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Minority Melanesians in Suva

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Votu mai Na Sitima ni meli	I can hear the steamship
<i>Lei tei dalo ko tamaqu</i>	My father went to the taro plantation
<i>Lei qoliqoli ko tinaqu</i>	My mother went fishing
<i>Au gade ki serea</i>	I am going to Serea
<i>Votu mai na sitimi ni meli</i>	I can hear the steamship afar
<i>Sa qai voce mai na velovelo</i>	A small punt came ashore
<i>Na velovelo me daru mai lele lele</i>	We sailed and sailed away from home
<i>Tauri au na kai valagi</i>	The white man took hold of my hand
<i>Au sa vesu ena dali</i>	Tied me up with a rope
<i>Sa bi na noqu tagi</i>	I cried as hard as I can
<i>Au sa kau dina ga ki Viti</i>	They are taking me to Fiji
<i>Sa yacaqu dina ko Mili</i>	My name is Mili
<i>Sa qai voce mai na velovelo</i>	A small punt came ashore
<i>Na velovelo me daru mai lele lele</i>	We sailed and sailed away from home

Source: Fijian folk song; translation provided by the author.

Melanesian descendants in Fiji recall that the song above was written specifically about the labour recruitment process to Fiji, as experienced by their ancestors. Many iTaukei children who grew up in Fiji will likely recognise this song, even if they are unaware of its true significance. The song is still performed at many kindergartens in Fiji today, possibly due to its popularity and ease of recitation for preschoolers, as well as its melody and tempo. A *lali* (drum) is frequently used to accompany the tune. I heard this song for the first time during a kindergarten recital two decades ago and did not really know what it meant until my elderly relatives explained it to me. As a child I was vaguely aware of some distant

relatives who had married Melanesian descendants, but everyone spoke the same language as me so I could not really tell the difference until I asked about our familial ties.

My own experience growing up in a low-income, underprivileged neighbourhood on Suva's outskirts inspired me to research the limits that poverty, unemployment, limited education and negative preconceptions can impose on one's wellbeing. It was a social and emotional challenge growing up in substandard housing, with limited access to health services, poor food and nutrition, and being stigmatised by others because of our family circumstances. Despite our financial limitations and personal challenges, I never gave up on my education and I worked hard to make it to university. My experiences growing up in an impoverished environment motivated me at university to explore how people break out of those types of situations.

My research involvement with informal settlements began with a community on the outskirts of Labasa, Vanua Levu. This informal settlement was built on a recovered strip of land along the Labasa River's bank, next to a mangrove swamp. The houses in this informal settlement were carefully spaced along the wetland swamp. Most of the dwellings are built on stilts, and the water reaches beneath most of them during high tide. Through this experience, I was introduced to different ethnic groups in the settlement, including some families of iTaukei-Melanesian ancestry who had migrated to Labasa in the hope of being able to access resources and offer a good education for their children. This piqued my curiosity in Melanesian descendants in Fiji, as I wanted to know why those who have resided in Fiji for over a century are still disadvantaged, destitute and living in impoverished communities.

Melanesian labourers who worked on colonial plantations in Fiji have had many different names over time. For Europeans who orchestrated the 'blackbirding' trade in the nineteenth century, it was common to refer to Pacific Islanders in general as Polynesians. In Fiji, all those of Melanesian origin that came during the labour trade period were categorised as 'Solomoni' regardless of their country of origin. The term is applied to the generation of descendants of Melanesian labourers whose ancestors came from the Solomon Islands (the largest number), Vanuatu (formerly New Hebrides) and New Guinea during the period 1864–1911. Most Fijians believed that all Melanesian descendants came from the Solomon Islands, hence the use of the word 'Solomoni' or 'kai Solomoni'. Though they were previously identified as those of Solomoni ancestry, Melanesian descendants in Fiji today prefer the term 'Fijian' as it is more inclusive.



Figure 17.1: A Solomon Islander's house in Suva, Fiji, approximately 1890.

Source: Charles H Kelly, National Library of Australia, PIC Album 1272
#PIC/19988/47, nla.gov.au/nla.obj-332526286.

This chapter is a reflection on the journeys of Melanesian descendants in Suva and how they have fared in terms of access to land, education and socio-economic opportunities. I focus on three settlements in particular – Wailoku, Caubati and Muanikoso. Melanesian settlements in Suva, like many other informal settlements in Fiji, have struggled with land

tenure concerns while striving to retain a sense of security and belonging on the land they now call home. Yet there are also positive stories of community solidarity and prosperity. Their lives serve as a catalyst for change, demonstrating that blackbirding's past was more than simply a tale of survival.

As I embarked on a PhD in 2015 to understand this history, I travelled around Fiji interviewing Melanesian descendants. It was part of a broader research study that looked at Melanesians' descendants in Fiji and Samoa, the historical development of identity formation in their new homes, and the social and economic status and prospects of these minorities. Since Winston Halapua's ground-breaking history in 1993 and 2001,¹ much had changed in Fiji, but had the lives and attitudes of Melanesians changed as well? There were 44 Melanesian settlements across Fiji as of 2017. Of these, 22 Melanesian communities are in the Central Division, six in the Western Division, six in the Eastern Division, and 10 in the Northern Division. The largest concentration of Melanesian descendants in Fiji are in Suva, and so this is where I spent the majority of my time conducting research. There were a range of attitudes and responses from the communities, as people spoke of the negative impacts of their minority status in Suva, and of the positive improvements to their lives as a result of greater political recognition.

Melanesians have been vulnerable and subjected to various social problems as a result of ongoing developments in the Suva City area. These problems were related to ongoing resettlement plans, as well as disputes among landowning units over the renewal or non-renewal of land leases.² Some Melanesian descendants were served with eviction notices after their land leases expired and were forced to resettle in other areas around Fiji. This has generated fear and instability within the Melanesian communities.³ Although many consider themselves Fijian, they are aware that they may be regarded differently by others. A 70-year-old Melanesian descendant who has been a resident of an informal Melanesian settlement in Suva argued that:

1 Winston Halapua, 'A study of the evolution of marginalization: The case of the Solomoni community of Wailoku in Fiji' (PhD thesis, University of the South Pacific, 1993); Winston Halapua, *Living on the fringe: Melanesians in Fiji* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 2001).

2 Aduru Kuva, *The Solomons community in Fiji* (Suva: South Pacific Social Sciences Association, 1974).

3 Eseta Mateiviti-Tulavu, 'Connecting identities and relationships through indigenous epistemology: The Solomoni of Fiji' (PhD thesis, University of Auckland, 2013).

we consider ourselves equal to our Fijian counterparts and we get on well with them. There was never a sense of racial differences or any derogatory attitude towards us but sometimes we can be conscious of the attitude of others towards us.⁴

Some Melanesian descendants believe that their social isolation has kept them from benefiting from the social and economic contributions and developments offered by the British colonial administration, the Anglican Church and various former governments. One Melanesian descendant mentioned that, 'to some extent, the experience my ancestors encountered has somehow shaped our current situation. We have over the past years been victimized and marginalized'.⁵

In Fiji, prejudices towards Melanesian migrants were formed in the nineteenth century when the colonisers imposed their rule through a hierarchical system. To some extent, the dominant ethnic groups in Fiji since then extended an ethnocentric attitude towards those of Melanesian ancestry perhaps because of their skin colour and origins, but also because of the white colonial attitude to them.⁶ The negligence of various governments in the past to adequately recognise Melanesians prompted Melanesian elders in 1987 to form an association a year later known as the Fiji Melanesian Community Development Association, which was renamed the Fiji Melanesian Council in 2014. According to Fiji Melanesian Council General Secretary Paterisio Nunu, the formation of the association came about to:

manage and administer issues about those of Melanesian descendants and act as a vehicle to voice their aspiration to the government and other organizations, reconnect descendants to their roots and to revive their tradition, culture, and languages, and empower descendants to be proud of their identity as descendants of Melanesian labourers in Fiji.⁷

It has representatives from all Melanesian settlements and was first recognised by the government through the then Department of Multi-Ethnic Affairs.⁸ The Fiji Melanesian Community Development

4 Personal interview with Serai, a 70-year-old Melanesian descendant in Suva, July 2017.

5 Personal interview with Melanesian descendant, July 2015.

6 Vijay Naidu et al., *Fiji: The challenges and opportunities of diversity* (Suva: CCF & Minority Rights Group International, 2013).

7 Personal interview with Paterisio Nunu, July 2017.

8 In 2011, the Multiethnic Affairs ministry was devolved, and its functions shared out to other ministries.

Association was founded at a time when Fiji was undergoing a major political upheaval, the country's first coup d'état in 1987. It hoped to focus solely on the social, political and economic wellbeing of Melanesians in Fiji, who had been neglected for years, and how government policies could be more meaningfully directed towards their needs.

In 2017, I attended the Fiji Melanesian Council meeting in Suva as an observer. Representatives from diverse Melanesian communities from throughout Fiji attended the council meeting at Marata Village in Wailoku, which was themed 'A Prosperous Fiji Melanesian Community'. The gathering was officially opened by the minister for women, children, and poverty alleviation, and government representatives were also in attendance. The council meeting lasted two days and was held mostly in the iTaukei language, with iTaukei culture and traditional protocols observed. The meeting was interesting in that each Melanesian settlement or village delegate spoke on behalf of their community, presented community updates and suggested ways forward for their community. Representatives from government ministries also spoke to them in iTaukei language about self-help programs, which included rural housing assistance, disaster risk reduction support, and social welfare and poverty alleviation programs in place.

Melanesian settlements initially emerged on low-lying areas and cliffs around Suva that were isolated and undesirable. Living among individuals from the same tribal groups was a way of maintaining their identity and a means of survival. To date, tribal groups have continually negotiated their conditions of stay with landowners through verbal agreements, but as the city has expanded, land has become increasingly valuable and these negotiations have become more difficult. The populations of these settlements have also changed too. Halapua reported in 1993 that in most cases the initial negotiations were for two or three extended families. Based on my fieldwork observations, intermarriage between the iTaukei and Melanesians has continued over time, settlements have grown and the number of people living in each area has increased. In 2015 the general secretary of the Melanesian Council noted that the iTaukei had begun to outnumber Melanesians in many of the settlements and were gradually marrying into Melanesian settlements. In some cases, married couples would bring their families to the settlements too because it was too expensive to rent in Suva and because the Melanesian settlements are conveniently located.

Wailoku

Wailoku is approximately 6.7 kilometres from Suva and was established as a central settlement in Suva to address the issues and challenges of Melanesians becoming marginalised in the newly formed capital. The Anglican Church leased some land at Wailoku from Fiji's Colonial Government for 99 years in 1941, and the agreement was made on the understanding the land would be used to build a central Melanesian settlement in Suva to meet the needs of the Melanesian community. Hence by 1942, most Melanesian descendants and their families were resettled on the property.⁹ During one of my interviews with Nunu, he stated that St John's School and a hostel were relocated from Levuka to Wailoku around the same time. Melanesians were divided into tribes by the colonial authorities and the Anglican Church when they arrived at the Wailoku settlement, after careful consideration of their history and languages.¹⁰

The Wailoku settlement extends over 254 acres on a flood plain beneath the Princess Road towards Lami town. Wailoku became a centralised settlement for the urban scattered Solomon Islanders in different informal settlements within the Suva and Navua corridor.¹¹ Settlement boundaries were established within Wailoku to encompass the different Solomon Island tribal groups in Fiji. They are the Malaita districts of Koio (Kwaio), Vataleka (Fataleka), Marata ('Are 'Are), Balibuka (Toabaita) and Wai (Ngwai), which make up the tribal groups in Wailoku.¹² In 1974 Kuva noted that about 1,100 people were living in Wailoku.¹³ The Wailoku settlement's population is now believed to be over 3,000 people, a significant growth over the past 40 years. As it has expanded, Melanesians have also settled on land not leased by the Anglican Church. In these cases, access is based on customary arrangements with the indigenous landowners (*vakavanua*) or negotiated with private landowners.

The Wailoku community has a predominantly male population, with males outnumbering females. This supports Kuva's finding from 1974 that there were more males than females, probably since females were expected

9 Halapua, 'A study of the evolution of marginalization', 45.

10 Mateiviti-Tulavu, 'Connecting identities and relationships through indigenous epistemology'.

11 Personal interview with Paterisio Nunu, July 2015.

12 Mateiviti-Tulavu, 'Connecting identities and relationships through indigenous epistemology'.

13 Kuva, *The Solomons community in Fiji*, 24.

to move to their husband's village if they married men from outside the settlement.¹⁴ Cement block flooring is used throughout Wailoku, with corrugated iron, wood or combined wood and corrugated iron walls. The income inequalities among settlement households, as well as the level of their socio-economic wellbeing, are shown by the variances in house structure. The Anglican Church, with the help of the Fiji Melanesian Council, remains the primary authority in Wailoku and other Melanesian settlements in Fiji, supervising the settlement's activities.¹⁵ Melanesians in each settlement, together with the Fiji Melanesian Council, nominate a *turaga-ni-koro* to look after their village affairs. In an iTaukei village, a *turaga-ni-koro*'s roles and responsibilities include coordinating the activities of the village, representing the village in wider community meetings, maintaining law and order, and representing the settlement to the local government.

Most of Fiji's Melanesian descendants see their future as linked to the land, but they remain a minority group with no traditional land rights, leaving them unable to assert themselves politically, socially or economically. Melanesians consider themselves on the margins in terms of accessing services and opportunities. Within Suva, some Melanesians were able to secure leased land, however they still feel insecure as the chances of being evicted are high. Levy M Laka, a Melanesian descendant in Wailoku, conducted a study in 1983 where he stated:

The insecurity of the land faced by the Wailoku Melanesian community comes because our forefathers came from the Solomon Islands and that does not entitle us to any land rights even though our mothers are Fijians. We have no rights, no say, and no share in whatever land that belongs to our mothers.¹⁶

Years later this issue was addressed when, according to Father Tomu Asioli:

The Standing Committee of the Diocese of Polynesia agreed to transfer the land lease title from the church to the people of Wailoku during its meeting in Samoa in February 2000. This step by the church can be viewed as an opportunity for Melanesians to make use of their potential and resources through collaborative projects and initiatives giving them a sense of responsibility and

14 Kuva, *The Solomons community in Fiji*, 24.

15 Personal interview with Paterisio Nunu, July 2015.

16 Levy M Laka, *Solomon Islands descendants in Fiji: A case study of Wailoku* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1983).

belonging. The church in its response was pushing Melanesian descendants to utilise their natural skills and abilities of leadership and management.¹⁷

Wailoku's experience demonstrates that land tenure has always been at the centre of the Melanesian community's efforts and struggles for belonging. Though there is extensive intermarriage with iTaukei, the small Melanesian community continues to retain a distinct identity, and because many cannot claim land rights, they focus on improving their livelihoods through education or employment. Most Melanesian descendants in Fiji are conscious that they are a landless class with only a few having acquired long-term lease holdings. Some still think it is acceptable to live on the church properties in perpetuity, while others hang on to the insecure tenure of an annual lease holding and hope not to be evicted. Some Melanesians in Wailoku or in other informal settlements may not have a legal title to the land they live on but are shown favour by the landowners and continue to live there today. A Melanesian descendant who I interviewed mentioned that: 'We are at the mercy of the landowners who have largely turned us into tenants at will'.¹⁸ Vijay Naidu further asserts that some people are unaware of the processes for purchasing a leasehold property or the costs of leasing, and hold the concern that they will not be given a lease in the first place.¹⁹

Caubati

Caubati is in Nasinu, approximately 4.2 kilometres from Suva within the Naitāsiri province. The Caubati Melanesian settlement is on native land owned by the Kalabu *mataqali* in the Naitāsiri province. The Melanesian descendants established their settlement there through a verbal agreement of reciprocity with landowners.²⁰ The Caubati village near the settlement is believed to be a portion of one of the Lands Department's low-cost subdivisions. Several of the lessees had secured loans from the Housing Authority to finance their homes. Halapua states that the settlers were first-generation Melanesians who left the Laqere settlement in 1910 because

17 Personal interview with Father Tomu Asioli, June 2015.

18 Naidu et al., *Fiji: The challenges and opportunities of diversity*, 27.

19 Naidu et al., *Fiji: The challenges and opportunities of diversity*, 27.

20 Mateiviti-Tulavu, 'Connecting identities and relationships through indigenous epistemology', 134.

of overcrowding.²¹ When Wailoku was first settled, the Melanesians of Caubati were asked to move to the village of Marata in Wailoku; however, because of the abundant space and Caubati's proximity to Suva, Melanesian residents in Caubati refused to relocate. The Native Land Trust Board (NLTB) and Native Land Development Corporation alerted Melanesians in Caubati in 1988 that their lease had expired and that they needed to subdivide the land. They also informed Melanesian settlers that they were illegally occupying the land and had to pay rent.²² However, Melanesian descendants in Caubati maintained that the lease agreement was for 99 years beginning from 1914. A Melanesian descendant from Caubati mentioned that:

It was NLTB's attempt to separate us from the land that had been granted to our forefathers. TLTB did not want to extend our lease when it expired in 2013, and instead wanted to subdivide the 25 acres. They served us with eviction notices and took us to court to have us vacate the land, but we won the case.²³

Melanesians in Caubati still live there, keeping their ties with the landowners by attending *vanua* meetings, reinforcing a pre-existing relationship.²⁴

In 1993, the original households at Caubati increased from two to 105.²⁵ Today approximately 500 people are residing in Caubati with approximately 70 residential homes. There are more women than men; however, like other Melanesian settlements it is dominated by a youthful population. Due to intermarriages with the iTaukei, the settlement contains a population of mixed ethnicities now and is not limited to those of Melanesian origin. About 65 per cent of Melanesians in Caubati have gone on to complete higher education and have secured white-collar jobs, while about 35 per cent are engaged in informal employment.²⁶ Their income is supplemented by subsistence farming. Over the years, there have been housing and living standard improvements in Caubati that can be attributed to better income-earning opportunities. Caubati settlement, like any other Melanesian settlement, has a *turaga-ni-koro* who

21 Laqere is about 1 kilometre away from Muanikoso, where Ni-Vanuatu descendants live and is about 3 kilometres to Caubati. Halapua, 'A study of the evolution of marginalization', 46–47.

22 Halapua, 'A study of the evolution of marginalization', 46–47.

23 Personal interview with a Melanesian descendant from Caubati, July 2017.

24 Mateiviti-Tulavu, 'Connecting identities and relationships through indigenous epistemology', 134.

25 Halapua, 'A study of the evolution of marginalization', 52.

26 Personal interview with Paterisio Nunu, July 2015.

coordinates settlement activities, oversees community projects and is the community liaison representative to the Anglican Church and provincial council meetings.

In Fiji, education is free, and schooling is compulsory for children aged five to 18 years; however, most families in Melanesian informal settlements find that sending their children to school is costly. As a result, some children choose to drop out of school because they believe they are putting their families in financial hardship. Children from Melanesian informal settlements in Suva are not the only economically disadvantaged students who receive free education; poor children from neighbouring informal settlements make for 70 per cent of the materially disadvantaged student ratio.²⁷ Increasing fees and food prices force families to make compromises elsewhere in their budgets to pay for their children's education. Due to physical impairment (health problems), rising food prices and other necessities for the families' survival, some parents in the settlement are unable to afford their children's educational fees. Financial constraints may prohibit some children from attending school in Melanesian informal settlements, although education is still highly valued. 'Life in a Melanesian informal settlement is not especially promising,' one responder said, 'so we push our children to work and study hard in school since their future is at stake.'²⁸ For their ancestry, Melanesian descendants have also reported being discriminated against, marginalised and mocked at school. One Melanesian descendant in Caubati said: 'We are victimized not only by the iTaukei but also by the Indo-Fijians ... we are teased and made fun of for being a Kai Solomoni.'²⁹ Discrimination against Melanesian descendants may have a psychological impact as well as an obvious influence on their school performance, resulting in many becoming disadvantaged and marginalised in the communities they live in.

Muanikoso

Muanikoso is located approximately 8.6 kilometres away from Suva in the Naitāsiri province. Approximately 700 residents are living in Muanikoso today, comprising of Melanesian descendants from the New Hebrides and the Solomon Islands. It is predominantly populated by

27 Personal interview with Paterisio Nunu, July 2015.

28 Personal interview with a Melanesian descendant in Muanikoso, June 2017.

29 Personal Interview with a Melanesian descendant in Muanikoso, July 2017.

people of New Hebridean origins, many of whom were relocated from Kaunikuila (Flagstaff) due to a hurricane in 1952.³⁰ After the hurricane, the Anglican Church offered to settle them in Marata village at Wailoku, but they preferred a location at Muanikoso because it was separate from the Solomon Islanders.³¹ The Anglican Church over the years assisted the Melanesians with their movement from Kaunikuila to Muanikoso and today continues to provide pastoral support. Similar to other Melanesian settlements, Muanikoso residents are unsure about their land tenure status. The whole of Muanikoso is partitioned into two - The land where those originally from the Solomon Islands live was initially under Crown Lease and is now under the administration of the Housing Authority of Fiji. Those of New Hebrides origins who live in Muanikoso are on reserved native land that belongs to the Kalabu mataqali in the Naitasiri province. One resident mentioned, 'there is also a lack of interest in working the land if it is obtained. What if we get evicted again?'³²

Churches continue to be the leading authorities within the settlement. In 2018, the Saint Gabriel Anglican Church in Muanikoso was completed and continues to be a place of gathering and worship for the majority of Melanesian descendants in Muanikoso. It is visible from the roadside opposite the old cement factory as you travel through the Nasinu–Nausori corridor. A mixture of iTaukei and Indo-Fijian homeowners now live in the settlement, which was originally dominated by the Melanesian descendants of New Hebrides origin. There are approximately 120 households in the Muanikoso Melanesian settlement. Families are generally comprised of five to eight people, consisting of two adults and four to six children. The houses in the Muanikoso settlement are mostly made of wood and corrugated iron, and some are in terribly dilapidated condition. The growing population in the Muanikoso residential area, like in other Suva informal settlements, has resulted in overcrowding, poor waste disposal, substandard living conditions and increasing social and sanitary issues, all of which can have an impact on the residents' overall health. Also, given the high cost of living, households in informal settlements tend to rely on multiple sources of income or livelihoods to meet their basic needs.

30 Fiji Colonial Secretary's Office 1940, 50/81, Part 2, National Archives of Fiji.

31 Halapua, *Living on the Fringe*, 75.

32 Personal interview with a Melanesian descendant from Muanikoso, June 2017.

Conclusion

As far as Fiji history is concerned, there is insufficient acknowledgement of Melanesians' contributions to its development, and in Suva too, Melanesian communities have been sidelined or overlooked. Once numerically small, the Melanesian descendants of Suva are growing to become a more prominent and vocal section of the population. While people of Melanesian descent in Suva share cultural similarities with iTaukei (in terms of language, lifestyles and customs), they are not politically represented, and have limited access to land, education opportunities and commercial opportunities, compared with the ethnic Fijians. Their communities in Fiji are referred to as 'settlements' rather than villages because they do not have secure land tenure. Melanesian communities live on land that was once isolated and undesirable but is now highly lucrative and well positioned in an expanding urban landscape. Wailoku, Caubati and Muanikoso residents are aware that their occupation is tenuous, relying on the generosity of the church or the consent of traditional landowners or governments. They are aware of their ancestors' historic displacement, exploitation and marginalisation, and some remain fearful today that they could be deemed illegal occupants and served with eviction notices.

There has been some progress, however, as Melanesian descendants have grown in number and pushed for greater recognition in Fiji. All the Melanesian settlements in Suva that I visited have greater access to some form of housing, health care and transportation, compared to other rural Melanesians. In 2018, the Fijian Government established affordable housing and lease-related incentives for first-time house buyers, which are open to all Fijians (including Melanesians). Yet the cost of developed land in Suva still remains out of reach for many residents of Melanesian informal communities and low-income earners, and their socio-economic status continues to limit their opportunities compared to other Suva residents. As mentioned by one young Melanesian descendant:

We are already landless and lack the financial means to build a proper home, most of us live in informal settlements and we make do with whatever materials we can get our hands on.³³

33 Personal interview with a Fiji Melanesian Council Executive Member, June 2017.

Despite the challenges Melanesian labourers and their descendants today face, many of their children and grandchildren have gone on to complete higher education and hold senior positions in various institutions within Fiji. A 25-year-old University of the South Pacific graduate and Melanesian descendant from Caubati told me:

There are Melanesia descendants with PhD and Master's degrees, some hold senior positions in government and non-governmental organisations, some even hold noble professions. We always try to not allow our community's history and that sense of historical exclusion and deprivation limit us from achieving our dreams. We want our life stories and our narratives to be the game changer, to be a source of inspiration to the younger generation.³⁴

Generations of Melanesian descendants believe that their aspirations for reform and a better future are rendered futile without targeted government policies. Affirmative action policies and better educational opportunities will allow them to break free from the vicious cycle of poverty, allowing them to improve living conditions in their communities and access better opportunities.

34 Personal interview with a 25-year-old Melanesian descendant from Caubati, October 2021.

This text is taken from *Suva Stories: A History of the Capital of Fiji*,
edited by Nicholas Halter, published 2022, The Australian National
University, Canberra, Australia.

doi.org/10.22459/SS.2022.17