shirt and tie, together with a smart (often matching) coat or blazer (kote), the sulu vakataga has become for Fijian men a source of as much pride as is a Scotsman's tartan kilt, another "invented tradition." The sandals developed for Fijian policemen to wear (ivāvā ni ovisa), with a solid upper and sling back, have become ubiquitous formal men's footwear, particularly with sulu and bare legs. Western suits (sutu) and shoes are of course worn by many businessmen. Casual wear for urban youths is generally the same as it is worldwide, T-shirts and jeans, or shirts with trousers or shorts made by local Indian tailors.

Fijian customary bodywear has traveled a long path. There has been profound change and much loss, and there have been unexpected reversals. But change has also thrown up proud new symbols that identify Fijian men and women amywhere they go in the world. While they have accommodated their customs to a global era, their bodywear still proclaims them a proudly unique people, as it always did.

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See also Missionary Dress in Samoa; Dressing the Body in Samoa; Barkcloth Body Wrapping in Tonga; Bilas: Dressing the Body in Papua New Guinea; Dress in New Caledonia; Body Ornaments of Solomon Islands.