

## *Farms, Suburbs, or Retirement Homes? The Transformation of Village Fiji*

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Villages are the soul of Fijian life. They are the spiritual and cultural home for indigenous Fijians because, by definition, all are members of clan units (*mataqali*) that encompass a fixed area of land associated with a village. Although many Fijians have become urbanites and some have migrated overseas, the links with the village remain through visits, the sending of gifts, and interaction with kin. “The village is at once the core and foundation of Fijian life; upon it is focused the Fijians’ desire and attempt to demonstrate their separate identity and their urge to carve a better place for themselves now and in the future. About 60 per cent of the Fijian population live in villages and every Fijian can be identified with a particular village of origin” (Lasaqa 1984, 34). Social relations practiced within the village help preserve Fijian culture and social structures (Ravuvu 1983, 1988).

At the heart of village organization lies communal ownership of land. Communal tenure remains by law. Eighty-three percent of Fiji’s land area is under “native” tenure and cannot be alienated. All of this land is held under clan (predominantly *mataqali*) title, and every indigenous Fijian, in theory, is registered as a member of a *mataqali*. All indigenous Fijians must be recorded in the *Vola Ni Kawa Bula*, the Native Lands Commission roll of all members of *mataqali*. Registration confers rights to land and defines legally who is an indigenous Fijian. However, Brookfield found a large number of Fijians on Taveuni who could not name their *mataqali* (1976, 6), many of mixed ancestry may not be registered, and it is probable that many inaccuracies and omissions exist on the rolls. Overall, though, the great majority of Fijians are registered.

As a member of a *mataqali* every Fijian belongs to a defined kin group, a defined piece of land, and thus a village, whether resident there or not. Membership in a *mataqali* also confers access to land that is open to all members, though in practice such rights may be difficult to obtain where land is scarce. Access to land allows for the survival of subsistence agriculture, which provides for the basic needs of villagers. Moreover, through subsistence agriculture villages offer a safety net for Fijians: if they fail elsewhere, there is always a home and some land in the villages. With little or no state provision for social welfare, living in the village is a way of coping with old age or privation.

These are powerful images of and assumptions about village life. The view that the traditional village survives and allows for the coexistence of communalism and capitalism is manifest not just in the romantic notions of academics or tourists but also in the ideology of some recent political initiatives in Fiji, particularly the postcoup belief that Fijians can return to their villages and to subsistence if the modern economy collapses. It is also apparent in the contrast drawn between Fijian villagers and Indo-Fijian smallholders, who are characterized by commercialism, materialism, and individualism, and viewed as being in conflict with the Fijian villagers through land tenure (Indians have no access to Fijian land except through leases) and development strategies (Indians favor commercial agriculture, specialization, and individual farming above subsistence, diversity, and communal resources).

Views like these must be challenged. First, the government's own initiatives in rural development have targeted Fijian villages for attention, seeking to develop commercial agriculture, whether in sugar, cocoa, cattle, or rice. The aim is to raise rural Fijian standards of living by encouraging market-oriented and specialized farming by individuals. Such policies are facilitated by land tenure laws that allow for the leasing of village land, and some 38 percent of all registered leases are to indigenous Fijians (data from Ward 1985, 34). The remaining 62 percent of leases are held mainly by Indo-Fijian tenants.<sup>1</sup> Colonial land laws allowed tenants to obtain leases of "native" land for up to thirty years, and this was basically the only legal way Fijian land could be exchanged. Such land laws have permitted the accumulation of land by some individuals and the promotion of commercial farming. This development ideology, associated with individual effort and acquisition of land and profit, sharply contradicts the ideol-

ogy of traditionalism (Spate 1959; Nayacakalou 1975; Lasaqa 1984; Ward 1987, 44–45).

The effects of commercialism have been noted by a number of authors. Watters (1964), Belshaw (1964), Ward (1965), and Nayacakalou (1978) all analyzed fundamental changes in social and economic relations within villages and remarked on the emergence of inequalities in the 1950s and 1960s. It has become apparent that villages in Fiji do not always take care of the welfare needs of their people. Brookfield noted the emergence of “rural slums” (1977, 13), and Cameron recorded that 13 percent of people living in rural villages (almost exclusively indigenous Fijian) were living below the poverty line (1983, 11). Furthermore, in an examination of destitution-allowance payments, Bienefeld noted that 59 percent went to Fijians and most of these lived in rural areas (1984, 322).<sup>2</sup> The UNESCO/UNFPA team working in eastern Fiji in the 1970s outlined the depth of rural poverty in this region and suggested that redistribution within the villages operated to maintain a “floor of hardship” but did not prevent poverty and inequality (Bayliss-Smith et al 1988, 113). Ward has also pointed to the growing inequalities within villages, especially between those who have acquired leases to good land for commercial farming and those who are left to plant subsistence gardens on poorer land (1986, 1987). From a different perspective, Ravuvu has lamented how religion, education, and money have alienated people from their traditional way of life (1988, 85). Village Fiji is being transformed.

Within this transformation, villages must be seen not as isolated social and economic entities but as part of larger national and even global systems. In Fijian villages one frequently meets people who have worked in New Zealand or Australia, who have children (and grandchildren) there or in North America, or who have been stationed with the Fijian military forces in the Middle East. Such movements, and the resultant savings or remittances, are responsible for much of the material wealth evident in villages—in the form of housing, electrical equipment, and other consumer durables. People are also linked through the export of some of their agricultural produce, the purchase of imported food, or the video programs they watch.

The range of economic functions within Fijian villages can best be examined by looking closely at village economies. In this paper I analyze data from case studies I conducted in two villages—Draubuta and Cautata

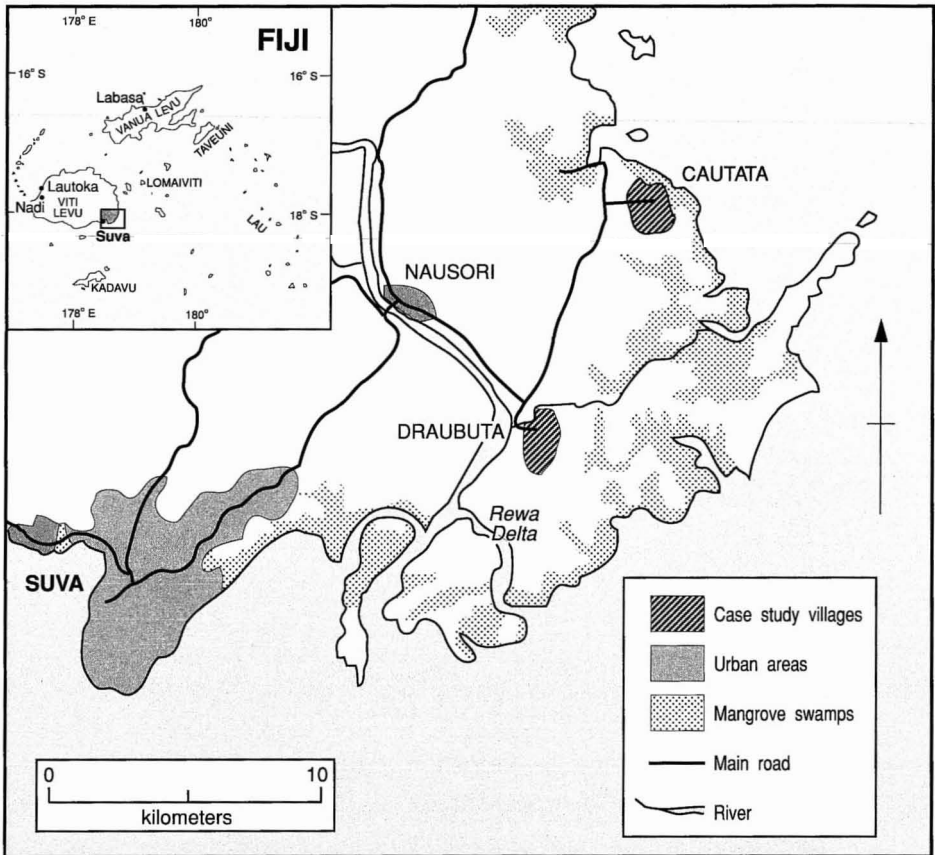


FIGURE 1. The Study Villages: Cautata and Draubuta.

—in 1985 and 1986.<sup>3</sup> These are not typical villages. Both are close to the Suva-Nausori urban corridor in southeastern Viti Levu (Figure 1). Daily bus services allow people from both villages to commute to work or school or to carry their produce to market. Both villages have also grown in population (Table 1), a result of high fertility and some return migration. Land is restricted, especially in Cautata, but some good alluvial soils are suitable for intensive cultivation. Although much more closely integrated into the cash and urban economies than most, these two villages offer nearly the full range of economic options—from cash cropping to commuting. They present a microcosm of the processes of change under conditions of continuing population pressure on land and access to non-agricultural opportunities. Such processes are evident to some degree in nearly every Fijian village. How pressures and opportunities are accom-

Table 1. Population of Study Villages 1956–1986

Census date	Draubuta		Cautata	
	Population	Households	Population	Households
1956	213	30	348	52
1966	191	33	412	74
1976	195	34	450	83
1986	285	41	581	97

Source: Overton 1989, 35.

modated within the village is of critical importance to the nature and pace of socioeconomic transformation, and the case studies may indicate changes occurring elsewhere in Fiji.

### THE MAKING OF VILLAGE FARMS

Indigenous Fijians have engaged successfully in commercial agriculture for many years (Knapman 1987, 32–47). To a large extent, this has been carried out away from the village social environment as people established themselves as independent farmers (*galala*) usually on leased land separate from villages (R. Frazer 1973; Brookfield 1988; Overton 1988a). This process was encouraged by both the colonial and the independence governments through land resettlement schemes (Bayliss-Smith and Haynes 1988; Overton 1988b) and laws to assure the security of leases of customary land. Sugar, cattle, and market vegetables have been among the successful products of Fijian farmers. Yet not all the success has been restricted to *galala* or to leased land. A large proportion of such high volume cash crops as cassava, taro, kava, and bananas is grown on village land by people living within the communities, including many in peripheral or remote regions (Bayliss-Smith 1978, 1983; Bedford, McLean, and MacPherson 1978; Chung 1988; Sofer 1985, 1988). About a third of the total cultivated area of Fiji consists of unleased village land (Overton 1990). Even on the island of Lakeba, where good agricultural land is restricted, some have observed the emergence of a class of rich kulaks using *mataqali* land (Bay-

liss-Smith et al 1988, 243). Farming—the production of agricultural commodities on a commercial basis—is a central element of present-day Fijian village life.

Farming has been conducted in Draubuta and Cautata since the colonial period when sugar, rice, and root crops were grown successfully for commercial sale. Today both villages are part of a government-sponsored push to increase rice production and extend it onto village land (Overton 1988c). Considerable government activity in recent years has focused on draining some of the swampy land and encouraging villagers to plant rice, which emerged as the leading cash crop in Draubuta by 1985.

As well as rice, large gardens of cassava, taro, pineapples, and sweet potatoes as well as a host of tree crops are harvested for sale. Although much is sold, usually at the Nausori and Suva markets, a great deal of the agricultural activity is still directed to providing food for the household. Most root crops grown, especially taro and yams, are for subsistence requirements rather than for the market. Although village diets include a high proportion of tinned protein (fish, beef, and mutton) as well as bread, most staple food is grown by the consuming households, usually on unleased garden land to which they have secured rights from their *mataqali*. In Cautata there are no leases of land; in Draubuta, but a handful.

In many ways, agriculture is in relative decline, and farming faces limitations. Land tenure is critical. Members of a *mataqali* are entitled to allotments of land within their clan boundaries, and traditionally a number of mechanisms allowed them to acquire land or obtain use rights elsewhere. However, during the colonial period laws were introduced that institutionalized a simplified (even distorted) version of traditional land tenure, ending, for example, many of the transfers of land between *mataqali* and the flexibility that characterized precolonial tenure (France 1969; Chappelle 1978). Other laws made it difficult for Fijians to leave their villages or acquire new land. Bound to their *mataqali* land, the Fijian village population began to experience stress. Some *mataqali* populations died out; others expanded rapidly. Their land allotments stayed the same, and very large inequalities arose.

Draubuta provides an example of such inequalities. Nayacakalou (cited by Spate 1959, 12) showed per capita landholdings ranging from 0.1 to 7.2 hectares, with a mean of 0.8 hectares. Some *mataqali* had adequate land; others were plainly overcrowded. The pressure on land was such that even informal exchanges between members of different *mataqali* were cur-

tailed, and the formal leases were under threat (Nayacakalou 1978, 24). After the regulations restricting movement out of the villages were relaxed in the mid-1960s, many of those in the land-scarce *mataqali* moved away. Those with more land tended to stay, and the total population rose. By 1985 inequality had lessened, and the range had narrowed to 0.2 to 1.7 hectares per capita, with a mean of 0.4 hectares (Overton 1989, 36). The colonial land laws effectively prevented the rational distribution of land within villages that might have facilitated commercial farming. Despite the easing of inequalities since the mid-1970s, pressure on land is still acute, and it is difficult for anyone to acquire Draubuta land.

Some laws, which prevent land from being alienated but allow it to be leased for up to thirty years, were designed to encourage cash-cropping. Rent is collected by the Native Lands Trust Board and distributed to chiefs and landowners, and the board is supposed to oversee the lease conditions. A great deal of *mataqali* land is leased in this way and is critical for the sugar industry. Yet landowners are increasingly wary of agreeing to leases because they get minimal return, and there are strong political pressures not to renew leases as they come due for revision (Overton 1990). Alongside this formal leasing system, much land is also leased informally as a result of customary or *vakavanua* agreements between landowners and tenants. Characteristically short-term arrangements, these sometimes involve sizable rent payments, and the practice has become widespread (Eaton 1988).

Registered leases of village land have been granted in Draubuta for some time. In 1954, Nayacakalou recorded some 59 hectares (or 36 percent of Draubuta land) as being officially leased, mainly to Indo-Fijian sugarcane farmers (1978, 20).<sup>4</sup> In addition, *vakavanua* leases have been evident in Draubuta. However, leasing has declined. In 1985 only just over 27 hectares (17 percent) were leased in Draubuta, and *vakavanua* arrangements were rare (Overton 1989, 35–44). In Cautata there were no registered leases of agricultural land, the good land suitable for rice was very restricted, and many families had to seek *vakavanua* land in neighboring villages. In short, the pressure on land has resulted in resistance to individual accumulation of land and more sharing of available land among resident villagers (Overton 1989, 1990, 1992). It has also resulted in migration as many villagers (especially those in *mataqali* with small land endowments or with land not suited to cash cropping) seek livelihoods elsewhere.

Village commercial farming is severely constrained. In Cautata, where

the hundred households face highly unequal access to land, the situation is most critical (Figure 2). The mangroves are useless for agriculture (though some have been cleared for housing and a rugby field), and nearly all the low land is too swampy for root crops and vegetables. Only the small area drained by the government is suitable for rice cultivation, and this is “owned” and actively farmed by about a dozen households. None have large holdings, and they are under constant pressure to admit others. The rest are confined to the low hills, which are intensively cultivated for root

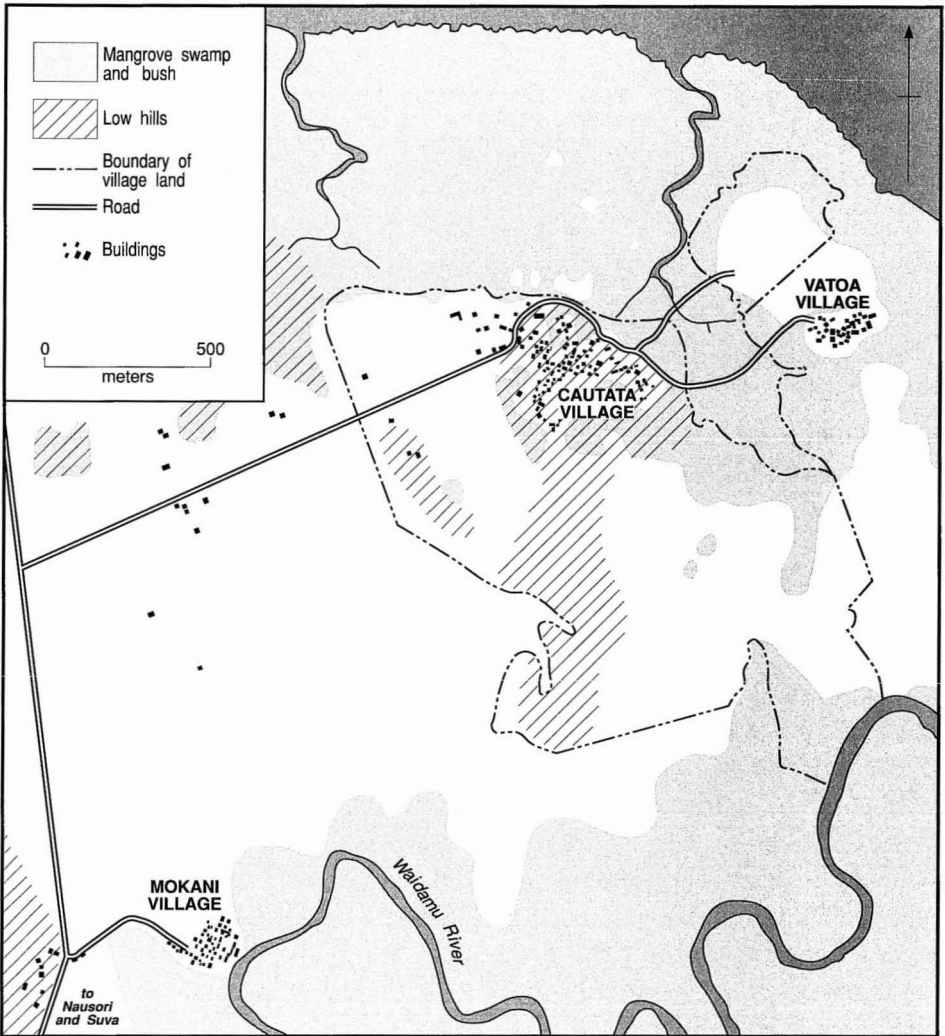


FIGURE 2. Landholding in Cautata.



crops and vegetables, but too limited in area to allow anyone else to plant commercial-scale gardens. Farming cannot develop under these circumstances.

In Draubuta there is relatively more land, and it is more equally shared, yet the effect on commercial agriculture is the same. Most households sell some produce, but few can rely on this as their sole source of income, largely because of the shortage of land. The leading cash crop in 1986 was rice, a crop encouraged by the Ministry of Primary Industries and new to all but a handful of villagers. Seventeen households were growing rice, but none planted more than 4 hectares, and the average plot was only 1.2 hectares. Although 4 hectares constitutes a sizeable planting of rice, yields were low, and not all this area was planted at once. The farmers on the five largest farms appeared to be successful, but most of the smaller growers were struggling. Two of the more successful growers had sought more land but had been unable to obtain any. Expansion thus was limited, and overall rice returns only about F\$320 dollars annually per household (Overton 1989, 71). Since 1986, rice growing has contracted, with many households not continuing the experiment. After the 1987 coups, the scarcity and high cost of imported foods boosted the prospects for cash crops, especially root crops and vegetables (Ali and Overton 1989). However, although some Draubuta people responded quickly to this increased demand, the promise of successful farming, as with rice, failed to materialize.

A further consideration is land quality. The lands of different *mataqali* may not only be of unequal size, but also may have different soils and vegetation, and be at various locations. For example in Draubuta (Figure 3) about half the *mataqali* have land clear of bush close to the village and the river. The soils are good and on these lands are concentrated the rice growing and other cash cropping. The other half have land that backs onto the mangrove swamp, is densely covered in bush, and is unsuited to extensive cropping. Plantings are restricted to gardens in forest clearings or margins. In effect, half the village is excluded from farming by virtue of their lower quality land endowment. No data were available to map Cautata *mataqali* boundaries, though it was clear that members of some *mataqali* had little or no access to adequate areas of good land.

In summary, agriculture remains very important within Fijian villages, both as a means of partial subsistence and as a source of income. Yet the evidence from the case study villages is that agriculture is not developing

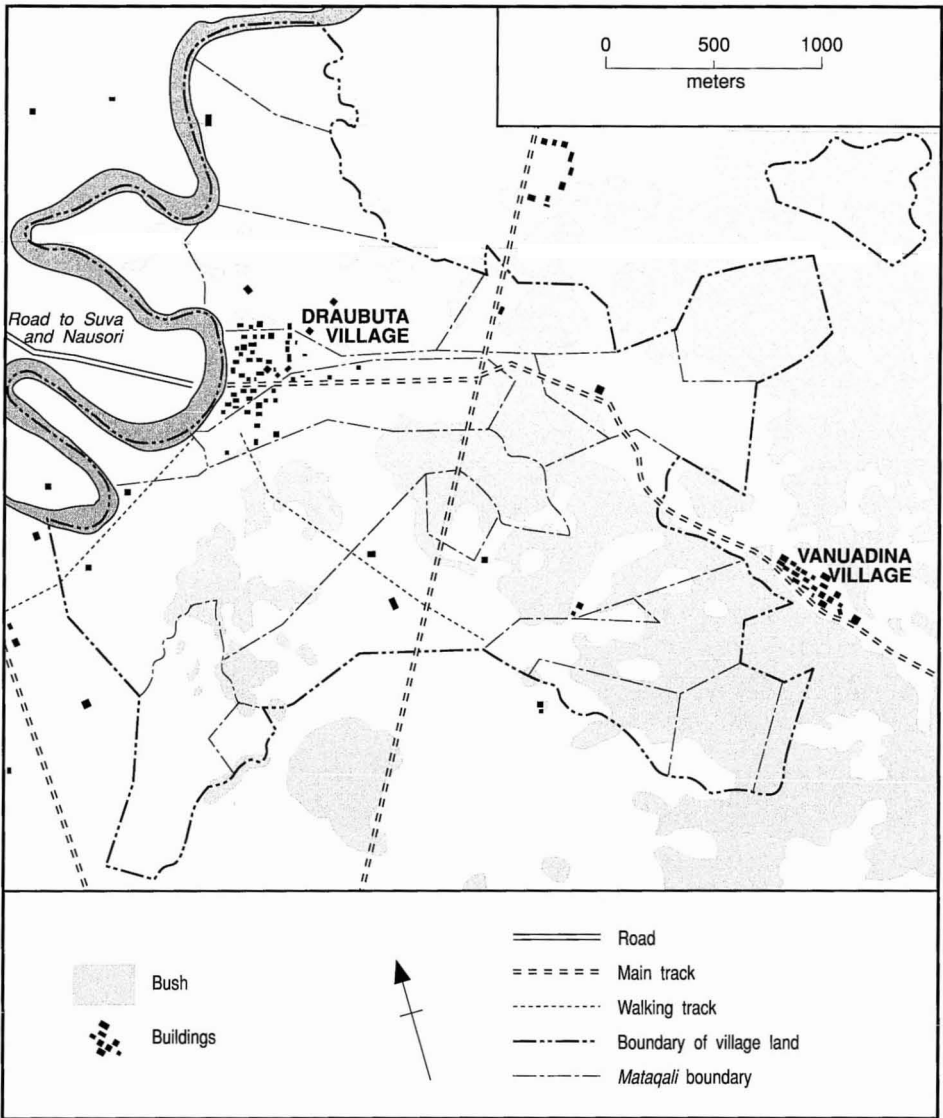


FIGURE 3. Landholding in Draubuta.

rapidly and is in relative decline. The prospect of farming exists for a few, something realized by many Fijians elsewhere, but the pressure on land is such that no one in Draubuta or Cautata can contemplate a successful career as a large-scale commercial farmer on village land. Instead of farming there is a pattern of small- to medium-scale cash cropping and widespread household gardening. In these villages at least, there is simply no

room for new large-scale individual farming, and the prospects for agriculturally based rural development are bleak. For many villagers, the land offers nothing more than partial subsistence. To survive, they have to seek alternative livelihood strategies.<sup>5</sup>

## THE ALTERNATIVE TO AGRICULTURE—MOVEMENT

Against this profile of a restricted agricultural economy in the villages, other economic functions may be analyzed and examined in relation to patterns of mobility. However, mobility must be seen not as a simple movement away from the village, but as a complex set of movements carried out over different periods and within different clan, household, and individual economic and social contexts. There is a basic distinction between movements that relocate and redistribute populations (migration, resettlement) and those that are reciprocal (circulation, commuting, return migration) (Roseman 1971; Chapman and Prothero 1983). Both processes are at work and in a state of constant flux, though the distinction may not be clear for the people moving—a temporary move to the city in search of work may turn into permanent residence. The different types of movement can be categorized as permanent, medium-term circular, commuter, and life cycle. Each reflects a different type of response, and many involve the village and village land not simply as the sources of movement but also as the resources and even the ultimate destinations.

### *Migration*

*Migration* is the term most often used to characterize rural-to-urban movement in Fiji. In this case, people move to the towns in search of employment and a better life, often because the outlook from the village is poor and the land resource limited. There is widespread evidence of significant permanent migration in Fiji, especially from remote islands. For example, Bryant has noted from census data that nearly 70 percent of Rotumans live elsewhere in Fiji, mostly in Suva (1990, 136). Using Native Lands Commission records, Margaret Chung (personal communication) believes that about half of those registered in her study population in Kadavu now live permanently away from the island—a generation (sometimes two) of children born elsewhere. Certainly the growing percentage of ethnic Fijians living in urban areas (32.7 percent in 1986) indicates that

at least some of them have made Suva and other towns their home. Others have migrated overseas (Connell 1987; Bedford 1988*b*, 1989; Levick and Bedford 1988). Such movement within Fiji or overseas gains momentum as better education and job skills equip people not for farming but for employment that only a modern and complex urban economy can provide.

For Draubuta and Cautata, it is difficult to estimate how many of those who come from the village have left for good without a detailed analysis of the Native Lands Commission records. However, it is clear from household surveys and interviews that village families are scattered throughout Fiji and the world. It was not unusual to find that of families of perhaps ten children, only one remains in the village. And those who have gone produce new generations that may be recorded on the *mataqali* registers but have rarely or never seen their "home." From such impressionistic evidence, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that, like Kadavu, villages such as Draubuta have "lost" perhaps half their population. Furthermore, this loss is not distributed evenly; whereas some (often land-rich) *mataqali* might have nearly all surviving members in the village (or away temporarily) others may have lost close to 90 percent.

*Circulation: The Remittance Economy*

Medium-term circulation involves the leaving of the village in search of a job or education but the maintenance of a place of abode and land (or at least secure rights to them) in the village (Chapman 1991). Such movement might involve an absence of as little as one month; sometimes it might stretch to two or three years. In many cases, part of the household (wife, children, older parents) remains behind, maintaining the house and land. Although such movement may be for extended periods and several "circuits" may occur, the commitment to the city is not complete, and the link to the village is strong. It is a strategy that makes sense. Land rights are maintained, children are brought up with the support of kin and in the stable and relaxed atmosphere of the countryside, costs of living in the city are minimized, and net cash returns may be higher than from either a full-time city life or farming. This form of mobility has been recognized in Fiji, notably in Bedford's work in Lau (1980, 1981, 1985) and in other research by Bayliss-Smith (1978), Tubuna (1985), and Chung (1986, 1988).<sup>6</sup> There are also interesting parallels with Underhill's work in the Cook Islands, where movement to and from Manihiki and multilocal economic behavior

have been strategic responses by households to varying economic resources, opportunities, and constraints (Chapman 1991).

In the study villages, as elsewhere, it is difficult to measure the extent of this circulation, mainly because it is hard to define, and people themselves may change their minds and become permanent not temporary leavers. The subjective evidence is strong, however. In Draubuta, there were (and still are) several men away from the village, sometimes leaving their families behind. They work overseas, earn high wages (by Fiji standards), save hard, and send money home. Before 1987, this strategy allowed one family to acquire electrical appliances (a video and a stereo) not owned by others and before the introduction of mains electricity. The appliances were run from a small generator, also purchased from the proceeds of an overseas trip. Savings and remittances, often thus dissipated on consumption, may not have a major role to play in rural development. Indeed, after the coups and economic downturn of 1987–1988, such income was often necessary just to keep families in food and clothing. Yet circulation remains a crucial and purposeful means to maintain or improve living standards and make life in the villages more economically tolerable.

In Cautata, the picture is similar and even more marked if military employment is taken into account. Fiji has a large standing army—about two thousand men prior to 1987, almost all indigenous Fijians—and several thousand reservists. Military employment was very important in Cautata. Most of those whose occupations were given as soldier (Table 2) were not resident in the village in 1985–1986. Some were in the Middle East as part of the Fijian contingent in the Multinational Peacekeeping Force, others were in barracks, and a few were reservists (and stayed at home). Unlike persons in other occupations, soldiers were considered part of the household even if they were stationed away, for most were younger unmarried men, and all sent money back to the family. It was assumed they would return home to the village when their tour was over.

Military employment is important to the rural economy of Fiji. Not only does it provide employment for what might be considered surplus young male labor in the villages, it trains them overseas in skills that may subsequently be of use in Fiji, and most of the pay they receive can be saved and much remitted to the village (Ravuvu 1987). In 1986 it was explained that a considerable amount of the new house-building occurring in Cautata was paid for by soldiers. They had saved while in the Sinai,

Table 2. Nonfarm Employment in the Study Villages, 1985–1986

	Draubuta		Cautata	
	No.	%	No.	%
Unskilled labor	8	31	2	4
Skilled labor	1	4	10	21
Administrative and clerical	6	23	6	13
Teaching	3	11	5	10
Retail and sales assistant	4	15	0	0
Tertiary students	1	4	2	4
Military	0	0	10	21
Transport	0	0	9	19
Part-time local	3	12	4	8
TOTAL	26	100	48	100
Households surveyed (number)	36		30	
Households with some nonagricultural employment (percent)	47.2		83.3	

*Source:* Household interviews 1985–1986.

returned home to the village, and built a good house. If Cautata can be described as a dormitory suburb of Suva, it might also be described as a mini-barracks for the Fijian military.

Military employment has increased dramatically since the May 1987 coup. The size of the military forces was expanded in the wake of the coup, and the great majority of new recruits were drawn, as before, from younger men in Fijian villages. In Draubuta, for example, surveys in 1985–1986 revealed no army employment among the households interviewed. Yet soon after the May coup, an army officer (who hails from Draubuta) went to the village and recruited some thirteen men, including four who were actively engaged in rice farming and one with regular wage employment. The effect on the village labor supply has been major, even if there was a degree of underemployment before. The army is becoming the principal employer for rural Fijian males and, although the political crises of

1987 may have led to an economic downturn in most areas, in some Fijian villages, it may have triggered a minor form of economic growth.

Medium-term circulation has become a crucial part of the village economy. Remittances and savings bring into the village cash that cannot be earned locally. By helping to support living standards this cash enables villages to continue to be home to a large proportion of Fiji's indigenous population. This strategy allows the household to divide its labor between domestic food production and cash earning.

*Nonfarm Employment: The Villages as Suburbs*

A shorter-term form of mobility, daily commuting, has also become a vital feature of the study villages. Although largely restricted to villages within easy bus journey of the main towns (Ponter 1986), it is an obvious, if little recognized, contributor to rural economic change. The data for Draubuta and Cautata indicate much commuting to work in the towns, and such nonfarm (or nonagricultural) employment is a feature of rural life throughout Fiji. Though opportunities for it vary greatly, this form of employment and short-term circulation deserves attention. On the settlement schemes at Waibau and Lomaivuna in inland Viti Levu, earnings from nonfarm employment are a critical element of household incomes (Overton 1988*b*), and even in parts of Lau, local wage employment has replaced copra as the main source of income (Bayliss-Smith et al 1988, 229–235). Nonfarm wage employment has become an integral part of Fijian village economies, though not always on the same scale as in the two case villages.

Nonfarm activities have long been a part of life in Draubuta and Cautata and, where residence (and small garden plots) can be maintained in the village, offer an alternative to either agriculture or long-term migration. Villagers have been active in the wider local and urban economies throughout the colonial period. By the 1950s, 21 of Draubuta's 41 men aged between fifteen and sixty years had permanent wage employment in Suva and Nausori (Nayacakalou 1978, 32), and in Cautata there were a great many absentees working in Suva, especially on the docks (Spate 1959, 104).

The structure of nonagricultural and nondomestic labor reveals both the widespread nature of such employment and a variety in jobs (Table 2). Buses that serve Cautata and pass near Draubuta carry many daily commuters to Suva and Nausori. In these largely commuter villages, the pat-

terns of off-farm employment are related to the structure of the household, which rarely concentrates entirely on such employment. Of those with some members working off-farm (including part-time and rural non-farm), only one household among those interviewed in each village had no adult staying at home to work on the land or on domestic duties. Some (4 in Draubuta, 10 in Cautata) had one or more adults working off-farm, leaving women behind to manage domestic chores and most of the garden work. But in the great majority of households where some were working off-farm, other men and women were engaged full-time in the home or in agriculture. The main household strategy is to divide work between those who are able to find cash-earning activities in the city or locally and those who support the daily requirements of the household and earn some extra through cash-cropping.

Within the occupational structure of those working off-farm, laboring (skilled and unskilled) accounts for about a third in Draubuta and Cautata. Most of these workers, and most of the administrative and clerical workers, are employed by government departments rather than private enterprise. When teachers, university students, and soldiers are included, the public-sector share rises to perhaps 80 percent of nonlocal, nonfarm village employment. Only the few in Draubuta who have jobs as sales assistants are privately employed. None are in industry, and none have their own businesses. For the government employees, jobs are relatively secure and until recently were well paid. Most are in the lower ranks of bureaucracy, with manual or clerical positions, but some in the sample hold positions of responsibility.

These Fijian village commuters are not affected by many of the profound changes occurring in manufacturing and investment in Fiji and the controversies over poor pay and working conditions in some industries (Bienefeld 1984). They are relatively well insulated from fluctuations in the fortunes of private enterprise and are, in a sense, protected by the state. However, one feature of the civil service is that employment generation has not been sustained. Whereas many have been able to get good jobs in the past, several young adult villagers (some well qualified) said they could not get government employment and had stayed on the farm. In addition, given recent changes in policy toward deregulation, privatization, and corporatization, the bureaucracy may face a period of stagnation or even contraction and may cease to absorb village commuters.



Nonfarm employment (neither agricultural nor domestic) is a way of life for half the households surveyed and even affects areas that are not suburbs of Suva. Where the employment is in the city and in the formal sector, it is relatively secure and well paid (if limited in its absorptive capacity), and even locally households engage in many activities to supplement income. For persons who remain in the village, off-farm employment, involving daily commuting, is the most important form of mobility.

*Life Cycles: The Villages as Retirement Homes*

All of the forms of migration discussed can be analyzed over a relatively short period. They affect decisions taken by people, mainly in response to economic imperatives, and typically involve younger adults, often with families of their own. But circumstances change during a person's working life and are reflected in patterns of mobility. Younger teenagers often leave the village for education; later they may seek work in the towns; some return to the village when they get married so that they can secure land and a basic standard of living; others may not return until retirement.

Although the patterns are complex and difficult to generalize about, Draubuta and Cautata offer some illustrations. In 1985–1986 in Draubuta, four new houses were being built. Inquiries revealed that two of them were intended for people from the village who had left the work force elsewhere but were now returning to live among their kin. Other villagers, living in separate households, were also obviously “retired” (though not necessarily of retirement age), living simply, with small gardens for growing most of their own food, and few luxuries. Cautata, with an apparently younger population (and relatively more commuters) also displayed elements of a retirement village, with several houses, some new, for elderly couples.

In Fiji, where there are few state provisions for the elderly or destitute, the village provides a fall-back position, a safety net (Brookfield 1988, 25). Here basic needs can be acquired easily, and some land, even if it is in short supply, can usually be found for small gardens for village members. Coupled with the out-migration of many younger people (through permanent or circular movement) however, this trend is increasing the dependency ratio within villages. More elderly and children are supported by fewer working-age adults, a further indication that Fijian villages are unlikely to become major centers of new commercial agriculture and an

alternative model for prosperous rural development. Relative poverty will be perpetuated.

### *Household Incomes*

The net effect of all these patterns of economic activity and movement is a varied pattern of household incomes (Figures 4 and 5). The most striking feature of these data is the preponderance of nonfarm income. In Cautata especially, the income of the village is dominated by wage earning.<sup>7</sup> Income from crops—mainly rice—is important for some households and “other farm income” (tree crops and livestock) brings needed supplementary cash, but the real core of the village economy is wage earning.

Wage earning is not determined by land endowment, and is often a function of the number, age, or educational attainment of working-age members of the household. It is a way for those with restricted access to land to gain an income and for all to seek alternatives to the low returns from agriculture. Because nonfarm income in these villages is the main component of income, it is also the main parameter of inequality. The greatest differences in material standards of living are between households that rely solely on their small gardens and those that have some members working for wages outside the village (as well as maintaining their gar-

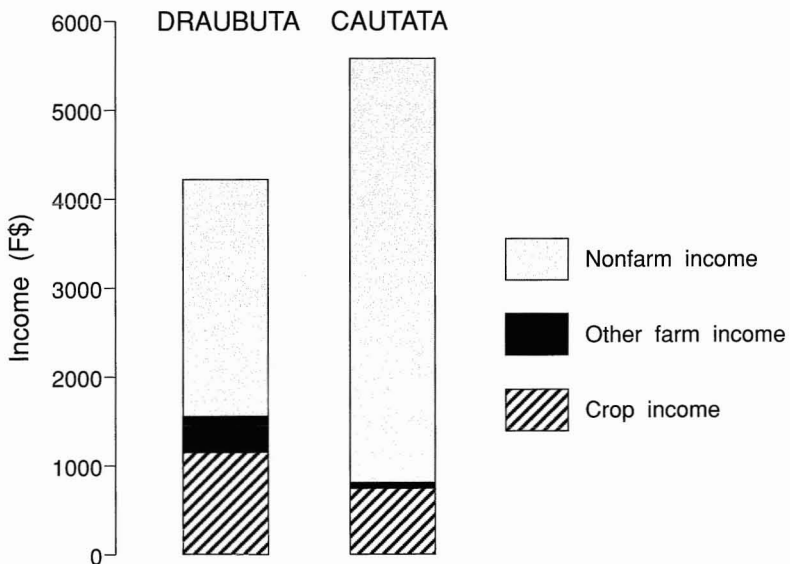


FIGURE 4. Mean Household Incomes in Draubuta and Cautata, 1985-1986.

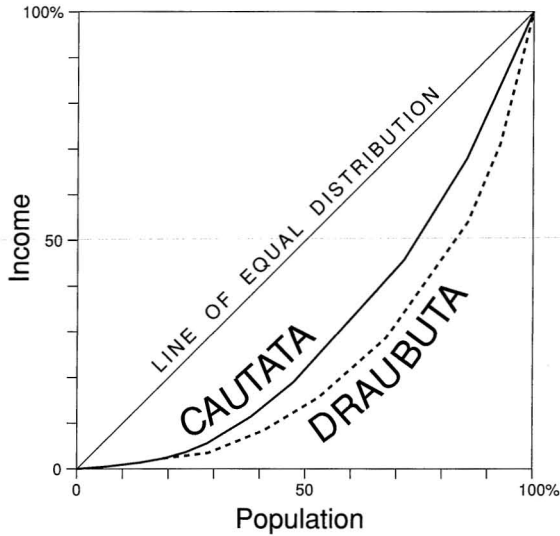


FIGURE 5. Income Inequality in the Study Villages, 1985-1986.

dens). Wage earning is thus the main cause of socioeconomic inequality, though higher levels of nonfarm employment (Cautata) may lead to a more equal distribution of wealth (Figures 4 and 5). Differences in wealth are greater in Draubuta, where fewer households derive income from outside the village and the gap between them and those who do not is more obvious.

Participation in the wage economy appears to be a result of land shortage (as in Cautata), as limited access to good land has forced people to seek alternatives. In this sense wage earning is a response to, as well as a cause of, inequality. Yet it is also the result of the higher cash returns obtainable in the city. If people can find a secure or well-paying job, they usually prefer it to the frustrations of farming (Goneyali 1986). It is likely that households will continue to straddle the village and urban economies, with some members deriving cash incomes in the towns while others attend to household needs by growing food or raising children. People can keep housing costs low and continue to participate in village society. They have much of the best of both worlds without participating fully in either.

Although no chiefs of very high rank reside in either of the study villages, a few who hold chiefly status are recognized by the honorific title Ratu. One cannot generalize from this small group about the role of chiefs in village Fiji, especially as there is a wide range within the chiefly class, yet some observations are pertinent. The chiefs command respect but not

extra land. None has noticeably sizable landholdings, their access to land being determined, as with commoners, by the relative endowment of their *mataqali* and the number of people in it who claim land. Nonetheless, two of the chiefly title holders are engaged primarily in agriculture, and accordingly their incomes are relatively low. With regard to off-farm employment, however, it is possible that rank may have advantages. The highest ranking chief in the two villages holds a senior position in a government department and commutes, though his high income is not reflected in his modest house in the village. On the basis of these two villages, there is little to suggest a strong correlation between chiefly status and material wealth. Within the villages the chiefs have ceremonial roles and their word is very influential in village affairs. Yet such power cannot be translated into individual wealth, and administrative duties are carried out by the *tūraga ni koro*, government appointees not necessarily of chiefly rank, who also have authority to call out labor or censure minor offenders. However, outside these villages, it is clear that Fijian chiefs do play key roles in politics and the economy. Those especially from the highest ranks figure prominently in the bureaucracy, the military, and even business.

## CONCLUSION

Fijian villages are no longer the setting for a simple subsistence mode of life. In a sense they are farms, suburbs, and retirement villages. They fulfill functions as both social safety net and facilitator of economic or material accumulation. Not only have commercialism, government regulations and projects, and differential population pressures on *mataqali* land transformed the way land tenure and village agriculture operate, but also the linkages and movements between villages and the wider urban and international economies have become larger and more diverse. The evidence from Draubuta and Cautata points to a variety of responses to internal constraints and external opportunities. Because of their location, these villages exhibit patterns of change that are perhaps more varied and extreme than elsewhere. Indeed, the contrasts between the two in land use, income earning, and military employment reflect some of the diversity found throughout village Fiji. What has been observed here may be the manifestation of processes operating nearly everywhere in Fijian villages. Population pressure, a crisis over land tenure, the commercialization of economic

relations, and the participation in very wide networks of production, exchange, and distribution are common and affect all Fijian villages to some degree. Villages are not bastions of traditional Fiji (whatever that might be) but reflect the complexity of social and economic relations throughout the country. Moreover, villages are linked strongly through kin and economic networks to other places—rural, urban, and international. Village people straddle different locations, whether through the agency of household division of labor or life cycle movements (Nair 1985; I. Frazer 1985; Chung 1986).

Patterns of mobility are complex and varied. Movements may be on a daily, monthly, yearly, life-time, or permanent basis. Certainly, the net flow appears to be outward from the villages, but this should not disguise significant reflux: people do return, and many village populations are rising. Although the village economy cannot compete with the city in terms of social excitement, employment opportunities, or high cash incomes, it does offer significant cost-saving and social advantages for young families and the elderly. It remains a vital element of Fijian social security.

The reasons that people move away from the village have a great deal to do with land tenure. The official system has institutionalized a now-rigid model of landholding. Traditional forms of land redistribution between clans are being lost, the land resource is shrinking in relation to population, and inequalities are apparent. The need to apportion land to those who have rights requires that clan land be constantly reorganized, making the system very difficult for someone who wants to invest in commercial agriculture and obtain secure long-term use of adequate land. The option of secure leases has been open for some but is being closed rapidly for many others because of village resistance to land being locked up in thirty-year leases (even to one's own kin) and unavailable to others who may have a claim to it.

In these circumstances, many villagers have little option but to move. They can stay in the village, grow food for their families, and sell a little at the markets for some cash, but this often is not enough to provide for even the most basic requirements. The alternative is to move—whether they pack up permanently and go to the city or, if they are lucky, to Australia, New Zealand, or North America; whether they go to these places for a few months every so often to work and save; or whether they live in villages such as Cautata and move daily into the towns to their jobs, combining the best of both worlds in a suburban existence. Fijian villages

encompass the full range of agricultural activities, from subsistence to commercial farming. They are also home to families of migrant workers, dormitory suburbs for commuters, barracks for soldiers, and retirement homes for the elderly. Such complexity matches the growing intricacy and differentiation of the Fiji economy and society as a whole.

The processes of change have policy implications. Observable in the study villages is a group of people who have particular resources and problems and whose patterns of livelihood and aspirations are, on balance, very similar to those of most of their compatriots. They share a great deal with those who live in cities or on individual farms, and with those of a different ethnic background. However, this partial commonality has not yet been translated into a sense of political and social identity and action over matters such as employment conditions, land tenure reform, or welfare provision. Village economies are transforming at a rapid pace and in ways that demand a reevaluation of scholarly preconceptions and analytical frameworks—ideas that hitherto have been based on the primacy of communalism, traditionalism, subsistence production, and self-sufficiency. Only if these are reviewed can more informed policy initiatives be expected to succeed.

Continued strategies involving rural development are questionable if built upon assumptions of low incomes, effectiveness of communal labor, and availability of land. The opportunity cost of labor in villages is often high and a function of potential off-farm wages or remittances rather than low returns to agriculture. Group labor does not operate well for commercial enterprises, and land is scarce. In these circumstances, returns to investment in village agricultural projects within present social and economic parameters will remain low, and issues of poverty and inequality in village Fiji will continue to be determined by the urban and global economies rather than by efforts to revive flagging petty commodity production. Perhaps villages may be better seen as social welfare centers and low-cost homes than as bases for autonomous rural development.

\* \* \*

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## Notes

1 For reviews of Fijian land tenure see Foster (1963), France (1969), Nayacakalou (1971), Rutz (1978, 1987), Walter (1978), Chapelle (1978), Lloyd (1982), Cole (1986), Overton (1987).

2 Cameron's definition of the poverty line included allowance for purchasing a minimum nutritious diet and basic necessities relative to the living standards of poor people in Fiji. Nine percent of households in Fiji fell below this line (Cameron 1983, 3). The Destitutes' Allowance is a small relief payment made by the government to households in severe need and whose adults cannot work. It is a rudimentary form of social welfare but is worth little and only a few households receive it.

3 See Overton (1987, 1988a, 1989) and work by Nayacakalou (1975, 1978), Lasaqa (1984), and Tukai (1988).

4 Sugar-cane farming in the region ended when the Nausori sugar mill closed in 1959.

5 The concept of strategy in household decision-making has been discussed at a general level by Crow (1989) and applied to the study of rural migration by Wood (1981, 1982). There are pitfalls in using this terminology, but in this Fijian study the term *strategy* can be used to describe the deliberate pursuit of rational objectives by households and individuals allocating resources across a number of economic activities.

6 For other reviews of recent migration in Fiji see Chandra (1980, 1981), Nair (1980, 1985), Walsh (1982), Connell (1985), R. Frazer (1986), and Bedford (1988a).

7 These data for Cautata were based on a skewed sample of households with those growing commercial crops overrepresented. The dominance of off-farm sources would be even greater for the whole village population.

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## Abstract

Fijian villages and village life are at the core of Fijian society and culture. Yet there has been much recent change in villages as a result of greater commercialization of land, labor, and agriculture. This paper draws on studies of two villages to demonstrate the range of economic responses being made by villagers and the consequences for village society. Attempts to encourage commercial farming on village land have been severely constrained by land shortage and land tenure practices that limit the size of landholdings. As alternatives, people are leaving to find

wage work elsewhere, whether on a permanent, medium-term, or daily basis. Others are returning to the villages to retire after a long period of working in towns. One consequence is a great variety in household incomes and daily work patterns. In these circumstances, Fijian villages can be seen as retaining their form, but often not their communal substance; they are just as much low-cost suburbs and retirement homes as they are centers for old-style subsistence agriculture. As these economic and social entities become more diverse and complex, so too must policies designed to improve the lot of their inhabitants.