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Ceremony and Embodied Memory in Urbanized Fijian Culture

Fijian culture is rich in ceremony, particularly in ceremonial connected with the establishment and maintenance of links in and between kinship groups. These ceremonies have been described and analysed by a number of anthropologists, from various theoretical angles and with different ethnographic emphasis (e.g., Hocart 1929, 1952, Sahlin 1962, 1976, Hooper 1982, Ravuvu 1983, 1987, Toren 1989, 1990, Williksen-Bakker 1986, 1990). A striking feature of Fijian daily life is that somehow Fijians manage to continue their ceremonial activities in spite of rapid urbanization and increasing participation in a market economy. The need to participate in both business and traditional activities, conceptualized as the ‘life of money’ (bula vaka ilavo) and ‘life of the land’ (bula vaka vanua) respectively, seems in fact to have become part of the urban ideology here (the word ‘path’ or ‘way’ is used synonymously with numerous other expressions to denote this same dichotomy). Though this dichotomy may have become more sharply defined under European influence during colonial times, when, as Jolly (1992:346) states, the ‘life of money’ was associated with immorality in Fijian culture, it has now become part and parcel of the Fijian perception. To be on the ‘path of money’ today presents a challenge to the ‘ways of the land’ in the sense that, far from posing a threat to Fijian values, it is experienced as strengthening tradition, provided one knows how to move with dignity in both realms of activity and thought.

Fiji is a multi-ethnic society, where until very recently the majority of the population were Indians. Indians still constitute a large section of the population today. Other major ethnic groups are those of the Chinese and the Rotumans and the Eurasians (like ‘Fijian’, these are local concepts). There is further a strong representation of many other Pacific ethnic groups.

1 The terms ‘Fijian’ and ‘Fijians’ are used here for ethnic Fijians, in accordance with common usage in Fiji.

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in Fiji, particularly in the capital, Suva. In 1987 this island state, which has been independent since 1970, witnessed two coups by the Fijian military. After that the members of some of the other ethnic groups began to feel uncomfortable, and many, particularly Indians, migrated to other countries.

Fiji is in many ways the centre of the South Pacific, and its inhabitants, irrespective of their ethnic affiliation, are not ignorant of the fact that they represent the largest island population in the region. Whereas the Indian section of the population used to be influential in the economy and politics, their role has been reduced by the political leaders since the military coups, and Fijians have assumed a more dominant position. Fijians have for a number of years been encouraged by their leaders to take an active part in business, but at the same time not to neglect their ceremonial activities. The latter form the ethnographic framework for the discussion in this paper.²

Fijian culture has a hierarchical social and political structure. This is manifest in many spheres of life: in the ways people approach each other, avoid each other, talk about each other, conduct their politics (Nayacakalou 1975; Nation 1978; Durutalo 1986) and stage their rituals (Toren 1990).

In contrast to the obvious aggressiveness brought into play in the recent military coups and in present-day nationalistic politics, as in wars and violence in former times, the values that are emphasized in ceremonies are those of respect and reverence, with both speeches and bodily movements expressing humility as well as pride. The overall message seems to be that it is very special and wonderful to be a Fijian. Further down in this article I shall draw attention to a particular ceremonial incident which I regard as an attempt by the persons concerned to remind themselves and others of the importance of being and remaining a Fijian.

The conflicting demands of 'the market' and ceremonial life

The body plays an important part in all ceremonies. If, in the course of the discussion, I speak of the body as if it moved around by itself, propelled by unknown forces, however, I do so only to emphasize the aspect of the body as the physical expression of personhood and to foreground the body, like a relief seen against a background of cultural values and formal practices. My aim in this is to illustrate the importance of ceremonies in sustaining the Fijian identity in a modern, urban environment. In the description of a part of a wedding ceremony that puts the body central

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² I am grateful to the ERASME équipe at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris for giving me the opportunity to present my material in the form of a paper and for offering useful and stimulating comments. The fieldwork on which this article is based was conducted from October 1991 to March 1992. I had enjoyed various long stays and fieldwork periods in Fiji prior to this, however.
while oil is massaged into the skin, I claim that certain values are inscribed on people's minds with it.

Like others who write about the body (see Carrithers, Collins and Lukes 1985, for example), I have been inspired by the early work of Mauss. His reflections on the gift (Mauss 1974) and on the movement and the expressiveness of the body (Mauss 1979) form a point of departure for the exposition in this article, where the body is viewed as a significant medium of information about the 'wide and enduring contract' (Mauss 1974:3), whereby persons as well as things circulate. By placing my discussion under Mauss's influence I may seem to be suggesting that there is a dichotomy between holistic and individualistic societies (cf. Dumont 1980). Indeed, this theoretical premise seems suited to the empirical reality of Fijian culture, where the person is engaged in the different activities of both money and 'land' (vanua), and seems to be carefully balancing at the intersection between the market and the sphere where gifts flow. This, at least, is the idea reflected in public oratory and ideology.

This dichotomy, as was indicated above, provides a popular metaphor for talking about life in general in Fiji. The market is associated with selfishness, distance from relatives, and loneliness, while 'land' (vanua) is argued (sometimes in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary) to represent the values of 'love' (loloma), 'care' (kauweitaki), and 'the joining of hands' (veitauriliga) for common purposes. Fijian political leaders seem to be exposing people to a continual double bind by urging them alternately to go in for modern business and to remain loyal to the values of the land. This is not without practical implications. To cite a simple example: when a person dies, their death is announced on the radio, though this message is not only meant to convey the news of the death, but also implies a demand to come and participate in the mortuary rites. Death provides the most important occasion for ceremonies, also in the urban context, and presence at these is a must.

Whatever may be a person's obligations in the 'market' - be it as a clerk in an office or as the manager of a bank - (s)he will inevitably feel it to be his/her duty (itavi) to attend ceremonies. Presence in individual person and body alone is not enough, however. One needs to go there with others and to bring gifts. Sometimes these gifts, or a large turnout of relatives, may compensate for the absence of a given individual at a particular ceremony, though this is only the case if the person is otherwise regularly seen in contexts where as a Fijian (s)he ought to be. These contexts concern not only a variety of ceremonies in connection with the life cycle, but also

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3 Laison Qi Ras, the manager of the Development Bank, who is himself a devoted participant in ceremonial life, says that a person's annual holidays are seldom sufficient for them to be able to fulfil all their ceremonial obligations. It is a problem to strike a balance between the demands of the market and the duties of ceremonial life (personal communication).
fund-raising meetings within the church, or simply kava parties, whether or not attended with fund-raising.

On the other hand, radio and newspaper commercials emphasize the need for people to own their own cupboards, Fridges, and stoves — implying that one must not borrow from one's neighbours and must not share other people's belongings. There are strong forces at work to make every person in Fiji a self-reliant consumer. A Fijian, with his emphasis on ceremonial spending, can only identify with the egocentric consumerism of a modern market economy with some difficulty.

Fijians, with their constant need for products to go with the 'goods of the land' (vakavanua), respond the way the market wants them to only to a degree, and in the context of ceremonies they are easy targets for marketing tactics. Yet, even in the most clearly market-oriented environments (such as in big department stores, at the market place, or in shopping centres) one may at times be struck by their behaviour with regard to objects. For instance, one elderly woman at the handicraft market told me how she had once given a big tapa cloth away to an American couple from one of the tourist ships because she thought the woman looked so sad and was so thin (a person's body ought to be, if not exactly fat, at least firm and solid; anything else is 'pitiful' (vakaloloma)). A former taxi owner related how he had lost his business because he had not been able to force himself to ask money from all the relatives who had kept getting rides in his taxi. A market vendor recalled how he used to stand with his goods outside the gate of the house he was going to approach, unable to exchange the vegetables he was vending for money. I have personally observed how Fijian vendors at the handicraft market may withdraw to the back of their stalls or sit behind curtains or mats, and sometimes even under the table, as if they wanted to dissociate themselves from the business context. At a smaller island market place I witnessed how a father, who together with his son used to bring root crops to sell, always used to sit at a distance under a tree. The son used to do the selling, saying: 'The old man always does that. He is ashamed (madua).'

The individual's actions usually give him/her away, and the body serves to communicate the fact of conflicting values. As a person moves around in the market place, their body tends to reveal unconsciously, and sometimes may demonstrate consciously (as in the case of the old man who withdrew

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4 The 'goods of the land' are tapa, mats and whales' teeth, though items like soap, washing powder, cotton material, cooking oil, flour, sugar, and, last but not least, kerosene, are generally also defined as gifts of the land, as are pillows, blankets and mosquito-nets. Many Fijian women now run shops selling household wares as goods of the land.

5 This is by no means a unique case. Laisoni Qarase, the manager of the Fiji Development Bank, told me of numerous similar problems (personal communication).
from the market context), that they really belong to another sphere of thought, to a realm where they are not confined within their individual body but are part of something greater than themselves. This can be temporarily subsumed under the indigenous term *cakacaka e cake*, ‘work of a higher order’, or *savasava*, ‘clean’ work. This kind of ‘work’ or activity is in harmony with the activities which Mauss refers to as ‘total prestation’, where things are like *persons* and *persons* are like things (Mauss 1974:11). In Fijian thinking, it is opposed to activities that are considered ‘low’ (*e ra*) or ‘unclean’ (*duka*) (Williksen-Bakker 1990).

**The conversion of ‘low’ into ‘high’**

Only a few years ago, business and any exchange of goods and services for money were considered quite despicable, something that Fijians considered below themselves. This attitude is now changing, but converting something that is ‘low’ into something that is ‘high’ is by no means easy. Here I shall restrict myself to the suggestion that this conversion is also affecting body language, though this is far from easy to change. As the modern person picks his or her way among tall buildings, in shops and banks, in offices and at cocktail parties, their body carries with it a memory of a different set of values.

This brings me to a second source that is useful in understanding the significance of bodily movements and techniques, namely Halbwachs 1950. This author discusses how the collective memory unfolds itself within a particular spatial framework. I have taken the ceremonial context as one such framework, in which memories that are important to the group are evoked and given expression. As the person acts and moves in various contexts in villages and cities, certain memories encoded in the body and expressed by its movements and different positions are articulated in the particular spatial framework in a way that is recognizable to and understood by others; the body is memorizing and re-enacting a particular past. ‘Collective memory’ is ‘a current of continuous thought whose continuity is not at all artificial, for it retains from the past only what lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memory alive’ (Halbwachs 1950:80, 140).

Halbwachs’ ideas have been used and elaborated in later works by others, for example Connerton 1989 and Fentress and Wickham 1992. The latter argue that our memories are essentially group memories, but emphasize that the individual does not for that reason passively undergo the collective will. They therefore prefer the term ‘social memory’ to ‘collective memory’. Connerton, while agreeing with Halbwachs, introduces bodily movements and signs into the act of memorizing. It is in this field of thought that I place the current discussion. To Halbwachs’ way of thinking, the community plays an active part in the constitution of memory. It acts as the basis of individual memory. He opposes the idea that in-
dividual consciousness is 'isolated and sealed within itself' (Halbwachs 1950:125).

Mauss was concerned with how individual bodies reflect communal values in very physical terms. He commented with reference to how he had learned to swim, for instance: 'I cannot get rid of my technique'. And this particular technique was bound to a specific culture and time. In Fijian culture, ceremonial life, conceptualized as 'work of a higher order', comes face to face with and is challenged by that which is 'low'. Both sets of values involved are illustrated and developed by means of bodily movements and techniques. These movements and signs are placed at the service of the social memory, instead of passively undergoing it, though the oiling ceremony to be described below may be indicative of the latter. Ceremonies are 'work' (cakacaka). Ceremonies establish connections between persons and things and provide arenas where the past and present may meet. That may be one of the reasons why this type of 'work' continues to be so actively performed.

Elsewhere (Williksen-Bakker 1992) I have spoken of the 'quiet, contemplative' body that is associated with ceremonies, versus the 'fast, restless' and even 'aggressive' body associated with the market. These are obviously stereotypes. I wish to explain here that, in discussing the body as though it were an independent entity, I do not mean to create an impression as though it were a depersonalized physical entity, devoid of a will and motivation. I nevertheless feel the two different body 'types' of 'fast' over against 'contemplative' to be sufficiently grounded in reality to be recognizable. Centlivres makes a similar point when he speaks of 'les silhouettes d’un autre temps' (Centlivres 1983:111). I am speaking of two such silhouettes, which as yet exist side by side, and in the case of which particular contexts (more or less explicit) compete for the relevant models or images or give cues for them to be represented at given moments.

To give an example, it is a sign of being 'high up' if one is able to remain 'low' and leave room for others. So when Queen Elizabeth visited Fiji some years ago, high chiefs who had come to Suva from all over Fiji remained seated on the wet ground in Albert Park for hours on end. After the death of former Governor-General Ratu Cakobau in 1989, men and women, some of them quite elderly, sat motionless in the burning sunshine for many hours (see The Fiji Times of 8 December 1989). During the formal part of ceremonies, the body is always positioned in relation to something or somebody else. One should not stand when another person is sitting, as one's own head should never be above the head of a person whom one respects. This value is instilled into chiefs and commoners alike, and is hard to shed in the urban setting. Therefore the Fijian body is still constantly alert to this relative positioning, prepared to crouch, bend, or sit down in a flash whenever this may be necessary. One's breeding as a 'true' Fijian is revealed by one's ingrained kinesthesia. A woman in a high position in one of the government ministries told me the following anecdote:
‘There are so many awkward situations here in town, you know. The other day I came out of the supermarket, and there was my minister, my boss, sitting in her car in front of the shop, just about ready to leave. She saw me, so I could not but go up to the car and greet her. Another colleague came out of the shop and lined up behind me, and we talked to our boss through the open car window. I felt so rude, standing there like that, but what could I do? I bent my knees more and more, so that my head should not be above hers, but it was hard. Finally I squatted down on my heels, with cars parking behind me; it was so embarrassing. My colleague behind me squatted down on her heels, too. The minister understood our predicament and took leave. We have as yet no rules about how to behave in situations like this. What we have learned comes automatically, but seems out of place here in town ...

Mauss’s above-cited question, ‘How can I get rid of my technique?’, is relevant here. When a technique is forgotten or deliberately cast aside, however, this is noticed and often criticized. So one woman said about her son-in-law’s behaviour: ‘He was standing in the doorway with his arms across the doorpost and his shoes on. He spoke to me in that position! I said to him: “Are you a Fijian? I never saw a Fijian like you, kai si [‘low’, ‘vulgar’]!” I said to my daughter: “How can you love this man?” She said: “I don’t like him either”. Eventually she asked him to leave.’

Reluctance to show discomfort

Relative positioning is important, then. It is superimposed on all other bodily movements, actions and positions, such as walking, sitting, sleeping, touching, beautifying, suffering and dying. As regards suffering, I was struck time and again while interacting with Fijians by how reluctant they are to mention any physical discomfort, whether it concerns a pain such as a stomach-ache or tooth-ache or a discomfort such as an uncomfortable sitting position. The body, in cases like these, is left to take care of itself and to suffer in silence. Conversations with several medical doctors from different ethnic backgrounds – Fijian, Indian, and European – all confirmed the fairly careless attitude of Fijians towards their own physical (dis-) comfort, even as far as death. Dr. Rosemary Mitchell, who has worked with Fijians for years, put it as strongly as this: ‘Fijians seem to come only when they are about to die. When I tell them, in cases of far advanced cancer, that no more can be done, they calmly receive the verdict’ (personal communication). During ceremonies, as was already indicated above, people

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6 The man was asked to leave not for the reason that he had adopted an offensive body stance in front of his mother-in-law, but because he drank and slept with other women. His behaviour towards his mother-in-law in this particular instance had simply added insult to injury.

7 My thanks are due to the staff of St. Giles Mental Hospital, and in particular to Dr. Singh, for inviting me to visit the hospital regularly to talk with the staff and meet patients. These visits and interviews gave me a new insight into both autochthonous
may sit quietly for hours on end. At funeral ceremonies in honour of high chiefs, a whale’s tooth was sometimes offered as 'compensation' in case one moved or changed position in the course of one's vigil.

As regards everyday complaints, people may moan and lie down, but it is not considered dignified to elaborate verbally on an affliction. A woman I used to talk to regularly told me how her brother, himself a medical doctor, had once retired to bed with a tooth infection, while his excuse had been that he was just a little tired. This, she informed me, was because 'we do not like to draw attention to our individual bodies'. This statement in many ways sums up what the function of the body is perceived to be symbolically and as a communicational device.

When the body is presented for adornment or, as we shall later see, for oiling and wrapping in tapa, these acts are not performed just on an individual body - that particular body merely happens to lend itself for that specific purpose, representing something beyond itself, a social phenomenon of a more general nature. Though the individual 'is raised' in this 'work of a higher order', this work is carried out by a communal effort, and the individual person undergoing this treatment must 'pay back' for this by working on others' behalves on later occasions. When the body is not officially presented as an icon, it may socially speaking be anybody. I have been to atonement ceremonies after elopements where the groom was absent and a number of relatives loaded with gifts came in his stead.

The 'work' that is done in ceremonies is performed in connection with relationship problems. It is true that it is individuals who come forward with their problems, whether these concern a request for forgiveness, as after an elopement, or a (frequently belated) presentation of a child to the mother's village, but it is the wider implications of such relationship problems that people are worried about. Therefore the ceremonies are highly abstract in nature, and when a body is used to make a particular problem or solution visible, this body is also an abstraction, an idea, which is subordinate to a more encompassing idea, that of 'total man' (Mauss 1974:73; Dumont 1980).

When there is no relationship to establish, build up or repair, the individual body can do more or less as it pleases. In fact, I have sometimes been surprised at the ease with which an individual body may expose itself to the public gaze and even public criticism when 'off-duty', so to speak. A person may say that s/he is feeling 'lazy' (vucesa) and then lie down, in the midst of a group of people, relatives or otherwise, and go to sleep. The body is abandoned to public view, and this seems to be taken as a matter of course. There is no sniggering, and no comment. The body is simply left

Fijian culture and the other cultures of Fiji. I am grateful also to Dr. Rosemary Mitchell, who, in spite of the busy schedule at her clinic in Suva, took time to talk to me.
there to recuperate. In this case also, I believe, it represents communality, a
subjection to general human needs, or a demonstration of trust in com-
munity. Besides, the act of exposing one's 'lowness', by leaving one's
sleeping body to the mercy of public judgement, may even be considered a
virtue, just as making oneself 'low' in front of somebody or something
who or which is 'higher' is.

As for the seated body, I have already described how the Fijian body
has the ability to sit motionless for hours on end, passively testifying to the
importance of being in the ritual field as long as this is required. I regard
this particular pose as a significant symbol in Fijian culture. It is presence
charged with meaning and bounded energy. As in a theatre performance,
the body during a ceremony may express 'dynamic immobility' (Barba and
Savarese 1991). A Fijian body at a ceremony is there for the purpose of
recalling and expressing certain values. Connerton in fact speaks of
specific cultural postures, as for example sitting postures, as 'mnemonics'
of the body (Connerton 1989:74).

In the urban area it is sometimes difficult to imagine that the efficient
business person one meets at a bank or an insurance office regularly takes
part in ceremonies and in exchanges of whales' teeth and ceremonial
objects and allows his or her body to be marked by cultural values and
demands. People who often participate in ceremonies are frequently
marked physically by patches of rough skin on their ankles, testifying to
the many hours of remaining seated at ceremonies or simply in informal
gatherings around the kava bowl. And men are sometimes marked by kani,
a scaly condition of the skin after excessive kava drinking, as well
(Brunton 1989:87). The various acts and signs testify to efforts to 'keep
the memory alive' (Halbwachs 1950:80). The body is adorned, groomed,
oiled and manipulated in various ways in this process of memorization.

Although not all bodies in the urban setting are physically marked in all
possible ways, no body is absolutely free of such marks. For men not to be
circumcised, for example, is a social disgrace. Once in a while one may hear
stories about adult males who have not been 'done' or 'worked on'
(caka). Such stories usually tell of a particular man who has gone bathing
or fishing with other men, when the disgrace was exposed. No judgement
is passed on the particular individual for such negligence, for he is not
himself responsible. But there is a certain amount of head-wagging at the
omission, and disapproving comments are made about those who are
responsible.

The case to be presented below can be regarded as an example of
'recording an event' in such a way that it can be memorized (Halbwachs
1950:83). Hereby the community as a whole undergoes an inculcation of
values and each individual member of that community engages in certain
acts and postures that 'fix' the relevant event in their memory.
Oiling the body

During my most recent fieldwork period in Fiji (1991-1992) I observed an event which to me appears to testify to the idea that the person is neither bounded by his/her body nor completely in charge of that body – it is not just a question of mine or thine. The person is simply obliged to open him/herself to social values, whether or not this is liable to hurt. And when the onlookers observe a body, one may well ask whether they see that particular body at all, or whether they see through that body and reflect upon other things, for example morality and duty. I had observed the practice in question twice before, and in both cases the acts of oiling and wrapping in tapa were performed on a female body. In the case described here, a man was the focus of attention. However, as far as I am able to tell from the amount of oil and tapa involved and the number of persons present (in both cases the audience consisted solely of women), there are no noticeable differences in the performance of these acts, which to me is evidence of the abstract nature of the body. On such occasions the body is beyond gender.

The event was the dressing of a bridegroom in tapa before the wedding ceremony, the bride and groom usually being dressed in fine tapa and flower garlands separately. The tapa is wound around the body very tightly, and the man I observed was wrapped up so tightly that it was obvious that he had difficulty in breathing. He held his arms above his head, and his ribs were tightly ‘bandaged’, so to speak, in tapa. There were two women working on him (I was told they were father’s sister and mother’s sister) as a houseful of women watched in silence. Not a single man was present. There was no singing or joking, and no advice was given by the women present, while the two women ‘working’ on the groom concentrated on their task in silence. The groom in the centre and two elderly women on either side of him were the focal point of the attention of the silent audience.

When the groom was completely dressed, his body – chest, arms, face, legs, and hair – was oiled. The oil was not applied in a small quantity but in big handfuls, which gradually made him look as though he was soaking wet. The oil was more or less dripping from his legs, forming a tiny puddle around his feet. Yet the women, and later only one of them, went on oiling every part of his body that was not wrapped in tapa. Finally, oil was again applied to his hair; this time it was mixed with turmeric to give it a

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8 Participation in ceremonies is associated with duty, as the concept of itavi indicates.
9 There are no men present when a woman is dressed in such a way, either. The men in both cases sit under a tarpaulin outside drinking kava.
10 I was told that the woman remaining in the end was father’s sister, though I was given the impression that this did not really matter. One of the two was given the honour of completing the task when they started running out of oil.
brownish yellow colour in patches. Then the bottle was held upside down and virtually emptied on the crown of his head.

When the ceremony was completed, the audience clapped three times, whereupon the groom was allowed to sit on a straight-backed chair. He remained seated there motionless while oil slowly dripped down onto the mats below. He had a serious, unsmiling expression on his face. It was obvious to me that he was enduring the situation, rather than enjoying it. However, we must not exclude the possibility that a body dripping with oil may be enjoyable in a particular way, though this is hard for the anthropologist to imagine.

About an hour later, the couple made for the church together and the church ceremony was conducted. The bride had been oiled in the same way as the groom. Throughout the sermon and the marriage rites the couple stood up straight, with their backs to the congregation. The solid, immobile, oily and silent bodies were as impressive from the back as from the front (see Barba and Savarese 1991 on the sensitivity of the back). This ceremony lasted well over an hour, during which the couple hardly stirred. Their bodies were glistening, and the delicate tapas they were wearing were gradually showing oil stains and wet patches of perspiration.

When they got home from church, the couple disappeared, and when they reappeared a little while later, they were both dressed in modern clothes, that is to say, the groom was wearing a shirt, tie and a blue skirt (modern sulu or sarong), and the bride was wearing a peach-coloured satin dress with a lot of frills. Both looked fairly anonymous and uninteresting (to the anthropologist) compared with how they had looked just an hour previously. Again we may ask: 'what did the onlookers see?' Is it too far-fetched to suggest that the bodies now dressed in smooth materials and smelling of perfume and soap conveyed the message 'the demonstration is over'? The message wrapped in cotton and silk stood out clearly and impressively: 'Remember this!'

The couple and the numerous guests now proceeded to enjoy the wedding breakfast. A table was loaded with cooked tubers and roast pork, chicken and fish, rice, curry, and a huge wedding cake. The whole assembly now partook of the food and gradually a drowsy mood descended upon the gathering. A man fell asleep on the pile of pillows that had been brought in for the ceremonial exchange, and the women who had been watching the oiling ceremony withdrew to the same room where this ceremony had taken place, but this time in order to smoke and sleep and tell each other stories.

The couple had been living together for a number of years, but as yet had no children. The husband was a teacher and the wife was working as a

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11 The multi-ethnic character of the food enjoyed by Fijians is remarkable. The pro-Fijian government relegates Indians to inferior positions in the government, while people continue to thoroughly enjoy Indian food.
nurse in her father's health clinic. They were city dwellers, and had been for a long time. The groom's father was a minister with the Methodist church, in which capacity he and his family had been allocated a large house belonging to the church in a village midway between the two cities, Suva and Nadi. The bride's father was a well-known medical doctor, and their entire family is influential in education and politics.

When the families had agreed to stage this spectacular feast, which lasted several days and for which cows were slaughtered and numerous pigs were killed and roasted – not to mention the huge heaps of taro (dalo) and yams (uvi) that were cooked in the earth oven (lovo) and were distributed and consumed, and all the obligatory gifts (cf. Ravuvu 1987, Williksen-Bakker 1992) – this had been with the intention of cementing the relationship between them, of making this relationship visible socially, or rehearsing the 'contract', in Mauss's terms. Fijians themselves speak of 'opening up the path' (Ravuvu 1987). Of the numerous messages conveyed, some are more potent than others and are destined to go down in history. The oiling of the bodies conveyed such a message, which was framed and put forward in a manner that made it fit for transmission. The couple could have refused to be used as a vehicle for the message conveyed as they walked to church in the hot midday sun, drenched in oil and tightly wrapped in tapa, but had not chosen to do so. By means of dress and certain postures and movements and by exposing themselves to touch and smell they had made themselves available for use for imagery.

Connerton uses the concept of 'sedimentation' of values through bodily memorization (Connerton 1989:72). With reference in particular to oiling and similar practices I would suggest the term 'impregnation' to describe this kind of transmission of meaning, whereby values are more or less massaged into the skin.

I indicated above that the body can expose itself to the public view without fear of criticism when it is 'off-duty', that is, when it is not ceremonially expressing particular cultural values. This does not mean to say that the body is an empty vessel on which the 'work' makes no marks. The contrary is true. If a person has participated sufficiently in 'work of a higher order', he or she will remain 'insulated' against criticism for a long time, if not for ever. And if people know when to make themselves visible or let themselves be made visible ceremonially, like the couple mentioned above, they will be able to get away with a lot of 'low' behaviour.

I shall give as an example the chief who functions as a master of ceremonies at major official events, where he is one of the specialists on 'right and true' behaviour. He is recognized in the streets as a gentleman of high rank and quality. He walks with measured steps and slow movements, in a way that is considered 'gentlemanly' (vakaturaga). I have seen this same gentleman lying dead drunk under a table in an obscure dancing place, from which he was later carried home by friends and passers-by without a word of criticism being uttered, however. Could the explanation

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for this be that he is of ‘high birth’, that it is all a matter of power, as he was one of those who pull strings (cf. Keesing 1987)? This would make chiefs (some of whom are female) immune from criticism altogether, however, which is certainly not the case in practice. If a chief offends against ‘work of a higher order’ frequently, he or she will no longer be respected.

In order to be considered a person of quality, one must engage in work of a high quality regularly during one’s lifetime and make sure that one is not too much in arrears with one’s ceremonial obligations. It is a well-known fact that there are powerful chiefs in Fiji whom no one would carry home if they were found drunk in a bar or a disco. These chiefs have power, without any doubt, but enjoy no respect. This is generally subject to discussion at grass-roots level. People blame their chiefs for not understanding clearly that they are seen. Again, when a person is seen, people in fact ‘see through’ that person, that is to say, they judge to what extent he/she lends him/herself for public imagery and memorization. As one of the villagers in Suvavou put it, however: ‘We Fijians have time. We know some chiefs will fall, and we can wait.’

Body care in daily life

A beautiful body in Fijian culture is first and foremost a body that is able to move gently and calmly and with alertness to changing social situations. The body should be straight and strong, like the tree one is culturally associated with (Williksen-Bakker 1990). The hair should be shiny and well cut, if possible in the style of the community to which the person belongs. Both women and men should be physically strong and fit. Their legs in particular should be strong, this being a mark of beauty in both women and men. I should emphasize here again that the body I am discussing is an abstraction in the sense that it refers to over-arching values with reference to both women and men.

Women’s breasts are not looked upon as erotic attributes. Breasts, in fact, seem to be aesthetically uninteresting, as was confirmed to me by both female and male informants, though I would not like to put it as strongly as the above-mentioned medical doctor in Suva, who said: ‘Fijians don’t care a hoot about breasts!’ (Dr. Mitchell, personal communication). In spite of some obvious influence from visiting tourists and western movies and videos on clothes fashions, the views on what is a good-looking body seem to be quite resistant to change. It is not attractive to be thin, whether it concerns a woman or man. If a person looks thin, pale and generally unhealthy, this is not taken as a sign of individual lack of control of their life, however. Eager eyes will scan such a person’s face and body, curious fingers will pinch their arms to feel the substance of the flesh, and people will wonder who is responsible for their condition, who can do anything about it (see Becker 1990).

It is generally considered unhealthy for a person to be alone, although in
some urban circles it is fashionable to boast about the ability to be alone and about liking to be alone. On the whole, solitude is fairly suspect, and it is definitely viewed as something both strange and sad. Probably the most striking characteristic of Fijian social life therefore is the fact that individuals are hardly ever alone. It is rude to leave someone on their own, and if one is obliged to do so, one never does without politely excusing oneself. Fijians are not asking permission to leave, as some foreigners believe, when they say 'may I leave, please'. This is simply a way of breaking the news of one's departure gently, lest one's host think that one has not had a good time (Ratu Komai, teacher of Fijian, personal communication). Obviously a Fijian, like anybody else anywhere else, may feel lonely at times and have private worries of an existential kind. But the physical presence and proximity of others is experienced as giving comfort and consolation then too, irrespective of the inner reflections and emotions of the person concerned.

Fijians invariably treat their body with a view to its exposure to others and nearness to other bodies. The body should have a pleasant smell. The ritual practice of oiling the body has cultivated a habit of oiling the body well in daily life as well. 'Lulumu' ('oil yourself') is often called out to children after their bath. Much attention is given to improvement of the quality and fragrance of oils. Women bring their own special make of oil to the market to sell, together with handicraft products, and each woman knows what 'brand' each other woman makes. I never learned to distinguish between the finer shades of difference in the fragrance of oils but, as advised, usually bought 'Makosoi' oil. Small babies are regularly oiled, and their skin always looks smooth and healthy. Dr. Mitchell spoke with admiration of the healthy skins of local infants. She said: 'Other children get rashes and sores on their bottoms, but Fijian children hardly ever do' (personal communication). Mothers fuss a lot over their children's skin, and a person's state of health is always judged by the look of their skin. At St. Giles Hospital, where I spent some time among the staff in 1992, patients' skins were often commented upon by the nurses. Oil is also supposed to contain magic, and may provide an appropriate means of making someone fall in love with you. For a woman to accept oil from a man may mean accepting his feelings of love as well, and it may even make her fall desperately in love with him.

Bathing is important in the ritual context. Birth and marriage rites were customarily followed by a bath in the sea. Physical cleanliness is equal to the ritual cleanliness that is so highly valued. A person's clothes may be old and tattered, but they must always be clean. In conformity with the prevalent aesthetic ideas, one must present an outward appearance marked by a clean body smelling of fragrant oils. A person's sulu may be patched, but it is certain to be always impecably clean. Fijians are not fussy about blemishes that are beyond their personal or social control. For someone to walk around with an uncovered boil is not considered unclean, but for a
person to smell unpleasantly is. A man may fall asleep in the middle of a kava party and still be dignified, but if his skin is affected by kava (*kani*), this is a bad sign and he will spend quite some time oiling himself.

As regards movement, the body should move gently and smoothly, as was stated above. This is one of the marks of a true gentleman or lady – which does not necessarily mean a person of high rank but someone who has worked on their conduct and deportment, and has also been worked on by others in the prescribed ceremonies. In the kinesthesis of the body, its movement and its position in immobility, its firmness and the smoothness of its skin, its grace, and even its humble subjection to public judgement, a person’s loyalty to the wide and enduring contract (Mauss 1974:3) is made evident.

**Conclusion**

I have tried to demonstrate that, far from losing in strength, ceremonies in Fijian culture seem to be gaining in force, while at the same time people are becoming engaged in modern jobs and modern pursuits more and more. This phenomenon one might discuss in terms of ‘revival’ and ‘invention’ of tradition for the sake of the preservation of people’s identity in a multi-ethnic, post-colonial social context (see *Oceania* 1992). I have preferred not to do so, however, but have focused instead on memorization and bodily inscription (Connerton 1989:73), within the theoretical framework of Halbwachs and Mauss. I have followed this line of reasoning because the concept of ‘memory’ gives more room to people’s personal experience and reflection than ‘invention’.

At the experiential level people carry with them values that they regard as traditional and which they try to memorize. According to Nora, ‘memory is a representation of the past’, but is ‘an intellectual and secular production’. Memory, however, ‘takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images and objects’ (Nora 1989:8-9). I find the concepts ‘bodily techniques’ – a concept used by Mauss – and ‘body mnemonics’ useful in discussing the particular way of remembering that Fijians engage in. I have looked upon the practice of oiling the body as one such technique. It is a technique which, as I have tried to show, allows the body to stand out as a very clear image in the memorizing process. As such, it can be viewed as a mnemonic device, that is to say, it can help one to remember, in this case through visual images (Connerton 1989:74; Fentress and Wickham 1992:11, 12). However, this particular example concerns only one of a series of bodily techniques for preserving and evoking memories.

I have also described the positioning of the body in relation to other bodies, as well as bodily movement as contrasted with immobility, the ‘understating’ of bodily discomfort, and the silent endurance of pain and discomfort in the context of public demonstrations in which the body is the most significant instrument. I mentioned at the beginning of this paper
that the body is a mediator between values with conflicting purports, as, for example, the values of ‘land’ versus those of ‘the market’, ‘custom’ versus ‘money’. The image of the oiled body can be viewed in this light as well: both the onlookers at and the ‘actors’ in the event described had roles to play also in the market-oriented sphere of society, where the body is fast and efficient, and where daily activities in shops and offices tend to blur images from the past. An event like this has a heavy impact as regards the inculcation of values. The young couple, one may assume, has been effectively updated on the question of Fijianess after the completion of the ceremony. In all ceremonies the pace gradually slows down to allow time and space for reflection, or ‘attention to life’ (Schutz 1980:47). The body may sit for hours or days on end while goods are accumulated and are distributed, all of it accompanied by the slow drinking of kava, by speeches and periods of silence, by movement and immobility. Bodies may move from a rigid, formal pose to the abandonment of sleep on some pillow or mat that happens to be at hand. And laboriously, yet unhurriedly, images are evoked and re-modelled to serve the memory.

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