

# THE UNIQUE INTERGENERATIONAL FAMILY SYSTEM OF TAKO AND LAVO

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*Buki vinaka tiko na druadrua ni veiwekani.  
(Let's tie firmly the cords of our relationship.)*

—A Fijian saying

## INTRODUCTION

Fiji's indigenous population is rich in relationships, and the nature of these relationships prescribes the behavior of their participants. There are kin relationships denoting linear family representations, brothers for example, and those that link between the generations, as in the grandaunt and grandniece relationship. This paper focuses on a different kind of relationship: a traditional connectedness that is represented across communities characterized by only two references, *tako* and *lavo*. iTaukei<sup>1</sup> Fijians value this kind of relationship deeply along with the tangible and intangible aspects that signify and consolidate these affiliations.

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1. Indigenous Fijians; a term adopted by the Fiji Cabinet in 2010 as the Fijian Affairs Decree replaced the word Fijian or indigenous Fijian with the word *iTaukei* in all written laws and official documentation when referring to the original and native settlers of Fiji.

Traditional tribal relationships hold a special place among the indigenous people of Fiji. Each type of relationship is a way participants address and refer to each other. When related tribal participants meet, what they say and how they behave is determined by the type of relationship that connects them. Some provinces or tribes within them are traditionally related to others. Their interconnectedness is rooted in their histories.

## TRADITIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are marked by the linguistic and non-linguistic elements that signify and define the type of relationship. In a *tauvu* relationship, followers take part in playing jokes on each other and tease each other in attempts to always bring down or shame the other person. The people of the province of Kadavu are in *tauvu* relationships with the people of the provinces of Ra and Nadroga. The people of Ra are also *tauvu* with the people of Bua, and those of Lau are *tauvu* with the people of Rewa. These are broad categories of the people in *tauvu* relationships, as some can claim that it exists only with people from a clan or village and not with the whole province. The relationships have extended over time to include everyone from the respective province. Our traditional stories explain that the original *tauvu* were “cross-cousins” from the places concerned. For example, a prominent person from a village in Ra and one from a place in Bua may have been cross-cousins. From such a beginning, their families, fellow villagers, and other people of the province would relate in befitting ways to their *tauvu* counterparts from Bua.

In contrast, utmost respect is observed in a relationship called *mataqali*. Oral history recites the belief that ancestral gods in the provinces of Lomaiviti and Tailevu were siblings, although this does not necessarily mean that they were actually brothers and sisters. Over the course of history, the people of these provinces have had a special brotherly bond characterized by formally expressed greetings uttered in respectful tones. The use of reverence in formal tones of address, as in using the plural pronouns *kemuni* and *o ni*,<sup>2</sup> for example, is used in conversations that denote respect.

2. *O kemuni* is the independent pronoun indicating “you” plural; *o ni* marks a plural subject.

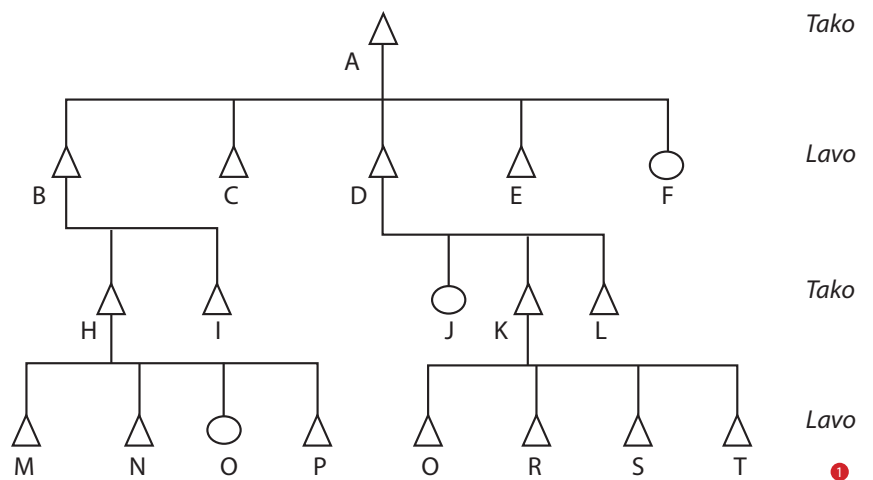
The traditional reference of *naita* is used by the people of various districts within the same province whose ancestral spirits were believed to be cross-cousins. *Naita* is short for *naitabani*, which means “to double up,” or to double the effort in whatever they are doing. The festive spirit of competition filled with jokes and laughter is shared when people from these villages or districts mingle. For example, people with *naitabani* ties are those from the districts of Taivugalei and Wainibuka, both of Tailevu Province.

The *yanu* relationship exists between the original inhabitants of the smaller islands. It is believed that their ancestral gods came from the smaller outer islands. The term *yanu* is short for *yanuyanu*, which means “island.” As a type of relationship connecting people from the smaller islands, “yanu,” as a term of address, means “of island origin.” An example would be the people of the Lau group of islands and those from the Kadavu islands addressing each other as “yanu.” These societal relationships have strengthened the traditional foundation of solidarity in communal living from the past to the present.

## TAKO-LAVO

*Tako* and *lavo* is a unique affiliation because, like the other traditional ties described above, not all indigenous Fijians are represented in *tako-lavo* relationships. Only the people who originate from the highland tribes of Vitilevu<sup>3</sup> and their descendants are its proponents. The only deciding factor to whether one is *tako* or *lavo* is one’s father. Should a father be a *lavo*, his children will be *tako*, his grandchildren *lavo*, his great-grandchildren *tako*, and so on as the cycle continues over the generations. Having defined themselves, all the *tako* from all the villages and clans in the highland tribes are specially connected to each other, sharing an affiliation due to their being *tako*. They remain so to infinity, referring to each other as “*tako*.” Likewise, all the *lavo* across the tribes and across generations belong to the other affiliation and refer to each other as “*lavo*.” In this relationship, *tako* means “older” and *lavo* “younger.” The relationship existing in the generations is illustrated in the following diagram.

3. The main and largest island in Fiji.



In this diagram, adapted from Ravuvu,<sup>4</sup> A, H, I, J, K, and L are tako and will address each other as “tako.” On the other hand, B, C, D, E, F, M, N, O, P, O, R, S, and T are lavo and will address each other as “lavo.” In this type of tribal relationship, all the tako in alternate generations are *veitacini*, or siblings; all the lavo in alternate generations are also *veitacini*. However, in between generations, the tako and lavo relate to each other as parent and child.

The first European observers were quick to notice that the societies of central Vitilevu present a number of specific features, one of which concerns the tako-lavo kinship terminology and family link. In relation to this, Batimudramudra reaffirmed by stating that tako-lavo has been a traditional blood relationship from our ancestors.<sup>5</sup> Nicole reported a pan-Colo<sup>6</sup> unity being concentrated due to the easy access in the interior highlands of Vitilevu,<sup>7</sup> where they travel by foot or on horseback across and along the *tualeita* (mountain ranges), compared to the coastal communities who navigate along the coast. Capell & Lester also added that in Namosi, the terms “tako” and “lavo” were also used to describe a significant bond in the way people addressed one another.<sup>8</sup> The tako-lavo division is found again in Namataku in Western Vitilevu, where the society is divided into two ranks or rows, with either one division or the next a lavo generation. If a man is tako, his son is lavo, and vice versa. Seruvakula also validated the vitality of *solesolevaki*,<sup>9</sup> or a communal gathering where competition for success mixed with merrymaking takes place between the lavo and tako members of the tribe. Hocart also adds that the tako-

4. Asesela Ravuvu, *The Fijian Ethos*, (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1987), 345.

5. I. Batimudramudra, “Notes on ‘Na Veiwekani in Nalawa, Ra,” iTaukei Institute of Language and Culture, 1984.

6. Literally, *colo* means “up above”; in the Fijian context, it refers to the highlands.

7. Robert Nicole, *Disturbing History: Resistance in Early Colonial Fiji*, 2011: 23.

8. Arthur Capell & R. H. Lester, “Local Divisions and Movements in Fiji,” *Oceania* 12.1 (September 1941): 194-196.

9. Semi Seruvakula, *Bula Vakavanua*, (2000): 15.

1 Generation relationship between *tako* and *lavo*.

lavo distinction came into effect in games or collaborative work in which each category competed with the other.<sup>10</sup> These generational distinctions continue to be important for the people of Nasau and Nalawa in the Ra province as well. Tinai asserts that the addressing of one another as “tako” or “lavo” usually solves disputes quickly and calmly; it also uplifts the soul and weaves a strong bond when this pampering name-calling is used.<sup>11</sup> *Takokai* and *lavokai*, adding the suffix *-kai*, meaning “of same origin,” accentuates the closeness in the relationship.

## MAP OF THE FIJI ISLANDS DENOTING COLO EAST, COLO WEST, AND COLO NORTH

The following map denotes the demarcation of the landowning tribes in what used to be labeled Colo North, Colo West, and Colo East. In the new provincial boundaries, the three Colo communities are straddled by the provinces of Ra, Naitasiri, Namosi, and Navosa.



10. A. M. Hocart, “Alternate Generations in Fiji,” Vol. 31, 1931: 223.

11. M. Tinai, personal communication with author, 2014.

COLO WEST DISTRICTS	COLO NORTH DISTRICTS	COLO EAST DISTRICTS
Magadro	Nadrau	Muaira
Namataku	Navatusila	Soloira
Conua	Nasau	Nagonenicolo
Korolevuiwai	Nabobuca	Nadaravakawalu
Koroinasau	Naqaliyatina	Matailobau
Mavua	Tavua	Waima
Naqalimare	Savatu	Noimalu
Noloto		
Nasikawa		
Noikoro		
Bemana		

Table 1: Districts with Tako-Lavo relationships.<sup>12</sup>

## THE DYNAMIC CONNECTION

This unique relationship, marked by a spirit of cooperation filled with the atmosphere of merrymaking and competition, is the dynamic force behind the tako-lavo relationship. A jubilant crowd would gather for a common purpose, and their most obvious system for grouping themselves would be the tako and lavo groups. For example, a fundraising activity was held wherein the two parties competed in raising money for the purchase of a village water tank to be installed in the community hall. This was a whole-day affair of merrymaking and spirited competition. The lavo team eventually won the fundraising drive, and the tako team, because they collected less money, was tasked with providing dinner and kava for both parties.

## SUSTAINABILITY OF THE TAKO-LAVO FAMILY SYSTEM

The essence of this unique tribal relationship is dynamic and ought to be maintained for cultural sustainability. Participants in the tako-lavo relationship not only identify with fellow tako or lavo and behave accordingly, but also care and look out for each other, affiliate with each other, and compete against the opposite affiliation. All the

12. Source: iTaukei Lands and Fisheries Commission.

knowledge behind this is acquired from being part of the tako-lavo communities they originate from in the highland of Ra (excluding the coastal communities) as well as parts of Naitasiri, Namosi, Nadroga, and Navosa. With the pressing challenges being brought about by modern lifestyles and related relationships—for example by school associations, religious groupings, or professional bodies—it is important that traditional relationships and their expected norms of behavior be maintained not only in the relevant communities but also in documentation.<sup>13</sup> The custom of relating to others as tako or lavo should ideally start within communities and homes to demonstrate to younger generations a beneficial experience that will generate pride in being a part of a traditional community and culture, an aspect of Colo culture that is beginning to lose its frequency among young people in the urban areas.

## CONCLUSION

Traditional indigenous wisdom in iTaukei relationships is cherished in the Fijian context as these relationships are ancestral legacies transmitted through generations. This sense of identity is unique throughout the Fiji Islands, preserved and disseminated from the past to the present, and ought to be maintained for the future generations. As stated above, the bond between our ancestral gods being brothers and sisters or cross-cousins was and is the basis of the provincial ties and has shaped the behavior of the Fijian tribal traditional relationships.

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13. A. Tagitagivanua, personal communication with author, Suva, April 2014.

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