

**DISTURBING HISTORY: ASPECTS OF RESISTANCE IN EARLY
COLONIAL FIJI, 1874 – 1914.**

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Robert E. Nicole

University of Canterbury

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Abstract

The overarching aim of this study is to trace evidence of resistant behaviour among subordinate groups in the first forty years of Fiji's colonial history (1874-1914). By rereading archival materials "against the grain", listening to oral history, and engaging postcolonial scholarship, the study intends to disturb accepted ways of understanding Fiji's past. This approach reveals the existence of numerous people, voices, and events which until recently have remained largely on the margins of Fiji's process of historical production. As a chronological survey, the study produces a body of evidence which uncovers a rich array of forms of resistance. The points at which these forms of resistance engaged dominant culture are divided into two broad categories. The first examines several forms of organized resistance such as the Colo War of 1876, the Tuka Movement of 1878 to 1891, the Seaqaqa War of 1894, the Movement for Federation with New Zealand from 1901 to 1903, the Viti Kabani Movement of 1913 to 1917, and the various instances of organised labour protest on Fiji's plantations. The second addresses everyday forms of resistance in the villages and plantations such as tax and land boycotts, violence and retributive justice, avoidance protest, petitioning, and various aspects of women's resistance. In their entirety these aspects of resistance reveal a complex web of relationships between powerful and subordinate groups, and among subordinate groups themselves. These conclusions preclude framing resistance as a totality and advocate instead a conceptualization of resistance as a multi-layered and multi-dimensional reality. In contributing to the reconstruction and revision of Fiji's early colonial history, the study seeks to both clarify and complicate future research in the area.

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Glossary

Bete: Priest.

Bose Vakaturaga: Meeting of the Council of Chiefs.

Bose Levu Vakaturaga: The Great Council of Chiefs.

Buabua: Native Fijian hardwood.

Bukuta: Propose a compact.

Buli: District chief.

Bure: Fijian house.

Bure kalou: Temple.

Lavaki: Legal order or ordinance.

Lotu: Christianity, the Christian Church.

Luveniwai: Woodland and river dwelling fairy.

Mana: Power and wisdom.

Matanitu: Government.

Mataqali: Fijian land-owning unit.

Rara: Village green.

Ratu: Chiefly title conferred on men.

Reguregu: Condolence gathering.

Roko Tui: Government provincial chief.

Siganilewa: Judgement Day.

Soro: Ceremony to ask for forgiveness.

Tamata Dina: True believers.

Tauvu: Traditional rivalries between vanua.

Tikina: District.

Tokatoka: Clan or smaller constituent of a mataqali.

Tuka: Immortality.

Turaga ni koro: Government appointed headman.

Vakaviti: The Fijian way.

Via Kaukauwa: Show of force.

Vuli: Fijian student minister.

Vanua: Land polity.

Tabua: Whale's tooth used in Fijian ceremonies.

Tavuki: Turned upside down.

Turaga ni lewa: Magistrate.

Wai ni Tuka: Elixir of life.

Yaqona: Traditional Fijian ceremonial drink prepared from pounded pepper root.

Abbreviations

CO: Colonial Office (London).

CS: Colonial Secretary.

CSO: Colonial Secretary's Office (Suva, Fiji).

CSR: Colonial Sugar Refinery Company.

JFLC: Journal of the Fiji Legislative Council.

MS: Manuscript.

NAF: National Archives of Fiji.

NSM: Native Stipendiary Magistrate.

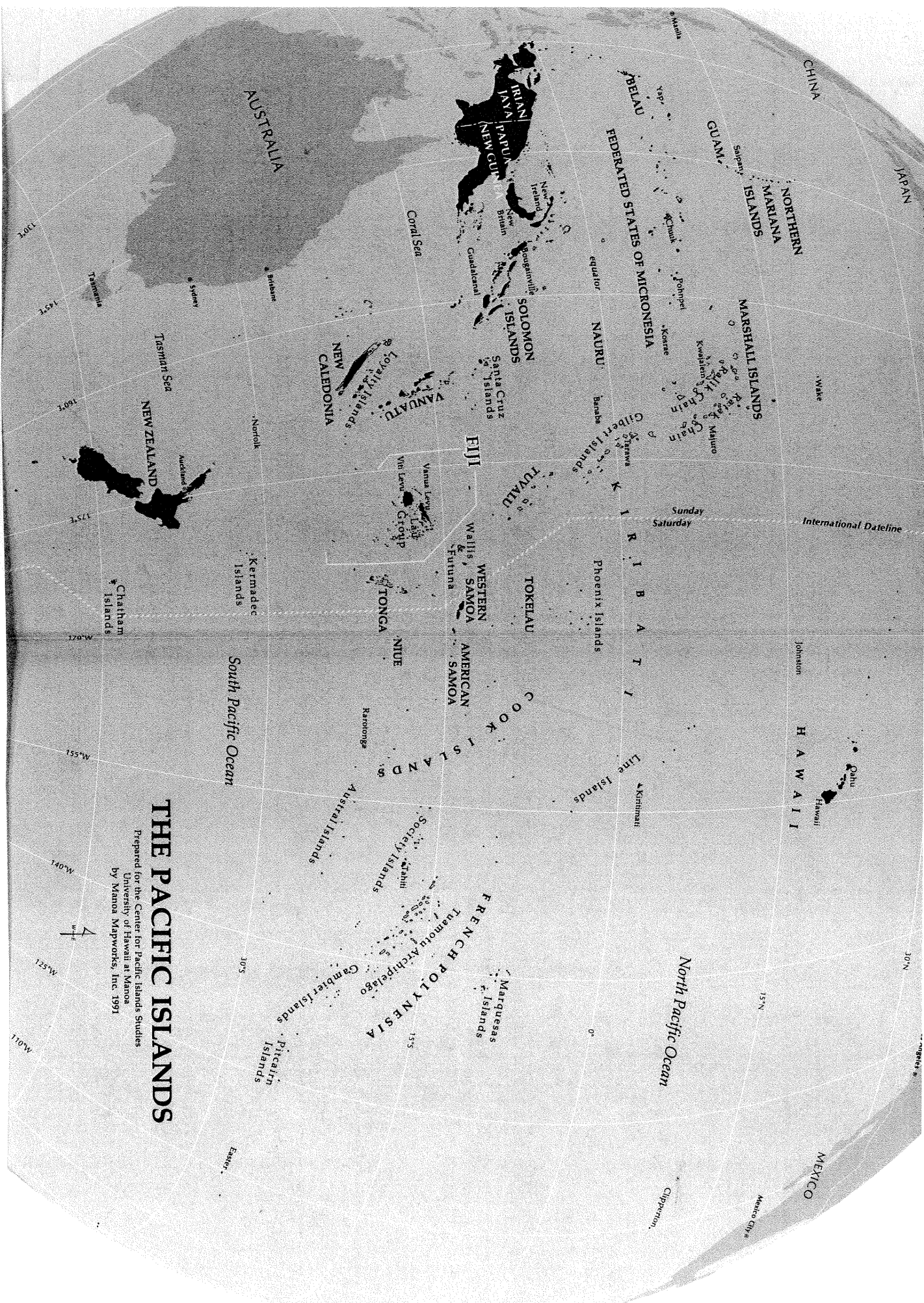
PMB: Pacific Manuscripts Bureau.

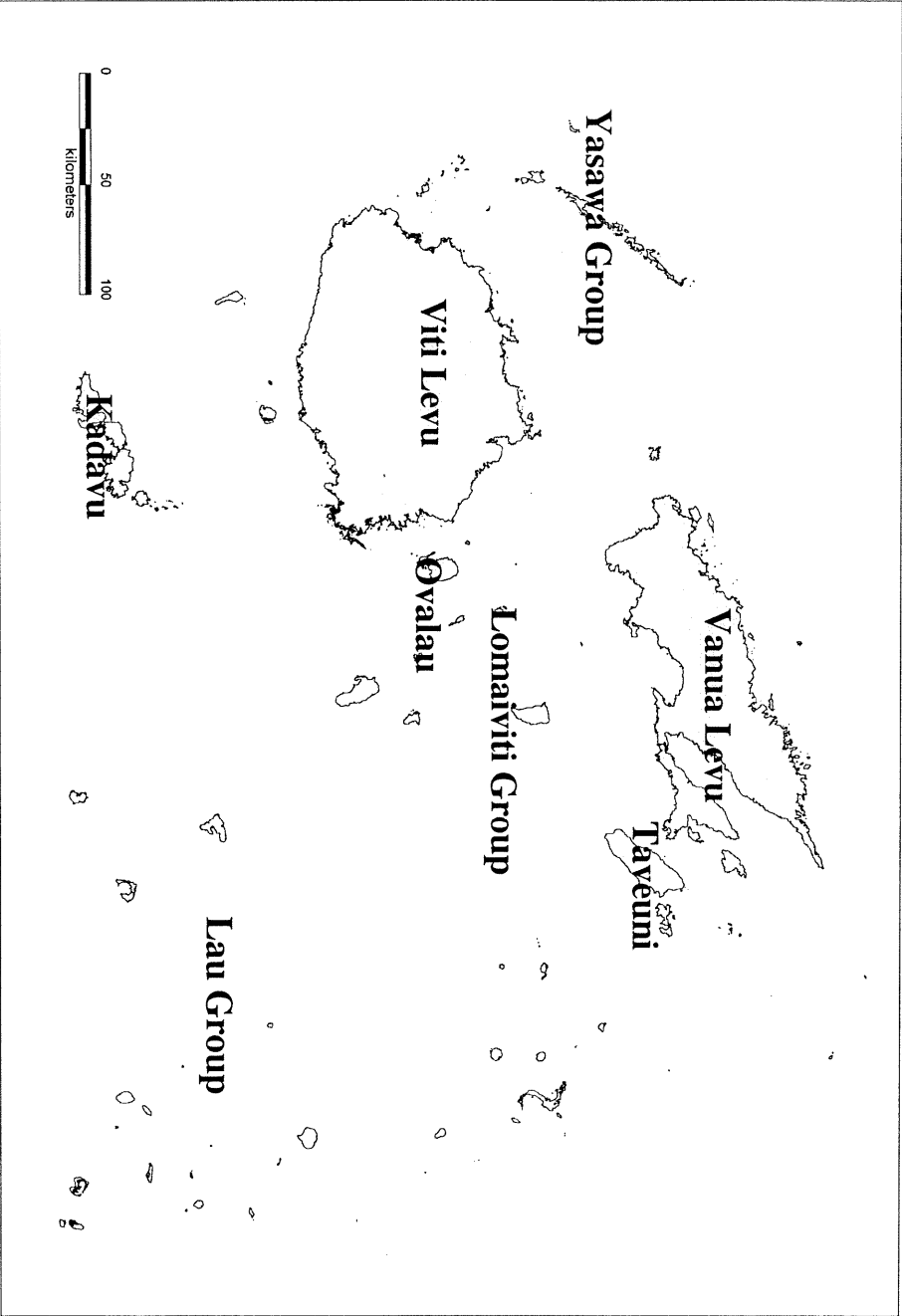
PRO: Public Records Office (London).

SM: Stipendiary Magistrate.

SS: Secretary of State for Colonies.

Map 1: Fiji in the Pacific Ocean





Map 2: Map of the Fiji Islands.

Introduction

In Fiji, as elsewhere in the world, numerous signs and inscriptions, including all the major landmarks, statues, building and street names, public holidays and school textbooks, denote and flatter the triumph of authority. By comparison, little is known of those historical figures who dared to be different, those who disagreed with and defied, Fiji's rebels, dissidents, and revolutionaries. These individuals, their movements and their deeds have been edited out of history, out of Fiji's landscape, and out of its people's memories and historical consciousness. The intention in this thesis is to uncover the nature of resistance in Fiji between 1874 and 1914, to detail who it was that rebelled, what they were disaffected about, why they resisted, how they went about challenging their opponents, and what happened to them as a consequence.

When I came out of high school, my view of Fiji history was largely derived from Kerr and Donnelly's *Fiji in the Pacific: A History and Geography of Fiji*,¹ the core textbook from which generations of Fiji citizens acquire their formal knowledge of Fiji history. My conceptual image of Fiji's past was of a country which had excelled under British tutelage, where indifferent villagers obeyed the wise rule and exemplary leadership of their chiefs, and where Indian labourers toiled endlessly in the sugar plantations to build the colony's economic prosperity.

Imbued as they were with elements of Marxism, my tertiary studies at the University of the South Pacific induced a profound transformation in the way that I understood colonialism. Belief in British benevolence gave way to a conviction about the pervasiveness of unequal power relations in all contexts including Fiji's colonial past. I began to suspect that contrary to public discourse,² a massive undercurrent of

¹ G. J. A Kerr, and T. A. Donnelly, *Fiji in the Pacific: A History and Geography of Fiji*. Milton, Queensland: The Jacaranda Press, 1969.

² Popular belief is well captured by Simione Durutalo, Alexander Mamak and Ahmed Ali who speak of a general tendency to view Fijians and other Pacific Islanders as passive and complacent participants in colonial acculturation and assimilation. See Alexander Mamak and Ahmed Ali (eds.) *Race, Class, and Rebellion in the South Pacific*. Sydney, N.S.W.: Allen and Unwin, 1979. 13, 138. Simione Durutalo, "Internal Colonialism and Unequal Regional Development: The Case of Western Viti Levu, Fiji." M. A. Thesis. Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1985a. 243; and Simione Durutalo "The Paramouncy

resistance to colonialism existed but that the capitalist class, with the complicity of colonial officials, chiefs, and mainstream historians, had conspired to hide it from posterity. With Durutalo and other Marxists of the time, I wanted to see Fiji as “a country whose people have a heroic history of struggle”,³ and I looked with envy at Third World icons of resistance such as Mahatma Gandhi, Franz Fanon, Che Guevara, and Nelson Mandela.

Although Marxism continues to inform my understanding of the past and the present, post-Marxist and postcolonial thinking has since moved the debates beyond the antithetical binaries and determinism that rendered classical Marxism too constrictive. Today, historians can draw on the histories of the everyday lives of ordinary people from the work of Edward Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, Eric Wolf, Howard Zinn, and James Scott,⁴ the theories of power drawn from Michel Foucault,⁵ the historiographical work of Ranajit Guha and the Subaltern Studies School,⁶ the influence of Homi Bhabha and other postcolonial scholars,⁷ the important

of Fijian Interest and the Politicization of Ethnicity.” Suva: Unpublished Paper, University of the South Pacific, 1986. 3.

³ Simone Durutalo, “Buccaneers and Chiefly Historians.” in *Journal of Pacific Studies*. 11, 1985b. 153.

⁴ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*. New York: Vintage, 1966. Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982; Eric Hobsbawm’s four volume history of the modern world, *The Age of Revolution*. New York: Vintage, 1996; *The Age of Capital*. New York: Vintage, 1996; *The Age of Empire*. New York: Vintage, 1989; and *The Age of Extremes*. New York: Vintage, 1996; Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1980; James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985; and *Hidden Transcripts: Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

⁵ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*. Brighton: Harvester, 1972; *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. London: Tavistock Publications, 1974; *The History of Sexuality*. 2 Volumes. Robert Hurley (trans.) New York: Pantheon, 1978; and *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Alan Sheridan (trans.) New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

⁶ Ranajit Guha, “The Prose of Counter-Insurgency.” in *Subaltern Studies II: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983a. 1-42; Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg (eds.) Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988. 271-313; Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 2002.

⁷ Homi Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817.” in *Critical Inquiry*. 12: 1, Autumn 1985. 144-65; and “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse.” in *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (eds.) Second edition. London: Edward Arnold, 1992. 234-41; Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for ‘Indian’ Pasts?” *Representations*. 37, 1992. 1-26; Gyanendra Pandey, “In Defense of the Fragment: Writing about Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today.” in *Representations*. 37, Winter 1992. 27-55; Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993; and Shahid Amin, *Event, Memory, Metaphor: Chauri Chaura, 1922-1992*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

contributions of feminist historiography,⁸ and the emergence of similar offshoots in Pacific History and the wider field of Pacific Studies which are discussed below. This thesis is informed by these post-Marxist and postcolonial frameworks and by a re-reading of Fiji's early colonial archive.

Methodology: Reading the Archive 'Against the Grain'.

By the "archive", is meant the extensive records and documents relating to Fiji's pre-colonial and colonial history. This includes official published and unpublished documents, reports of commissions, official correspondence, diaries, mission records, proceedings of the Council of Chiefs, newspapers, contemporary works written by individuals, and other such written sources. As I read it, the archive also contains oral history, the complexities of which are discussed below.

The question of the relationship between the archive and power has been cogently discussed by the Haitian archivist, Michel-Rolf Trouillot. Rather than read the archive as a neutral institution, Trouillot has described it as a politically active repository of historical experiences and facts which are not created equal.⁹ In Fiji, as elsewhere, what is deemed important in history is a function of who decides what is worth recording and remembering. It is a function of power.

The term "power" is used here in the Foucauldian sense to explain its physical or governmental character, as well as its more important but subtle manifestation in multiple deployments in the most minute and intimate everyday relations including knowledge and knowledge production.¹⁰ The process of historical production in Fiji has made certain people and events visible and important, and others invisible and forgettable. I see my role as a historian as consisting partly of combing this archive

⁸ Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History. 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It*. London: Pluto Press, 1973; Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*. New York, Random House, 1981; Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988; Joan Wallach Scott (ed.) *Feminism and History*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996; Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. See also journals such as *Gender and History* and the *Journal of Women's History*.

⁹ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995. 29.

¹⁰ Foucault, 1972, 1979.

with a view to restoring visibility to those characters and stories that have been previously by-passed or relegated to the margins of history.

Such a position presents a number of methodological challenges. How does one decipher the voice and practice of ordinary people in an archive weighed down by the unrelenting inscriptions of colonial officialdom? How does one read Fijian and Indian thoughts in European documents? How can one evoke the daily experiences of village and plantation women, when most accounts are written from the vantage point of powerful men? How can a historian today claim to know the motivations and aspirations of individuals who lived in a world so far removed from his/hers? What kind of power relationship is the historian establishing with these colonised individuals as he/she writes from the comforts and privileges of twenty-first century postcolonial academia?

I do not wish to claim success or finality in the methodological position adopted in this thesis. The questions raised above are part of on-going debates about the nature of history and the universal question about how the past is and should be represented. They have no easy answers. I readily concede that the past is not a static transparent object the complexity of which can be unfolded with a ready-made formula. There are parts of any society and its past that remain opaque and inscrutable to the gaze of the historian. This is particularly so of the experiences of individuals that I seek to reconstruct in this thesis. Therefore, as in all historical enquiry, much is dependent on the historian's capacity to draw credible inferences from the available evidence.

My own subjective position and personal history with Fiji is fraught with shortcomings. For instance, I do not know the Fijian and Hindustani languages well enough to understand the nuances that are communicated in the small but important sample of the archival documents produced in Fiji's vernacular languages. This is a serious handicap because Fijians and Indians, when they wrote, did so mostly in their mother tongue. (Chapters Five and Six discuss the reasons why they were often forbidden to speak or write in English.) Only a portion of these texts were translated into English. Yet, while epistemological and hermeneutic differences between cultures are undeniable, these cultures are not sealed or irreconcilable. Weaknesses born from difference can be compensated for by other strengths. For instance, being

neither Fijian nor Indo-Fijian may enable a certain detachment and balance. This can be advantageous in a climate where ethnicity is contentious and ethnic antagonism obtrusive.

In seeking to recuperate ordinary people's voices and experiences, I propose to read the archive "against the grain" or "contrapuntally".¹¹ Reading against the grain recognises that a multiplicity of contending voices, stories and truths inform the archive. However, these contending voices do not carry equal power or resonance. The archive is composed of a hierarchy of truths, the most powerful of which acquire legitimacy and are easily discernable, while others are less detectable, often obscured.

Yet, as I demonstrate in the thesis, as much as the archive reflects the deeds, interests and worldviews of institutions and individuals who control the means of historical production, other voices and stories can never be completely suppressed. A historian who reads against the grain will seek to unsettle the authority of received notions of the past by finding those moments where ordinary men and women interfered with the otherwise monotonous yet fractured narratives of colonial pacification and ordering.

Such interventions are typically signalled indirectly through the mediation of colonial officials, missionaries, chiefs, plantation inspectors, and the newspapers. Although they are part of officialdom, they often act as signposts pointing a historian in the direction of other stories not deemed essential to the central narratives relating to colonialism. These traces of other stories constitute the subtext of the archive. It is in this subtext that a historian can begin to read against the grain. When pursued with sufficient rigour, the fragments of these stories can reconstruct at least partially the world of ordinary men and women in a way that simultaneously draws them away from the periphery of the past and reconfigures the centre.

¹¹ Reading against the grain has been used in Pacific History, notably by Peter Hempenstall and Bronwen Douglas. See Peter Hempenstall, "The Colonial Imagination and the Making and Remaking of the Samoan People." in *European Impact and Pacific Influence: British and German Colonial Policy in the Pacific Islands and the Indigenous Response*. Herman Hiery and John MacKenzie (eds.) London: Tauris Publishers, 1997. 65-81; Bronwen Douglas, "Provocative Readings in Intransigent Archives: Finding Aneityumese Women." in *Oceania*. 70: 2, 1999. 111-29. In postcolonial literary theory, this approach has been popularised by Edward Said See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage, 1993. 100-116. Guha has used a similar approach in 1983a and *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983b.

The archive also contains a small number of documents originating from subordinate people themselves. These include letters, petitions, and oral testimony. When this evidence is juxtaposed with the subtext of dominant narratives, the blurry image acquires a little more clarity. As I hope to demonstrate, sources as diverse as the Governor's despatches and the *girit* labourer's oral testimony, can be used together to reconstruct the realm of ordinary people's resistance.

Two brief examples are used to illustrate how reading against the grain works in the thesis. Firstly, the public debates conducted in the newspapers from 1901 to 1903 between factions supporting and opposing federation with New Zealand, do not merely reveal a deep chasm between the interests of some settlers and those of the government. The debates also render visible a profound and widely held sense of discontent among Fijians and their eagerness to exploit this "European" quarrel to petition the King for a change of government (see Chapter Three). In this case we can reconstruct Fijian dissent through the medium of newspapers which claimed to represent the views and interests of colonists.

Secondly, when the *Proceedings of a Native Council* indicate that the "murmurings of the people" became a regular feature on the agenda of the *Bose Vakaturaga* (Council of Chiefs) in the 1880s, we can deduce that there was widespread discontent among ordinary people about the way that their affairs were being run. That the *Bose Vakaturaga* comprised essentially the most powerful chiefs in the colony, and the fact that translation of its deliberations was controlled by colonial officials, did not prevent this grassroots disaffection from reaching the ears of the most powerful men in the colony, and being recorded for the attention of historians writing from posterity (see Chapter Five).

Voices of the past can be further amplified by listening to the oral testimony of their descendants. In a context where so much history was and continues to be communicated by oral rather than written means, my visits to Nadi, Ba, Ra, Nadroga, Navosa, Colo, Tailevu, and several other *talanoa* (story-telling) sessions with people from other parts of Fiji, were particularly insightful. *Talanoa* sessions were never strictly "interviews". Rather, they were collective discussions involving groups of villagers who were connected with the individuals and events discussed in the thesis.

Because the details and interpretations often added a different dimension to those presented in the archival materials, the visits highlighted the dangers of confining research to archival reading rooms and university libraries.

Being on location is all the more important in Fiji because one is exposed to an intricate web of connections and relationships that people endlessly forge with one another and with their past. Such networks only reveal themselves if the historian is prepared to go on site. For instance, with respect to the Tuka Movement (see Chapter Two) competing versions of history existed from one village to the next. The discussions helped to underline the existence among ordinary people of widely divergent experiences of colonialism and of contending versions of the past. This raises serious questions about the assumption often made by Marxists and in popular culture about the existence of a homogenous subaltern class.¹² The visits were also useful in more practical ways for conveying a better sense of space and terrain and to acquire a more holistic picture of conflicts such as the Colo War of 1876 (see Chapter One).

Historiography

The development of a distinct Fiji historiography cannot be isolated from the broader evolution of Pacific History.¹³ During Fiji's colonial era, histories tended to follow the process of nation-building or political evolution, and depicted the lives and careers

¹² "Subaltern" was the term coined by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci to refer to the large anonymous mass of ordinary urban and rural people whose existence was etched in the shadow of capitalism. See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds.) London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971.

¹³ Among several other accounts of the development of Pacific historiography, see Jacqueline Leckie, "Towards a Review of History in the South Pacific." in *Journal of Pacific Studies*. 9, 1983. 9-69; Nicholas Thomas, "Partial Texts: Representation, Colonialism and Agency in Pacific History." in *Journal of Pacific History*. 25: 2, 1990. 139-58; Brij Lal (ed.) *Pacific Islands History: Journeys and Transformations*. Canberra: The Journal of Pacific History, 1992; Peter Hempenstall, "The Line of Descent: Creating Pacific Histories in Australasia." in *Australian Journal of Politics and History*. 41, 1995. 157-70; The special edition by Doug Munro of "Reflections on Pacific Historiography" in *Journal of Pacific Studies*. 20, 1996; Robert Borofsky, *Remembrance of Pacific Pasts: An Invitation to Remake History*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000; and David Hanlon, "Beyond 'the English Method of Tattooing': Decentering the Practice of History in Oceania." in *The Contemporary Pacific*. 15: 1, Spring 2003. 19-40. Futa Helu has valuable articles in his *Critical Essays: Cultural Perspective from the South Seas*. Canberra: Journal of Pacific History, Australian National University, 1999. Some of the essays trace indigenous pre-contact history writing which he deciphers from current mythology, songs, poetry, dance patterns, woven mat designs, tapa-making, agriculture, architecture, engineering, seafaring and other transmitted cultural knowledges.

of “great men” as the engines of history. They are essentially ‘top-down’ histories of administrative ordering, disciplining and pacifying, not ‘bottom-up’ social histories of ordinary people. In their overall effect, they tend to normalize good order and compliance and ignore resistance.¹⁴

The next phase emerged largely as a result of the influence of J. W. Davidson, first professor of Pacific History at the Australian National University. Davidson rejected ethnocentric European histories of the Pacific Islands and advocated island-centred history. In this history Pacific Islanders were presented as active participants in the making of their own histories. Rigorous empiricism, fieldwork and personal experience replaced the rhetoric of imperial benevolence and inevitability, and the image of a forlorn native was replaced by clearly intentioned indigenous actors with choices in their hands.¹⁵ K. L. Gillion’s work on Fiji Indians best exemplifies this phase of Fiji’s historiography.¹⁶ His detailed empirical work on indenture in Fiji was the first serious attempt at reconstructing of the origins and experiences of Fiji’s Indian indentured labourers.

Gillion opened up the field for a corpus of historians who enriched Fiji history with fresh ideas and insights.¹⁷ While they may be said to now occupy the mainstream, their approaches and interests varied markedly. Together they demonstrated conclusively that the cultures of Fiji proved actively responsive to the impact of colonialism and capitalism. The image emerged of a complex society whose dynamism and vitality consistently thwarted European attempts to bring Fiji under complete control. It showed Fijians and Indians to have their own motivations and to

¹⁴ The most prominent historian of this era is R. A. Derrick. See in particular *A History of Fiji*. Revised Edition. Suva: Government Printing, 1950.

¹⁵ For details of Davidson’s vision, see J. W. Davidson, “Problems of Pacific History,” in *Journal of Pacific History*. 1, 1966. 5-21. For Davidson’s legacy in the larger context of Pacific Historiography, see Barrie Macdonald, “‘Now an Island is Too Big’: Limits and Limitations of Pacific Islands History,” *Journal of Pacific Studies*. 20, 1996. 23-44; Doug Munro, “The Isolation of Pacific History,” in *Journal of Pacific Studies*. 20, 1996. 45-68; and Peter Hempenstall, 1997: 67.

¹⁶ See Gillion, *Fiji’s Indian Migrants: A History to the End of Indenture in 1920*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1962; and Gillion, *The Fiji Indians: Challenge to European dominance 1920-1946*. Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1977.

¹⁷ See among others, Peter France, *The Charter of the Land*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1969; Ahmed Ali, *Plantation to Politics: Studies on Fiji Indians*. Suva: USP Institute of Pacific Studies, 1980; Timothy Macnaught, *The Fijian Colonial Experience: a Study of the Neotraditional Order under British Colonial Rule prior to World War II*. Canberra: Australian National University, 1982; Deryck Scarr, *Fiji: A Short History*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1984; and David Routledge, *Matanitu: Struggle for Power in Early Fiji*. Suva: USP Institute of Pacific Studies, 1985.

be active agents in forging their own destiny. In these various works, resistance was not consciously suppressed. Rather, resistance did not figure among the leading questions on the contemporary agenda. Moments of resistance were mentioned but the priorities of the time lay elsewhere in questions of policy, frameworks of colonial administration, wars, the Christian missions, and in the biographies of great individuals.¹⁸

These early studies are valuable as building blocks without which research such as my own would be impossible. Yet, as valuable as the contributions are, these histories tend to suffer in varying degrees from certain limitations. Most of them have a heavy coastal, eastern Fiji, and Viti Levu bias. This reflects the location of the seat of power in Fiji, capitalist economic development, the interests of Europeans, and consequently the weight of the archive. They also tend to be preoccupied with the ruling families. As such this “island-centred” history has tended to be a history from above rather than from below. Because most of these historians were periodical visitors to Fiji and spoke neither Fijian nor Hindustani, few of them ventured into the large oral archive that lies deceptively dormant in popular consciousness.¹⁹ There is also a strong male gender bias. Women are often left out or included as minor characters on a stage where the protagonists are all men.

These histories also show a marked preoccupation for warfare and other large conflagrations. In Fiji, the emphasis on cataclysm has given the impression that Fijians were constantly at war, that European intervention restored peace, security, law and order. However, the absence of war does not necessarily mean that peace is restored. This thesis will show that all sorts of states were possible between extremes of war and peace.

When Deryck Scarr says that ethnicity ruled the colony,²⁰ it also rules his history of Fiji. Scarr’s tendency is to see Fiji as a plurality of racial groups and to understand Fijians, Indians, and Europeans as homogenous ethnic groups. Several scholars have

¹⁸ Fiji’s histories of resistance are discussed later in the Introduction.

¹⁹ A notable exception is France, 1969. Through his knowledge of the Fijian language and use of the *tukutuku raraba* (the earliest available transcribed oral histories), France managed to reveal a highly mobile and fluid culture both in time and space. His insights mean that the book continues to attract wide readership and to enjoy currency.

²⁰ Scarr, 1984: 134.

succumbed to this orthodoxy and reinforce it by inscribing ethnic difference as the primordial factor in Fiji's colonial history.²¹ Even if racial compartmentalisation was a powerful means of ordering colonial space, some individuals resisted these colonial demarcations and converged with other communities to forge a common cross-ethnic bond, as will be shown in chapters Three to Seven.

Many of these positions are shared by subsequent histories but less so than this early wave of historiography. Among the first to challenge this wave of mainstream historians were Marxists offering class-based approaches to the study of Fiji history.²² Foremost in their critique was the argument that ethnicity-based models of historiography were masking class interest and privilege.²³ The evolution of modes of production replaced archival empiricism. Marxist histories also placed Fiji in the wider context of global capitalist and colonial expansion. In these works, colonialism and capitalism form a monolithic power structure and act as the driving forces of history.

A criticism that can be made of William Sutherland's *Beyond the Politics of Race: An Alternative History of Fiji*, is that while the historian's sympathy and solidarity with the "masses" is obvious, their voices are not heard. It is as if they were buried under the insurmountable weight of capitalist exploitation. While it is a useful critique of capitalist operations and class dynamics in Fiji, Sutherland lacks a sense of the lives and stories of ordinary people. This is also partly due to the failure to use archival materials. Sutherland seems content with applying the Marxist model of analysis in Fiji and thereby opens himself to the charge that his "alternative history" is in fact an exercise in rhetorical reaffirmation.

Simione Durutalo's work has similar limitations. It implies that the state was too powerful, smart and organised for Fijians to oppose. His work represents the colonial

²¹ See Gillion, 1962; Macnaught, 1982; Scarr, 1984; Asesela Ravuvu, *The Façade of Democracy: Fijian Struggles for Political Control 1830-1987*. Suva: Reader Publishing House, 1991.

²² See among others, Vijay Naidu, *The Violence of Indenture*. Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1980; Durutalo, 1985a; Durutalo, 1986; and William Sutherland, *Beyond the Politics of Race: An Alternative History of Fiji to 1992*. Canberra: ANU, 1992.

²³ See in particular, the scathing attack on Routledge, Macnaught, Scarr and others in Durutalo, 1985b: 117-56.

administration as an effective machinery in the control of the Fijian population.²⁴ Studies have since shown that control was imperfect.²⁵ With the exception of Naidu's study of the violence of indenture,²⁶ Fiji's Marxist histories left too little room for the release of suppressed characters and voices, or for uncovering the complexities and ambiguities of people's responses to domination. My intention in this study is to demonstrate that control was consistently breached, undermined or postponed by the actions of the colonised. Agency was real, not merely rhetorical, and resistance was widespread if equally messy and imperfect as the attempts to control it.

This does not mean that these approaches are useless as analytical tools. They are the historiographical building blocks that make Fiji's current histories possible. They allow historians to ask different questions and to continue the endless process of historiographical revision and refining.

Within more recent scholarship, one finds a group of postcolonial cultural historians who have helped to enlarge the scope for reading and writing colonial Fiji.²⁷ Grounded in the theoretical development of post-structuralist and postcolonial theory, and building on the anthropological approaches pioneered in Pacific History by Marshall Sahlins and Greg Denning,²⁸ these scholars are more attuned to the fragmented and contradictory nature of colonialism and have helped to unsettle and challenge notions of linear histories of colonialism's authority and power.

In *Colonialism's Culture*, Nicholas Thomas draws attention to the messy nature of Fiji's colonial encounter. He emphasises the internal discursive and practical fragilities, fractures, complexities, ambiguities, and contradictions of the colonial

²⁴ Durutalo, 1985a.

²⁵ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

²⁶ Naidu, 1980.

²⁷ Among others see John Kelly, *A Politics of Virtue: Hinduism, Sexuality, and Countercolonial Discourse in Fiji*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991a; Thomas, 1994; John Kelly and Martha Kaplan, "Rethinking Resistance: Dialogics of Disaffection in Colonial Fiji." in *American Ethnologist*. 21: 1, 1994. 123-51; Martha Kaplan, *Neither Cargo nor Cult: Ritual Politics and the Colonial Imagination in Fiji*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995; and James Heartfield, "'You are not a White Woman!': Apolosi Nawai, the Fiji Produce Agency and the Trial of Stella Spencer in Fiji, 1915." in *Journal of Pacific History*. 38: 1, 2003. 69-83.

²⁸ See among others Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985; and Greg Denning, *The Bounty: An Ethnographic History*. Melbourne: History Department, University of Melbourne, 1988.

enterprise.²⁹ While this approach is useful in accounting for the deficiencies in the application of colonial power, it rarely evokes the complexity, ambiguity, and contradiction in the multiple points of resistance by colonised people themselves. This thesis is an attempt at examining how colonialism's power was challenged and transformed by the disruptive practices of subaltern peoples.

Martha Kaplan and John Kelly have shown that the projects of the colonisers could never completely organise all areas of the practice of the colonised, nor could the colonised ever again make their history in terms unaffected by colonialism. Their respective work explores the strategies employed by colonised Fijians and Indo-Fijians to challenge colonial authority and to remake themselves in a context where they were denied any political space.³⁰

Among those who resist easy classification is Brij Lal, Fiji's most productive and accomplished historian. The sheer breadth and depth of Lal's contribution to the history of Fiji Indians and indenture make his work an essential companion to anyone studying in this field. Of particular relevance to this study is the publication of *Chalo Jahaji* which brings together Lal's most important articles on indenture.³¹ As a collection, *Chalo Jahaji* is the one history of Fiji's early colonial past that comes closest to being a people's history. As discussed below, his interest in matters of resistance and his concern with women as agents of history make his work, an ideal springboard from which to launch new propositions. Since his early studies of indenture, Lal has broadened his field of research to include larger issues of cross-ethnic relations, and contemporary postcolonial history.

²⁹ Thomas, 1994: 15-16, 97, 106, 167. See also Nicholas Thomas, "Sanitation and Seeing: The Creation of State Power in Early Colonial Fiji." in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. 32: 1, 1990. 149-70.

³⁰ See Kaplan, 1995 and Kelly, 1991a.

³¹ Among the previously published articles that are collected in *Chalo Jahaji*, see "Kunti's Cry: Indentured Women on Fiji Plantations." in *Indian Economic and Social History Review*. 22, 1985. 55-71; "Veil of Dishonour: Sexual Jealousy and Suicide Fiji Plantations." in *Journal of Pacific History*. 20, 1985. 135-55; "Murmurs of Dissent: Non-Resistance on Fiji Plantations." in *Hawaiian Journal of History*. 20, 1986. 188-214. Among Lal's large corpus of other literature dealing with Fiji's early colonial period, see *Girmitiyas: The Origins of the Fiji Indians*. Canberra: Journal of Pacific History, 1983. Second Edition, Lautoka: Fiji Institute of Applied Studies, 2004; *Broken Waves: A History of the Fiji Islands in the Twentieth Century*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992; and *Chalo Jahaji: On a Journey Through Indenture in Fiji*. Canberra and Suva: Australian National University and Fiji Museum, 2000.

Recent historiography has also been influenced by the anti-elitist approach to history writing initiated by Thompson³² and developed in postcolonial circles by the Subaltern Studies collective. Led by Guha, Subaltern Studies sought to produce historical methods and analyses in which subaltern groups were viewed as the subject of history.³³

Writing in 2000, Robert Borofsky remarked that subaltern studies has only slowly moved into the Pacific region's scholarly writings.³⁴ Among those who have supported a subaltern approach in Pacific history, Peter Hempenstall has called for more inclusive histories that look beyond self-chosen elite players and strive to release previously muted or ignored voices.³⁵ In an earlier publication with Noel Rutherford, Hempenstall placed people's resistance histories on the future agenda of Pacific historiography.³⁶ He has also shown support for breaking history into a multitude of histories, and for a greater openness to multi-vocal story-telling.³⁷ Klaus Neumann has added his voice to the growing number of historians who attack hegemonic constructions of the past. Historians must be more sensitive, he believes, to the "trash of history", or to those individuals and practices that seem irrelevant, insignificant, marginal, or negligible.³⁸

Doubt has been cast - on archival and epistemological grounds - about the possibility of letting the subaltern speak and of constructing a totalising history that can narrate the politics of subaltern lives.³⁹ This has seen a turn away from total histories towards local histories. Yet, some of the Pacific's most respected scholars continue to highlight the need for more "people-centred" histories of resistance. In his influential essay "The Ocean in Us", the Tongan philosopher Epeli Hau'ofa writes that the duty

³² Thompson, 1966.

³³ Guha, 1983a; 1983b; Guha, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India." in *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South India History and Society*. Delhi: Oxford UP, 1982. 1-8; For a critique and a discussion of the progression of Subaltern Studies, see Chakrabarty, 2002; and Vinayak Chaturvedi (ed.) *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*. London: Verso, 2000.

³⁴ Robert Borofsky, "An Invitation." in *Remembrance of Pacific Pasts: An Invitation to Remake History*. Robert Borofsky (ed.) Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000. 25.

³⁵ Peter Hempenstall, "Releasing the Voices: Historicizing Colonial Encounters in the Pacific." in Borofsky: 52, 60.

³⁶ Peter Hempenstall and Noel Rutherford, *Protest and Dissent in the Colonial Pacific*. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies University of the South Pacific, 1984. 151.

³⁷ Hempenstall, 2000: 46-60.

³⁸ Klaus Neumann, "Starting from Trash." in Borofsky: 68. From the same author, see also *Not the Way it Really Was: Constructing the Tolai Past*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992.

³⁹ Among other critiques, see Spivak, 1988; Pandey, 1992; Chatterjee, 1993; and Amin, 1995.

of Pacific scholars is to write about “ordinary people, the forgotten people of history, ... their resistance and struggles”.⁴⁰ At a time when dominant local and international powers are so effective at imposing their truths and wills, cultures of resistance must be strengthened for the sake of present and future generations. He adds,

In order to bring into the center stage grassroots resistance and other unnoticed but important events for our peoples, we must refocus our historical reconstructions on them and their doings.⁴¹

People-centred histories help to build and strengthen cultures of resistance. This he holds to be vital for the welfare of present and future generations.⁴²

Resistance

Definitions of resistance have changed over time. This reflects changes in our understanding of the concept. In the 1970s and 1980s, historians tended to focus on the more organised and spectacular forms of resistance such as mass protest and rebellion.⁴³ Reflecting renewed interest in Gramscian thought and the cultural roots of resistance in the early 1990s, Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash described resistance as:

those behaviours and cultural practices by subordinate groups that contest hegemonic social formations, that threaten to unravel the strategies of domination; ‘consciousness’ may not be essential to its constitution. Seemingly innocuous behaviours can have unintended yet profound consequences for the objectives of the dominant or the shape of a social order.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Epeli Hau’ofa, “The Ocean in Us.” in Borofsky: 458.

⁴¹ Hau’ofa: 458.

⁴² Hau’ofa: 469.

⁴³ Among others, see Peter Hempenstall, *Pacific Islanders Under German Rule: A Study in the Meaning of Colonial Resistance*. Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1978; Mamak and Ali, 1979; and Hempenstall and Rutherford, 1984.

⁴⁴ Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash, “Introduction.” in *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*. Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash (eds.) Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991. 3.

With reference to Fiji, John Kelly takes resistance to be “a search for ways to contest or at least evade some of the things presented as obligatory while maintaining or even improving the things that truly enable effective speech and action”.⁴⁵ The resistance needs to create an opponent, and to transform the obligatory into the contestable.⁴⁶ While definitions are useful the evolution of thinking about resistance is more important.

Resistance and resistance theory have been of recurring interest among scholars since the 1960s. Much of the early impetus was provided by the decolonisation process in Africa with the most incisive theories unsurprisingly coming from African scholarship.⁴⁷ Yet, the study of resistance in the colonial context has suffered from a wave of scepticism, much of which originates from its traditional use (especially in the context of African decolonisation) as a neat, unproblematic and unambiguous opposition to a colonial monolith.⁴⁸ This view of resistance saw it as a perpetual antithesis to alleged totalising systems of domination such as the capitalist bourgeoisie, racism and patriarchy. With a certain romance, resistance was conceived of as the spectacular and heroic occasions when colonised people rose against all odds to challenge their masters. Radical history consisted in championing and glorifying such occurrences.⁴⁹

Scepticism for this binary approach has come from several directions. To begin with, some authors argue that the meaning of acts of resistance is not fixed. As Ortner

⁴⁵ Kelly, 1991a: 23.

⁴⁶ Kelly, 1991a: 25.

⁴⁷ See among others Terence Ranger, “Connections Between Primary Resistance Movements and Modern Mass Nationalism in East and Central Africa.” in *Journal of African History*. 9, 1968. 631-41; Allen and Barbara Isaacman, “Resistance and Collaboration in Central and Southern Africa.” in *International Journal of African Historical Studies*. 10, 1977. 31-62; For more recent developments, see Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

⁴⁸ Among critics of the binary, oppositional approach to resistance, see Sherry Ortner, “Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal.” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. 37, 1995. 173-93; Lila Abu-Lughod, “The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women.” in *American Ethnologist*. 17, 1990. 41-55; Kelly and Kaplan, 1994; Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (eds.) *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Cultural Anthropology*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997; Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler (eds.) *Tension of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. For an important discussion of resistance and accommodation among plantation workers in the Pacific see Brij Lal, Doug Munro and Jacqueline Leckie (eds.) *Plantation Workers: Resistance and Accommodation*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993.

⁴⁹ One such example is Mamak and Ali, 1979.

points out, “the intentionalities of actors evolve through praxis and the meaning of acts change over time, both for the actor and the analyst”.⁵⁰ To compound difficulties, Scott points out that much of this resistance is inscrutable to historians and other researchers because it depends on anonymity and secrecy for its effectiveness. Thus, everyday observable resistance only forms the tip of an iceberg.⁵¹

In her work on Indonesia under Dutch rule, Ann Stoler showed that homogenizing versions of domination and resistance accorded poorly with the fact that both their quality and intensity varied considerably in different cultural, geographical and historical contexts.⁵² These are conclusions that Pacific historians Peter Hempenstall and Noel Rutherford had also arrived at by the mid 1980s.⁵³

Another limitation of the dichotomous model is that resistance is often assumed to be progressive and the resister always right. In the Pacific, the assumption that a militant stance is generally the most worthy or the most historically consequential, has been warned against by Nicholas Thomas. Celebrations of resistance, he cautions, can obscure why particular regimes were actively supported and complied with by disaffected people.⁵⁴ It also tends to sanitise the internal politics of the dominated. Bronwen Douglas has shown that resistance histories in the Pacific have tended to prioritise and emphasise conflicts between Islanders and Europeans, while disregarding the internal complexities of many of these conflicts.⁵⁵ Peter Hempenstall and Noel Rutherford in their survey of protest movements across the Pacific, concur with this view.⁵⁶ As will become apparent throughout this thesis, ordinary people fought oppressive authority irrespective of its ethnicity. However, the subaltern also made complex alliances with those in power. This and other self-generated

⁵⁰ Sherry Ortner, “Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal.” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. 37, 1995. 175.

⁵¹ Scott, 1990: 87.

⁵² See Ann Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.

⁵³ Hempenstall and Rutherford: 15, 147.

⁵⁴ Thomas, 1990: 139-58.

⁵⁵ Bronwen Douglas, “Conflict and Alliance in a Colonial Context.” in *Journal of Pacific History*. 15, 1980. 21-51.

⁵⁶ Hempenstall and Rutherford: 147-52.

impediments made intra-subaltern solidarity difficult to coordinate. This points to an inherent fluidity in the complex world of subaltern people.⁵⁷

In the same vein, Hempenstall has observed that collaborators and resisters were often the same men in the Pacific, thereby making these categories redundant.⁵⁸ Doug Munro has pointed out that resistance and accommodation should not be regarded as polar opposites. When studying the activities of plantation workers for instance, the distinction between resistance and accommodation became exceedingly blurred. Most of them chose a course of action based on careful calculations aimed at maximising benefits and minimising disadvantage. In certain situations, this meant that compliance and collaboration were more advantageous, and that choosing the side of dominant power was more rewarding. The outcome was a hybrid that fitted neither the category of accommodation nor that of resistance and where the division between resistance and non-resistance became unreal.⁵⁹ There were, as Borofsky observes, “degrees of resistance, degrees of accommodation, with a host of subtle complications in between”.⁶⁰ One of these complications, as Ortner points out is that subordinate groups do not constitute a single unitary group: “[S]ubaltern groups are internally divided by age, gender, status, and other forms of difference and ... occupants of differing subject positions will have different, even opposed, but still legitimate, perspectives on the situation.”⁶¹

Much of the conceptual context for rethinking the nature of resistance has come from the late twentieth century evolution of theories about power, agency, and the subject. Michel Foucault’s work on power and Homi Bhabha’s notions of subjectivity and agency among subordinate populations are among the most prominent.⁶² This transformation has seen the singular category of resistance dissolve into multiple points of resistance, or *resistances*. For instance, when Foucault redefined power to draw attention to the multiple ways in which it is deployed in minute and intimate everyday relations, he also wrote: “[W]here there is power, there is resistance.”⁶³ It

⁵⁷ Ortner: 179. See also Hempenstall, 1978: 207.

⁵⁸ Hempenstall, 1978: 219.

⁵⁹ Munro, 1993: 30-1.

⁶⁰ Borofsky: 182.

⁶¹ Ortner: 175.

⁶² Foucault, 1972, 1974, 1978, 1979; Bhabha, 1985, 1992.

⁶³ Foucault, 1978: 95.

follows that if power is variable and fragmented, so is resistance. James Scott's study of everyday forms of resistance and Eugene Genovese's study of the world that African-American slaves made for themselves fall into this category.⁶⁴

Yet, if Foucault acknowledged the pervasive presence of resistance, he also doubted the existence of a subject with will and intentionality. In this, he was joined by postcolonial thinkers among whom Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Dipesh Chakrabarty are the most prominent.⁶⁵ Their pessimism about the ability of the subaltern to speak and the possibility for a resistant subaltern subject position to exist, has come under attack from a number of theorists.⁶⁶ Ortner for instance, argues that by refusing to attend to her as a person, subject, agent, or any other form of intentionalised being with her own hopes, fears, desires, projects, a strict post-structuralist position leads to the "de(con)struction of the subject".⁶⁷ The disappearance of the individual actor as a subject of history and maker of his/her own destiny thereby allowed "resistance" to be replaced by such phrases as the "failure of the pacification process", thereby shifting the debates back to how forms of domination are sustained and reproduced, rather than how they are contested. This problem has been highlighted by Gyan Prakash who has observed that "while there are scrupulous accounts of Western domination, we have yet to fully recognize another history of agency and knowledge alive in the dead weight of the colonial past".⁶⁸

Several scholars have sought to salvage the subject in the wake of its erosion under post-structuralism and to reassert resistance as a vital area of investigation. As recently as 2000, Edward Said wrote in a collection of essays dedicated to Pacific History:

⁶⁴ Scott, 1985 and 1990; Eugene Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. New York: Random House, 1976.

⁶⁵ Bhabha 1985 and 1992; Spivak, 1988; Chakrabarty, 1992 and 2002.

⁶⁶ Among them see Benita Parry, "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse." *The Oxford Literary Review*. 9, 1987. 27-58. See also Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996. 82-108.

⁶⁷ Ortner: 186.

⁶⁸ Gyan Prakash, "Introduction." in *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*. Gyan Prakash (ed.) Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995. 5.

I think resistance is terribly important because in no place did people just give up and say: OK, you can have the land, we are leaving. They always stood and fought. And with that resistance came a culture of resistance, a history of opposition.⁶⁹

Among those who refined theories of resistance Dirks, Eley, and Ortner have pleaded that

the theoretical exploration of the subject as an active agent must be concerned, at least in part, with the question of resisting or at least eluding that subjection. We need a subject who is at once culturally and historically constructed, yet from a political perspective, we would wish this subject to be capable of acting in some sense “autonomously,” not simply in conformity to dominant cultural norms and rules, or within the patterns that power inscribes.⁷⁰

It is largely in these terms that I understand and read the subjects whose contestatory practices I discuss in this thesis. I share these scholars’ unease about the disappearing subject. I detect a certain autonomous power in subalternity, among which is the power to resist. Hence where Foucault posited the pervasiveness of power in the most minute of relationships, thoughts and practices, I want to see how subordinate groups consciously or unconsciously, selectively or haphazardly, critically or uncritically, variously avoided or rejected such invasions and refused to function as passive receptacles for the effects of power.

My position is that resistance and power are phenomena that are constantly conditioned and shaped by one another in all facets of human relations. They form an inseparable relationship in which neither is ever complete. Power is constituted and reconstituted partly as a result of the tests it endures and erosions it suffers from the contestatory actions of the subordinate. It also exerts itself differently across all kinds of contexts and induces various collaborative and resistant behaviours in response. In the same way that power is never totally unified and coordinated, much resistance is

⁶⁹ Edward Said, “A View from Afar (Middle East) – An Interview with Edward Said.” in Borofsky, 2000: 451.

⁷⁰ Nicholas Dirks, Geoff Eley and Sherry Ortner (eds.) *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. 18.

piecemeal, fragmented, tentative, ambiguous, filled with imperfections and messy. As much as domination is not an overarching superstructure so is resistance not an overarching understructure.

The Boundaries of the Thesis

As I began to compile a register of disorder to itemise instances of resistance during Fiji's colonial era, it quickly became apparent that the "one hundred years of resistance" I had in mind was far too ambitious a time frame. Resistance being so complex and instances of it so abundant, the period of study was reduced to the first forty years of colonial rule. Periods of dissent have continuities that extend well beyond the somewhat artificial cut-off dates of 1874 (the signing of the Deed of Cession) and 1914 (the onset of World War I). The end of indenture in 1920 was considered as another possible cut-off point. However, a plethora of developments between 1914 and 1920 would have forced the discussion beyond practicable limits. Hence, in the same way that the 1874 annexation of Fiji by Great Britain marks an approximate beginning for the study, the onset of World War I marks an approximate end of the period under examination.

In terms of inclusion, the colonial terrain was far too complex to attempt to reproduce it "as it actually was". All colonised people adopted "intermediate attitudes" including a great deal of subordination and collaboration. No effort is made in the thesis to reconstruct a holistic image of the colonial encounter. Rather, as a survey of resistance, this project sets out to magnify one aspect of the encounter which has been neglected. If resistance and collaboration are two sides of the same coin, one side has remained faceless. The present study sets out to sketch the complex face of resistance.

Yet, magnifying resistance without reference to the other constituent parts of the colonial encounter can result in the production of a rather skewed image of the colonial past. The danger is that the resulting profile of the colonised individual makes of this highly complex character a one-dimensional combatant perpetually opposed to authority. To avoid creating this impression, the reader's attention is hereby drawn to the existence of aspects of the colonial encounter other than resistance, which can depict a fuller image of colonial dynamics.

A survey may seem outmoded in the wake of recent scholarship. Adrian Muckle's recent thesis on the 1917 wars in New Caledonia highlights the value of in-depth micro-studies of resistance.⁷¹ In Fiji, studies such as Kelly's and Kaplan's⁷² enjoy the same advantage of rendering fuller accounts than is possible here, of the complexity of relationships which were always partly collaborative and partly antagonistic. On the other hand, a survey has the advantage of revealing the interconnectedness of a range of insurgent histories across time. No such survey currently exists in the historiography of Fiji.

The recent studies by Kelly, Kaplan, and Muckle, are also useful for tracing histories of representation which explain how historical events were perceived by the actors who participated in them. Yet, if all historians represent the past, not all histories deliberately set out to examine changes in the representation of the past. The evidence presented in this thesis does not seek to explain changes in the representation of resistance in Fiji. Without getting into a lengthy theoretical debate about hermeneutics, I believe in the possibility, even desirability, to write about history rather than to confine scholarship to the study of representations of history. While conceding that all historical utterances, once transmitted, fall into the realm of representation, this thesis sets out to reconstruct a version of Fiji's past which has been neglected. It implies a certain confidence in a past that can be retraced, yet I make no claims to finality or to a higher truth.

As a caveat, it is necessary to point out the necessary omissions which have had to be made in the taxonomy of resistance. Aspects of cultural and discursive resistance (or contestatory knowledge formations) were originally included in the survey to examine how they challenged dominant ways of seeing and knowing. They have since been left out because their study merits far more space than is available here. Because this sort of history is difficult to quantify and verify, it also requires a frame of analysis that is markedly different from that which has been adopted here. Hence, the struggle

⁷¹ See in particular Adrian Muckle's "Spectres of Violence in a Colonial Context: The Wars at Koné, Tipindjé and Hienghène – New Caledonia, 1917." PhD Thesis. Canberra: Australian National University, 2004.

⁷² Kelly, 1991a; Kaplan, 1995.

between subjugated and dominant knowledges is alluded to rather than explicitly discussed.

Culturally conditioned modes of resistance such as those brought with them by indentured labourers from Polynesia, Melanesia, and India, are also deferred to a future comparative study. This deferral also applies to such interpretations of past resistance which are premised on indigenous ways of knowing and remembering.⁷³

I also omit those occasions when dominant groups activated resistance to protect their already privileged position. This includes most Europeans whom, although heterogeneous as a group,⁷⁴ mostly occupied a position of comparative advantage vis-à-vis ordinary Fijian, Indian, and Melanesian people. For this reason, the discussions will be confined mainly to those who occupied the lowest rungs of the colony's order of things.

Finally, this study deliberately omits treatment of Rotuma. Although the island was annexed under the ambit of the larger Fijian colony in 1881, Rotuma presents its own distinct historical, cultural and geographical circumstances, and therefore belongs to a separate study.

Structure

The discussion combines a chronological with a thematic approach and is divided into two broad sections. The first consists of the first four chapters and explores the organised, confrontational, and often dramatic aspects of resistance. The second, consisting of the last three chapters, examines what happened in between the larger conflagrations. This will cover the less spectacular and more mundane everyday resistance.

⁷³ For an important discussion of what such a study might entail, see David Hanlon, "Beyond 'the English Method of Tattooing': Decentering the Practice of History in Oceania." in *The Contemporary Pacific*. 15: 1, Spring 2003. 19-40.

⁷⁴ For discussions of Europeans in Fiji, see R. A. Derrick, 1950; Deryck Scarr, "John Bates Thurston, Commodore Goodenough and the Rampant Anglo-Saxons in Fiji." in *Historical Studies*. 11: 43, October 1964. 361-82; John Young, *Adventurous Spirits: Australian Migrant Society in Pre-Cession Fiji*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1984; and Claudia Knapman, *White Women in Fiji, 1835-1930: Ruin of Empire?* Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986.

Chapter One is concerned with the Colo War of 1876. Until now, the people of Colo in the interior of Viti Levu, have not been judged favourably by history. By refusing to accommodate and yield to powerful outsiders (both local and foreign), its inhabitants have acquired notoriety as a ‘deviant’ and ‘backward’ people. Coastal dwellers, chiefs, missionaries, and colonial officials have routinely cast kai Colo⁷⁵ as ignorant, uncivilised, cannibalistic and fearsome *tevoro*.⁷⁶ This stigma lingers with persistent force in the present.⁷⁷ Internalised and normalised in national and popular consciousness, the perception of Colo is of a wild, primitive, disorderly, dangerous, and evil place: something to laugh uncomfortably about.

Colonial historiography’s representations are scarcely more flattering. Kerr and Donnelly describe this war under the heading “The Devil Tribes” in the following terms:

Gordon’s first problem was to put down a rising of some of the mountain tribes in the Sigatoka valley. These ‘devil tribes’, as they were called, had attacked Christian Fijian villages, murdering and eating many of the inhabitants. Gordon realized that if he did not deal with them immediately, they would gain more followers.

⁷⁵ *Kai* is a Fijian prefix denoting the place that people come “from”. *Colo* means “bush”, “outback” or “mountain”.

⁷⁶ *Tevoro* is an adaptation of the word “devil”.

⁷⁷ At a recent reconciliation ceremony to commemorate the killing of Reverend Thomas Baker by the people of Nabutautau village in the interior Navosa Province, the Prime Minister of Fiji, Laisenia Qarase, was quoted as saying that “Reverend Baker would always be remembered in our country because he was killed while trying to spread the work of God in a land that was still in the dark.” *Fiji Times*, 14 November 2003. The ceremony was organised to offer a traditional apology to Baker’s family. The people of Nabutautau have repeatedly sought to shake off the stigma associated with Baker’s death. They first approached the Methodist Church in 1905 with a request that a memorial be erected in memory of Baker’s death. Minutes and Journals of the Fiji District Annual Synod 1874-1892 and 1891-1907. F/4/B: Journal for 1905, Item 33. Another attempt in post-independence years resulted in the erection of another Memorial by the President of the Methodist Church, Paula Niukula, to commemorate the fall of seven other *vuli* (or students) who were also in Baker’s party. These stones are today positioned on the site where the attack occurred and signify the village’s apology to the Church and to the families of the fallen men.

Organising his own small force, which was assisted by the chiefs of the coastal tribes of Viti Levu, Gordon successfully defeated the devil tribes and punished several of the leaders.⁷⁸

Kerr and Donnelly were articulating the orthodoxy of the time which generally viewed colonialism as the driving force of history. Those who stood in the way of colonialism were adjudged to be small in number, isolated, ignorant, and recalcitrant. Generations of Fiji Islanders grow up knowing and memorizing this version of the war.⁷⁹ Because alternative histories of the war tend to be local to Colo and disruptive of this dominant version, they struggle to gain national legitimacy.

The only detailed study of the Colo War of 1876 was undertaken by Timothy Macnaught.⁸⁰ He argues convincingly that this war “was not a rebellion against British rule but a local war on a larger scale”.⁸¹ Macnaught’s study shows that British administration and settlers were important players in the unfolding and resolution of the conflict, but the motor of history was definitely Fijian. In the thirty years since this study, references to the war by other historians have been made in passing in larger general studies. They usually refer to the war as the last and most brutal of Fiji’s tribal and colonial wars⁸² or as Colo’s challenge to Governor Arthur Gordon’s policy of indirect rule, the legitimacy of the new colonial administration and the whole premise of the natural “civilizing” of Fijians.⁸³

In reconstructing this war, generous space has been allocated to chronicle the context within which it took place. This is intended to familiarise readers with some of the key political, economic, geographical, and religious circumstances of pre-colonial mid nineteenth century Fiji. It will also show that resistance did not take place uniquely in response to Western colonialism and that it had a long prior history within and between the various Fijian polities. The conflict is also recast as a war of

⁷⁸ Kerr and Donnelly, 1969. 37.

⁷⁹ The improved 1994 edition still uses the same words albeit with the omission of the phrase “devil tribes”.

⁸⁰ Timothy Macnaught, “The Subjugation of the Highlands of Viti Levu, Fiji.” B.A. Hons Thesis. Sydney: Macquarie University, 1971.

⁸¹ Macnaught, 1971: 72.

⁸² See for instance Scarr, 1984: 76; and Sutherland, 1992: 39.

⁸³ Martha Kaplan, “The ‘Dangerous and Disaffected Native’ in Fiji: British Colonial Constructions of the Tuka Movement.” In *Social Analysis*. 26, December 1989. 22-45; and Kaplan, 1995: 84.

independence to challenge views that uncritically accept Fiji as a constituted whole under Bauan, Eastern, and Christian hegemony and which represent Fiji's transition to colonial rule as ordered and peaceful.

Chapter Two establishes some continuity of organised resistance between the Colo War and the Tuka Movement which emerged on the Ra coast from 1878 and lasted until 1891 (although the repercussions were felt well into the Twentieth Century). It accounts for the transition from warfare to religious protest as one of the main channels through which Fijians would thereafter challenge authority. The Tuka movement is typical of popular religious movements which arise in times of tribulation. It shares much in common with such movements in other parts of the world and the Pacific.⁸⁴

Most early descriptions of the movement labelled it a superstition with an unfortunate and misguided anti-colonial agenda,⁸⁵ but later representations of the movement (by Worsley and Burridge in particular⁸⁶) placed it firmly in the category of cargo cults. Martha Kaplan's *Neither Cargo nor Cult* is the first serious attempt at historicizing Tuka and of understanding its meaning in the evolving fabric of colonial Fiji. This chapter builds on her anthropological work with more emphasis on the chronology of events and the key characters involved in the movement. The discussion also ventures beyond Drauniivi to test the popularity and reach of the movement in other parts of the Vatukaloko polity.

Chapter Three is concerned with two popular movements of the early Twentieth Century. The little known movement for federation with New Zealand (1901 to 1903) is discussed as the first countrywide organised movement of ordinary Fijians to demand the end of British rule. As such it acts as an important precursor to the second movement, the Viti Kabani, which emerged in 1913 and which at times functioned as a second government in Fiji.

⁸⁴ Caroline Ralston, "Early Nineteenth Century Polynesian Millennial Cults and the Case of Hawaii." in *Journal of the Polynesian Society*. 94: 4, 1985. 307-32.

⁸⁵ See Arthur Webb, "Fijian Superstitions." in *Victorian Review*. 12, August 1885. 399-412; and Basil Thomson, *Fijians: A Study of the Decay of Custom*. London: Heinemann, 1908.

⁸⁶ See Peter Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound*. New York: Schocken Books, 1968; and Kenelm Burridge, *New Heaven, New Earth*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969.

Because no major study exists of the Federation Movement, I begin by placing it in the wider context of popular dissatisfaction with the administration of the colony in the late 1890s. This is followed by a reconstruction of the events which led to the London conference to decide the future status of the colony. The presence of this movement challenges the orthodoxy that the Viti Kabani opened a deep vein of discontent among ordinary Fijians.⁸⁷ The vein of discontent had never stopped flowing.

A few historians have paid passing attention to Apolosi Nawai, the founder of the Viti Kabani, but they all begin their account in 1912 when he was already twenty-eight years old.⁸⁸ Discussions of the Viti Kabani suffer from the same fate. To fill this gap, an attempt is made at retracing some of Apolosi Nawai's early years. A number of trouble spots are also identified in the decade preceding the formation of the Kabani with the intention of providing some context for the emergence of the movement and its leader.

Aside from dealing with indigenous movements, the colonial administration was also kept busy by a number of strikes and protest marches mounted by the colony's indentured labourers. In Chapter Four, a brief account of the migration of indenture labourers from India is followed by a survey of the ways in which these labourers organised themselves to combat the oppressive conditions under which they worked and lived. This survey serves as an indicator of the level of organisation which was possible when the resources of these workers were so few and fragmented.

With the exception of Fijian and Melanesian labourers, the history and experience of indenture has been well covered by Gillion, Lal, Ali, Naidu, Shameem and Kelly.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Macnaught, 1982: 91.

⁸⁸ See in particular, A. D. Couper, "Protest Movements and Proto-Cooperatives in the Pacific Islands." in *Journal of the Polynesian Society*. 77: 3, 1968. 263-74; Timothy Macnaught, "Apolosi R. Nawai: The Man from Ra." in *More Pacific Islands Portraits*. Canberra: Australian National University, 1979. 173-92; Lal, 1992; see also Lal's contribution on Nawai in *Twentieth century Fiji: People who Shaped this Nation*. Stewart Firth and Daryl Tarte (eds.) Suva: University of the South Pacific, 2001; Charles Weeks, "The Last Exile of Apolosi Nawai: A Case Study of Indirect Rule during the Twilight of the British Empire." in *Pacific Studies*. 18: 3, 1995. 27-45; and Heartfield, 2003.

⁸⁹ See among others, Gillion, 1962; Ahmed Ali, *Girmit: The Indenture Experience in Fiji*. Bulletin of the Fiji Museum 5, 1979; Naidu, 1980; Shaista Shameem, "Sugar and Spice: Wealth Accumulation and the Labour of Indian Women in Fiji, 1879-1930." PhD thesis. Hamilton: Waikato University, 1990; Kelly, 1991a and 1991b; and Lal, 2000.

However, in the absence of a register of organised labour protest, this chapter foregrounds a number of these protests and accounts for their frequency across the period of indenture. The intention is to show that while instances of organised labour protest were uncommon and occurred at irregular intervals, they did occur. Their existence is used to test the view of indentured labourers as mere survivors of history.

Chapters Five to Seven explore the daily struggles of ordinary people that invade periods of normality in between larger conflagrations, though we must guard against the assumption that all relationships at this level were adversarial, continuously oppositional, or that large confrontations were inevitable. The following three categories have emerged from the data: everyday resistance in the villages, everyday resistance on the plantations, and women's resistance. Because of their distinctiveness, they are examined separately, as detailed below.

History, argues James Scott, teaches that subordinate classes have rarely been afforded the luxury of open, organized, political activity.⁹⁰ Because the weak are often scattered across the countryside, illiterate, lacking formal organization, and lacking the institutional means to act collectively, they are more likely to employ local means of resistance that require little coordination and are best suited for extended, guerrilla-style, defensive campaigns of attrition.⁹¹ Scott defines such everyday forms of resistance as:

The prosaic but constant struggles between the peasantry and those who seek to extract labour, food, taxes, rents and interest from them. ... Everyday resistance consists of the ordinary weapons of the relatively powerless groups: footdragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth. These Brechtian forms of class struggle have certain features in common. They require little or no co-ordination or planning; they often represent a form of individual self-help; and they typically avoid any direct symbolic confrontation with authority or with elite norms. To

⁹⁰ Scott, 1985: xv.

⁹¹ Scott, 1985: xvii.

understand these commonplace forms of resistance is to understand what much of the peasantry does ‘between revolts’ to defend its interests as best it can.⁹²

As Simione Durutalo accurately noted, there is a tendency in Fiji to see villagers as docile, passive, and grateful for British rule.⁹³ Ahmed Ali, for instance, claimed in 1980 that “Fijian loyalty to authority was generally unquestioning”.⁹⁴ Another view claims that Fijians were saved from hard work by the presence of Indian indentured labourers from India. These orthodoxies merge in the following quote from Ken Gillion:

... colonialism was far from oppressive for the Fijians: they had been left with more than enough land for their needs and their culture had been respected and honoured, even though altered and standardised as the approved “Fijian way of life”. Thanks to Indian immigration, they had not had to work on the sugar plantations. It was for good reasons that indigenous Fijian protest was a rare event in the crown colony of Fiji.⁹⁵

Chapter Five tests these orthodoxies by reviewing aspects of resistance in the villages including evading and subverting the authority of their chiefs, absenteeism and flight, tax evasion, and a silent but effective boycott of land registration. Such practices illustrate the wide range of responses (not always aimed at the same person or institution) that ordinary villagers used to challenge authority of all sorts. The chapter also includes a discussion of *luveniwai*, a ritual of invulnerability practised by young people to defy the village hierarchy in several districts of Fiji. It ends with an account of how villagers used Christian churches and the possibilities offered by education, to overcome the permanent status of subservience that the administration reserved for them.

Chapter Six asks the same questions of the strategies used on plantations by labourers to variously subvert, defy, and challenge plantation managers. The high incidence of violence used by labourers against their employers, against other labourers, and

⁹² Scott, 1985: 29.

⁹³ Durutalo, 1985a: 243.

⁹⁴ Ali, 1980: 137.

⁹⁵ Gillion, 1977: 175.

against themselves warrants an examination of how retributive violence acts as resistance in intensely suppressive environments such as the plantation. Labourers, however, were more likely to seek other ways of coping with the violence of their employers. The chapter brings together strategies of survival such as feigned illness, absence from work, desertion, petitions, acts of sabotage and other such “weapons of the weak”, and asks how effective they were in disrupting the production process and undermining plantation authorities. The chapter ends with a discussion of the importance that labourers placed on religion and education in harnessing for themselves a sense of moral strength and a future less dependent on the dictates of their masters.

While women have a long tradition of household resistance which is analogous to everyday resistance, the domestic space presents an arena which is both similar and distinct from that which their male counterparts encountered in the villages or on the plantations. Reconstructing this fragment of resistance is perhaps more difficult than any other. To borrow from Spivak, “if in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow”.⁹⁶ Commenting on this difficulty Brij Lal points out that written records, far from being neutral sources, exclude the perspective of women and have in fact shrouded the faces of indentured women with a veil of dishonour.⁹⁷ Subordinated as Fiji’s women were, first within indigenous (Fijian and Indian) hierarchies and then within the colonial hierarchy, Chapter Seven asks if, when, how and why, they left traces of their insubordination. In so doing, the discussion attempts to challenge another orthodoxy: that women were mere bystanders on history’s highway.

While a global surge in women’s histories has run parallel to the women’s movement since the 1960s, very few women’s histories have been undertaken about Fiji’s early colonial era. Foremost among them are Claudia Knapman’s *White Women in Fiji*⁹⁸ and Shaista Shameem’s “Sugar and Spice: Wealth Accumulation and the Labour of Indian Women in Fiji, 1879-1920.”⁹⁹ Because Knapman’s study deals primarily with

⁹⁶ Spivak, 1988: 287.

⁹⁷ Lal, 2000: 222.

⁹⁸ Knapman, 1986.

⁹⁹ Shameem, 1990.

European women and looks at colonized women almost exclusively in terms of their sexual relations with European men, its usefulness to this study is limited.

Shameem on the other hand, deals extensively with indentured women and boldly claims that they “expressed their resistance loudly, clearly and persistently, so much so that it would be fair to say that the indenture labour system came to an end because of women’s actions against exploitation and oppression.”¹⁰⁰ She adds that “one of the remarkable aspects of indenture was not that there was no resistance but that women’s resistance to exploitation and oppression was markedly different from men.”¹⁰¹ The validity of these claims will be assessed, although greater emphasis will be placed on her more important point that the Indian community itself was fractured by relations of power, with gender being most prominent among them.

A few male historians have also addressed specific aspects of women’s lives within larger studies. Among them, Lal’s articles about indentured women remind us that the benefits and suffering of indenture were not distributed equitably and that women bore the brunt of the hardships. Yet in spite of their vulnerability, he finds them often defiant, courageous and independent.¹⁰² In his study of the politics of virtue in Fiji, Kelly documents the sexual abuse of women on Fiji’s plantations and explains the process by which this abuse was transformed into a moral weapon and mobilizing force to initiate and then precipitate the end of indenture.¹⁰³ For all this affirmative optimism, Jane Harvey has remarked that indentured women’s acts of resistance in Fiji only had “limited potential for challenging the injustice and brutality that [they] encountered within the plantation system”.¹⁰⁴

This historiography indicates that indentured women have received comparatively greater attention than their Fijian counterparts. But for a few exceptions,¹⁰⁵ the colonial experience of Fijian village women remains a glaring gap in Fiji’s historiography. Chapter Seven is a fragile attempt to address this problem. It teases

¹⁰⁰ Shameem: 284.

¹⁰¹ Shameem: 284.

¹⁰² Lal, 2000: 211, 205. This view is shared by Ali, 1980: 28.

¹⁰³ Kelly, 1991a: xiii.

¹⁰⁴ Jane Harvey, “Naraini’s Story.” in Lal, 2000: 345.

¹⁰⁵ See for instance Vicky Luker, “Mothers of the Taukei: Fijian Women and the Decrease of the Race.” PhD Thesis. Canberra: Australian National University, 1998.

out the meaning of such phenomena as the increase in divorce rates, the chiefs' persistent concern at the refusal of many women to marry, the increased incidence of abortions and stillbirths, general disobedience and flight from villages. The inferences that are drawn from this study are necessarily tentative and await more comprehensive studies to redress the imbalance.

In framing this survey, I reiterate my opposition to predetermined models of resistance. I simply want to highlight a number of alternate dates, events, and characters that seldom if ever get a mention in our conversations about the past. I begin this exercise with the complex world of mid-nineteenth century Colo.

Chapter One

The Colo War of 1876

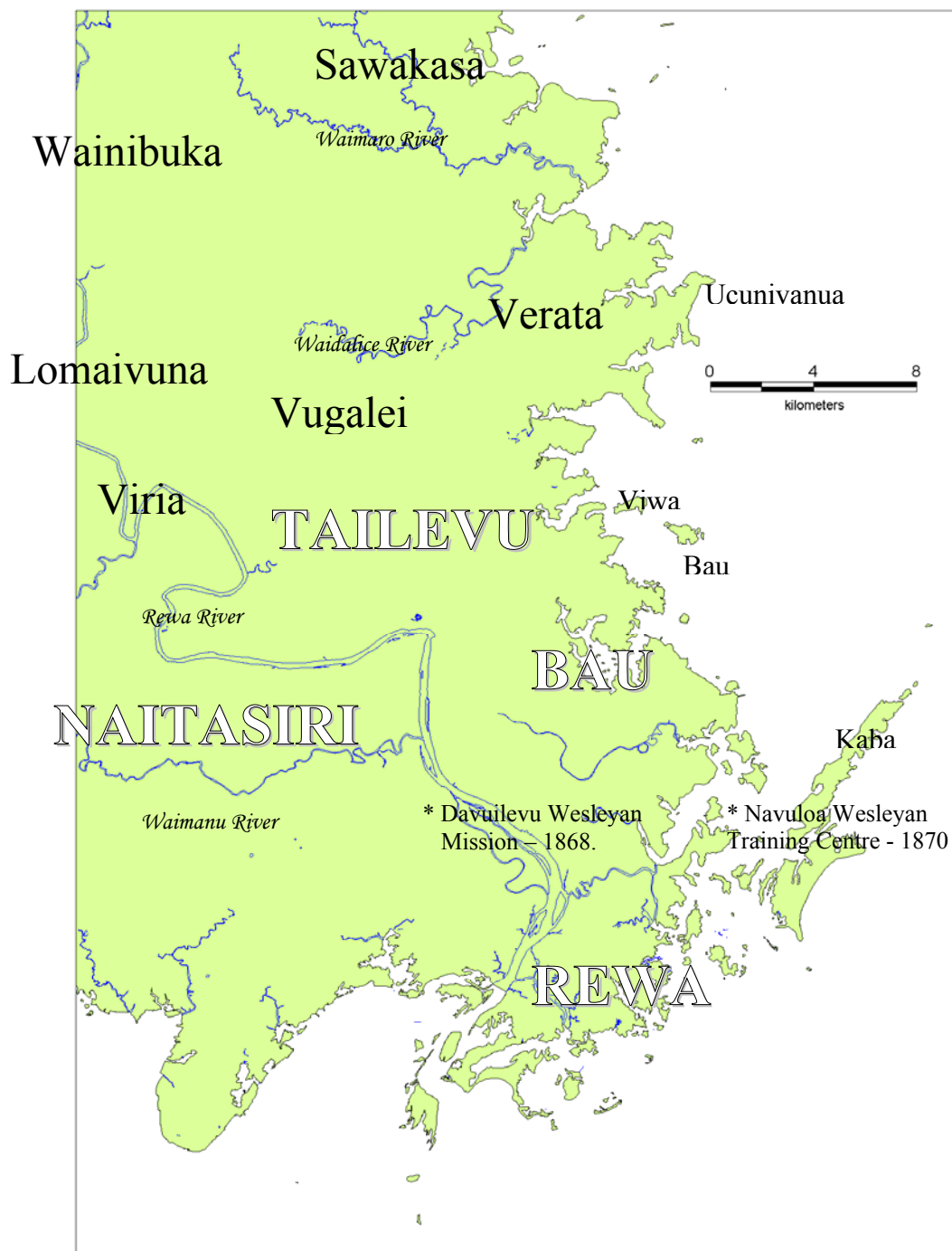
Finding a starting point for this study is to acknowledge that several of the conflicts of colonial times have their roots in pre-colonial history. The continuities that bridge pre-colonial and colonial power relations are fundamental in accounting for the little known Colo War of 1876, the first of several overt confrontations between disaffected peoples and the amalgam of forces that emerged to become Fiji's dominant colonial order. In piecing together the complexities of the war, this chapter begins with a search for traces of the conflict in the twenty-year period preceding the event and sets out to reconstruct the Colo world of the time. This first section is important to the overall thesis because it sketches the context from which important historical, geographical, political, and thematic issues are discussed in subsequent chapters.

Context for Antagonism: A Series of Events

In the absence of a significant enough body of work on the war, I begin my discussion by situating Colo in its historical, political and geographical context. Of particular importance is the evolving alliance between the leading chiefdom of Bau, the growing number of planters and settlers, the Wesleyan mission and the newly established colonial administration under Sir Arthur Gordon. Many historians¹ identify the Battle of Kaba of 1855 as a watershed in post-contact Fijian history mainly because it established the island of Bau and its Vunivalu, Ratu Seru Cakobau as the most powerful political forces in Fiji. But the war only settled long standing quarrels between Bauan chiefs and their rival Rewan counterparts. Together, these districts constituted only a fraction of the population and land of Fiji. Although several other regions were in one way or another sympathetic or loosely allied with one camp or the

¹ For Fiji's pre-Cession history see among others R. A. Derrick, *A History of Fiji*. Suva: Government Printing, 1950; David Routledge, *Matanitu: Struggle for Power in Early Fiji*. Suva: USP Institute of Pacific Studies, 1985; Deryck Scarr, *Fiji: A Short History*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1984; G. J. A. Kerr, T. A. Donnelly and Max Quanchi, *Fiji in the Pacific: A History and Geography of Fiji*. 4th Edition. Milton, Queensland: The Jacaranda Press, 1994; Andrew Thornley, *Exodus of the I Taukei: The Wesleyan Church in Fiji 1848-74. Na Lako Yani ni Kawa I taukei Na Lotu Wesele e Viti 1848-74*. Trans. Tauga Vulaono. Suva: USP Institute of Pacific Studies, 2002; J. D. Legge, *Britain in Fiji, 1858-1880*. London: Macmillan, 1958.

other and would have felt some repercussions, most people remained relatively untouched by this event. Although everyone saw this battle as a victory for Cakobau, Bau, and the Wesleyan mission, the war is striking for the number of problems that it left unresolved, and those that would emerge as a direct consequence of the evolving Bauan-Christian-European alliance.



Map 3: South-eastern Viti Levu before Cession (1874).

The number of upheavals sustained in the two decades following the Battle of Kaba suggest that power in the islands was still in considerable flux. There were divisions within the Bauan establishment itself with the dissident chief Mara spearheading a long struggle against Cakobau until his capture and execution in 1859. In 1860, the district of Nakorotubu between Tailevu and Ra, claimed to be an independent state.² Several other coastal and inland chiefdoms also proclaimed themselves free of tributary obligations to Bau. In 1866, Cakobau was forced to launch a campaign to subdue the people of Vugalei (a few miles North of Bau) who had refused to recognise his rule. He was also at war with the people of Viria in Naitasiri and those of Lomaivuna and Waikalou (Soloira). The chiefs in these areas had for some time, as Reverend Thomas Baker wrote, “been forming a league in reference to the *lotu*, agreeing that no one single town should *lotu* by itself, but that when it should be agreeable to all parties they would *lotu* together”.³ Cakobau’s army prevailed and much wasting and plundering followed in the wake of the campaign. Among those eager for a share of the spoils of war were a number of planters. They moved into the lands left empty by retreating and beaten enemies and purchased them from Cakobau with muskets, powder, and lead.⁴ The deep-seated antagonism that this created among the original owners was to resurface with grave consequences a few years later.

Bauan expansionary projects were encountering stiff resistance from all corners of Viti Levu. Out west, the villages in Navosa resented Bauan ambitions and were deeply suspicious of all individuals who associated themselves in one way or another with Bau.⁵ Here the Wesleyan mission was singled out as the most dangerous of Bau’s allies. The missionaries had not sought to conceal their attachment and support for Cakobau and were widely recognised to be partisan in all matters relating to Bau. Bau was using the *lotu* to solidify and extend its influence and vice-versa. The character of conversion was therefore as political as it was religious. There were also

² Derrick, 1950: 146.

³ Cited in Andrew Thornley, *Exodus of the i Taukei: The Wesleyan Church in Fiji 1848-74. Na Lako Yani ni Kawa I taukei Na Lotu Wesele e Viti 1848-74*. Trans. Tauga Vulaono. Suva: USP Institute of Pacific Studies, 2002. 341. *Lotu* refers to Christianity.

⁴ Gordon to Earl Carnarvon, 19 November 1875. Arthur Hamilton Gordon, *Fiji: Records of Private and Public Life, 1875-1880*. Edinburgh: R. & R. Clark Limited (Printers), 1897. Volume 1. 337. See also John Young, *Adventurous Spirits: Australian Migrant Society in Pre-Cession Fiji*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1984. 149.

⁵ Thornley, 2002: 337.

conflicts between Bau warriors and inland tribes in northern Viti Levu. In the South, tribes of the interior were also unsettled by increased European settlement along the tributaries of the Rewa River.⁶

In May 1867, buoyed by a series of military successes, Cakobau, a few missionaries and a number of settlers organised a coronation ceremony that crowned him King of Bau and its dependencies. The settlers propped up Bau because they perceived it to be the strongest of Fiji's chiefdoms, and the most likely to validate their (sometimes dubious) land claims and to enforce laws that would protect these new properties. The missionaries were also interested in enlarging Bau's sphere of influence, because it gave them a better platform from which to conduct their evangelical mission.⁷ Among the missionaries present at the ceremony, was the zealous Reverend Thomas Baker. Baker had arrived in Fiji a few days prior to the execution of the dissident chief Mara (of Kaba fame) on Bau. On that occasion he had remarked, "Mara was the principal rebel chief and it is hoped that the event of his death will strike home to the remainder of the rebels and be the means of their subjugation".⁸ Back then, Cakobau had been battling to consolidate his position at the helm of the Bauan polity. Eight years on however, he had designs over the whole of Fiji. This made him and those perceived to be his allies, infinitely more threatening to independent communities all around the archipelago. Baker's support for Cakobau was not without consequence. Just two months after the coronation, he was killed at Nabutautau on 21 July 1867. He was thirty-five years old.

It is worth noting that British Consul Jones had passed through Nabutautau two years before. He had been welcomed in the village because Britain did not then pose an immediate threat to the autonomy of the area. Katakataisomo, the same Nabutautau chief who ordered Baker's execution, had accompanied Jones back to the Northern coast where they encountered several refugees fleeing Bauan soldiers. Cakobau's son, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau was leading an operation to extend Bauan influence in the north and centre of Viti Levu. A member of the expedition later recalled that the air was full

⁶ See John Young (Chapter Four), Routledge, and Thornley 2002 in particular.

⁷ See the first three chapters in Thornley, 2002.

⁸ Cited in Thornley, 2002: 206.

of smoke from the burning villages plundered by the Bauan army.⁹ Fearing an attack on the village, Katakataisomo decided to return to fortify the area.

What is generally retained from Baker's death is the savagery of it. He was defenceless, probably clubbed from behind and eaten. But so were seven other members of his party. Few historians acknowledge them, as if they did not matter, as if they were forgettable. The seven Fijian *vuli* were killed (and eaten) because they represented the same threat that Baker did.¹⁰ Christian evangelism, whether it wore white skin or black, was invading the land that Bau could not conquer by military means. Conversion to Christianity was linked in the minds of the hillmen with subservience to Bau. The *lotu* was the means by which Bau (and other coastal chiefs) would extend political control beyond its own sphere of influence. In this sense, Baker was not simply a bushmen's curiosity as is often presumed in contemporary popular consciousness. Rather, he had moved knowingly into areas where the *lotu* was understood principally as an agent of destruction.¹¹ His murder and that of the seven other *vuli* was an unequivocal response to the challenge posed by Cakobau's coronation on Bau. It defied the coronation and all that it represented.

It was also a challenge to the settlers who were arriving in increasing numbers, lured by prospects of cheap land and labour. They were taking up the best land in all the valleys of Viti Levu and were pushing inland. This they did with the complicity of coastal chiefs who used the money to buy guns to secure their current positions and further their own ambitions inland. The sale of these lands also formed a useful buffer between their coastal chiefdoms and the inland tribes they had antagonised. In some cases the land was sold without consulting those who cultivated it and without the consent or knowledge of the owners altogether. Ratu Kini Nanovo the Kalevu of Nadroga was one such chief.¹² Ratu Kini aspired to a degree of importance on par

⁹ A. J. Boyd, "Exploration of Navitilevu." in *Transactions of the Fijian Society*. 1919. This publication does not contain any page numbers.

¹⁰ The seven men who died with Baker were mainly from South Eastern villages in Tokatoka, Rewa, Beqa, and Deuba. Two *vulis* in the party managed to escape. They were Aisea Nasekai and Josevata Nagata. For more details on the circumstances of these murders, see Thornley, 337-48.

¹¹ Thornley, 2002: 348.

¹² Carew to Gordon, 18 October 1875. *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 280. Kalevu is the title given to the paramount chief of Nadroga.

with other leading chiefs of Fiji. He led Nadroga's own "valu ni lotu" or "war of Christianity"

by the simple and cogent means of killing and driving out all tribes who were not inclined to accept the new faith. He carried his crusade through the southern portion of Colo West burning and slaughtering as he went, and then applied the same method of conversion to the tribes in the hill districts of Waicoba and Tuva.¹³

In 1867, Ratu Kini had hired a secretary, Duncan Murray, whose main responsibility was to find as many settlers as he could find to buy land in Nadroga. Money generated from such sales was then used to procure muskets.¹⁴ Many of these muskets were put to use during Ratu Kini's invasion of Western Colo in 1868. Immediately after the war, Ratu Kini and his allies sold large portions of the territories they had invaded and used the proceeds to purchase yet more weapons to consolidate his position as the leading chief in the area. The records of the Land Claims Commission reveal that within a few days of the conquest in 1868, all the principal sales in the area had been completed.¹⁵

The arms build-up with the accompanying political and territorial aggression was gradually framing the form of resistance (military) which would eventually arise. The tribes in Colo West laid claim to many of the areas sold off to planters by Ratu Kini and his allies. The new planters who occupied these were therefore exposed to considerable harassment by the original owners in the nearby hills. Inevitably, the relationship between Colo villagers and planters was thus characterised by antagonism. On a visit to Nadroga in October of 1868, the missionary Lorimer Fison reproached the chief for exposing the purchasers of the lands to the retaliatory actions of the rightful landowners. Ratu Kini replied, "[i]t is true but the white men have many guns. They are a war-fence to my back."¹⁶

¹³ Paper 27: "Native Lands Commission." in *Journal of the Fiji Legislative Council* (hereafter *JFLC*) 1914. 6. National Archives of Fiji (hereafter NAF).

¹⁴ John Young: 144.

¹⁵ See the records of the Land Claims Commission and Executive Council Sitting for the rehearing of Claims to Land, 1875-1887. NAF.

¹⁶ Cited in John Young: 141.



Map 4: South-western Viti Levu before Cession.

The coronation of Cakobau, the death of Baker and seven *vuli*, the 1868 invasion of Western Colo by Ratu Kini, and the land sales that ensued, were all symptomatic of the collision course on which Bauan-coastal-settler-Wesleyan projects were headed against the autonomy of the interior tribes of Viti Levu. Several events in the next six years would further aggravate the animosity.

Pressed by settlers to avenge the death of Thomas Baker, Cakobau sent a punitive expedition to the highlands in April 1868. Because the village of Nabutautau lay in the centre of the island, Cakobau devised a plan to make a three-pronged attack on the interior from the Sigatoka (south-west), Ba (north) and Rewa/Wainimala (east) rivers. One of the missionaries, Carey, thought at the time that the expedition gave Cakobau “a reason for attacking tribes he had long wished to conquer in order to make himself the sole head of Na Viti Levu”.¹⁷ However, the outcome was a comprehensive and devastating humiliation for Cakobau. Two of his armies were routed, and the third returned without engaging in combat. Thirteen Bauan high chiefs and more than sixty soldiers lost their lives in the conflict. The inland tribes were defending their own

¹⁷ Cited in Thornley, 2002: 350.

lands and were more familiar with the terrain. Nadawarau (in Muaira) joined Navosa as did Namosi and Noemalu, all of them united in a combination of fear and contempt for Bau. One of Cakobau's advisors, John Bates Thurston, lamented at the time that "victory would have seen the whole of Viti Levu recognise his power and authority. I now fear many petty tribes before submissive to Bau, will become troublesome."¹⁸ In hindsight, Thurston's optimism about the recognition of Bauan paramountcy was misplaced. The Tuka Movement from the 1870s to the 1890s and other regular cases of insubordination and defiance against Bau in the first decade of the Twentieth Century (see Chapter Three) suggest that Bauan supremacy would always be contested.

However, his prediction about the eruption of trouble among pacified tribes gained instant credence. An immediate resurgence of local religious beliefs occurred with many mission teachers being targeted for intimidation. One mountain tribe sent Lorimer Fison a terse message: "There are three classes of men we will now strive to kill – Chiefs and Missionaries and Native Teachers, that your grief may be great."¹⁹ All mission teachers from around Soloira had to be withdrawn and the mission station at Davuilevu was temporarily closed.²⁰ By May 1868, the owners of the land grabbed by settlers in 1866 and 1867 in Naitasiri and Tailevu North returned to their hereditary planting grounds. Insults and assaults between settlers and Colo villagers became matters of daily occurrence.²¹ In July 1868, villagers managed to drive Wainibuka planters off the land and to turn back under fire, two British boats sent to restore the evicted planters. The following year, the largest plantation on the Sigatoka (owned by Burt and Underwood) was burnt to the ground and the settlers were relegated to the coastal fringe.²²

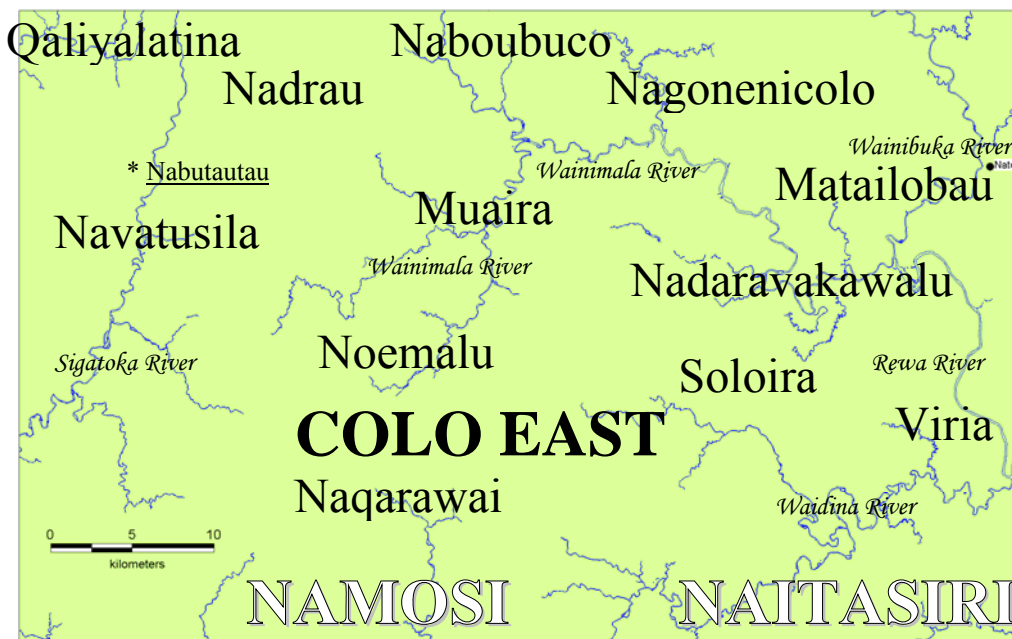
¹⁸ Cited in Thornley, 2002: 351.

¹⁹ Cited in Thornley, 2002: 350.

²⁰ Thornley, 2002: 351.

²¹ Gordon to Carnarvon, 19 November 1875. *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 314.

²² Macnaught, 1971: 6.



Map 5: Map of Colo East before Cession.²³

But Cakobau would yet do more to antagonise the inland tribes. Before the year was out, he sold vast tracts of land (200,000 acres) to the Melbourne based Polynesian Company, including some land (in Beqa, Cakaudrove, Ra, and Suva) that did not belong to him. He had resorted to this in a desperate bid to pay off an old and accumulating debt to the United States Government. While these land sales did not include areas of the interior of Viti Levu, they brought hundreds more settlers to Fiji²⁴ putting more pressure on existing fertile coastal and accessible river valley lands.

Resistance to political and religious encroachments again surfaced in 1869, when the people of Sabeto also renounced Christianity and joined their mountain allies against Bau and the mission. This created an inner ring of districts immediately inland from the coast all around Viti Levu that opposed Bauan and Wesleyan incursions into the interior. In the north the districts stretched from Sabeto (near Nadi), to Nalawa (near Rakiraki), and in the south from Tavuni (near Sigatoka), through Namosi, to Viria

²³ This map indicates the location of the various Colo Vanua involved in wars against Bau between 1867 and 1874.

²⁴ This exodus is well documented in John Young, *Adventurous Spirits: Australian Migrant Society in Pre-Cession Fiji*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1984.

(near Nausori). It is in these highly permeable border areas and in the relatively more impervious interior that the drama would unfold.

All over the valleys, settlers were driven back from disputed lands while Wesleyan teachers were forced out of nominally Christian areas. There were raids in Navua, another area of flat and fertile land. Numerous complaints were received from planters elsewhere in the group. Several of these were exaggerated as a deliberate ploy to get the government involved in expeditions that, it was hoped, would lead to the confiscation of more land and the freeing-up of freshly captured labour.²⁵

1870 saw more of the same. Land alienation reached such levels that British consul March feared that widespread discontent among Fijians would result in the outbreak of a racial war.²⁶ In the absence of a strong government that could assure their protection and further their interests, the planters armed themselves and their Vanuatu and Solomon Islands indentured labourers with weapons to form small but fierce armies which they used to hunt down any stray Kai Colo.²⁷

On June 5 1871, Cakobau sent shock waves through the town of Levuka by announcing that a new administration had been set up to govern Fiji. Cakobau himself was proclaimed King of Fiji. Much consternation and disquiet followed the announcement especially among the Levuka residents.²⁸ When it became obvious that this government had been created with the express aim to support and advance the interests of the settler community, the unrest subsided. Funds for the administration of government were provided partly by auctioning the recently conquered Lovoni lands and selling its people as slaves to planters mainly in Lau and Taveuni. Like Nabutautau, Lovoni had never been conquered and Cakobau had resorted to trickery and betrayal to bring about its submission. The sale brought between £1500 and £1900 to government coffers in successive years.²⁹ Many Fijians viewed these events

²⁵ This is well documented by Young. See Chapter Four in particular.

²⁶ France: 93.

²⁷ Many Melanesian labourers died in the process. Young speaks of the death of nine Tana men on Burt's plantation in Sigatoka. He attributes these deaths to planters arming their labourers. See John Young: 145-6.

²⁸ For details of this proclamation and reactions to it, see Derrick, Legge, Scarr, Routledge, Young, and France in particular.

²⁹ Derrick, 1950: 201.

with a mixture of contempt and fear for they provided further evidence of Bauan treachery or *vere vaka Bau* (the evil ways of Bau). Almost overnight, Cakobau effectively claimed paramount authority over people and territories that had never seen themselves as constituting a nation wide polity, let alone him as its head. The response to his challenge was swift.

Barely a month after the proclamation, two Ba planters, Spiers and Macintosh, were killed while out shooting duck in the valley. Spiers was one of the settlers who had been evicted from the upper Rewa in 1868. Like Spiers, McIntosh had bought his land from the Tui Ba and guarded his new property with armed indentured labourers from Tana (Vanuatu).³⁰ He made himself dangerously unpopular by denying mountain tribes access to the coast where they normally traded and visited relatives. He also prohibited their use of the river to collect kai (fresh water mussels).³¹ Most importantly however, both were recipients of land claimed by interior tribes. As such, they had become involved in a much wider conflict involving land disputes in the border zone that lay like a buffer between coastal and interior Fijians. Some historians³² have tended to highlight the death of a handful of Europeans in this conflict. The murders of Europeans made for ‘big news’ especially in the European community. They also led to retributive action by the government and/or the settler community. For this reason they are well documented. Yet, as France points out, the number of fatalities of rival Fijians in this conflict was much greater and ran upwards of 300.³³

In this case, interior tribes showed themselves to be as averse to Bauan encroachments as they were to coastal ones. In 1870, the Tui Ba (a coastal chief) began selling to settlers large tracts of land that did not belong to him. Between 1870 and 1872, he sold forty-two properties which stretched fifty miles around the coast and twenty miles up the river on both banks. In that area as Young writes, “every scrap of available land was claimed by a settler”.³⁴ Land was bought with guns, and the Tui Ba’s military capabilities grew with every piece of land that he sold. As one of the

³⁰ Most indentured labourers in Ba were from the island of Tana in Vanuatu.

³¹ John Young: 198.

³² Derrick and Scarr in particular.

³³ France: 92-3.

³⁴ John Young: 193.

settlers testified to the Land Claims Commission, “Tui Ba told me that his reason for selling land was to place a barrier between himself and the mountaineers”.³⁵ But in dispossessing his own people of “every inch of their tribal lands”³⁶ and in selling land claimed by interior tribes, he was also creating animosity between settlers and the landowners. Attacks from the mountains began soon after the first land sales and continued sporadically until 1873 and the murder of the Burns family (discussed below).³⁷

Meanwhile, Spiers and McIntosh had their deaths avenged by a combined force of planters, about 100 Melanesian labourers, and government soldiers. They skirmished extensively in the mountains inland of Ba but usually with the wrong people,³⁸ and created in the process more antagonism and many more future adversaries. Early in 1872, a young Kai Colo was caught cutting a digging stick by Solomon Island labourers near the Ba River. In his account of the murder, J. B. Thurston described how after he was caught, “the prisoner was taken to the planter, Lindbergh, who refused to save his life, despite the pleas of the son of Tui Ba the arch enemy of the Kai Colo. The labourers hacked off his head, took it to another planter to admire, then smoked and dried it, Solomons style.”³⁹

Punctuated with violence and uncertainty, 1872 was another eventful year. In February, the rising tension between ethnic groups was manifested further by the formation in Levuka of Fiji’s Ku Klux Klan with aims not dissimilar to those of its American counterpart.⁴⁰ In July, the Burt plantation in Sigatoka was burnt again.⁴¹ By

³⁵ Cited in John Young: 193.

³⁶ Land Claims Commission Report cited in John Young: 193.

³⁷ John Young: 370.

³⁸ See Derrick, 1950: 204. Note that the rejection of the Cakobau Government was not confined to Viti Levu. Wainunu in Bua, Vanua Levu was the last stronghold of traditional religious beliefs in Vanua Levu and its chief Tui Wainunu declared war on Bau in protest over the proclamation and dismissed all recently appointed Wesleyan teachers. See Thornley: 490. The hostilities ceased with the defeat of Tui Wainunu and his supporters and their imprisonment in Bua.

³⁹ Thurston to Layard, 18 February 1874. Cited in Macnaught, 1971: 9.

⁴⁰ The Ku Klux Klan was replaced in July 1873 by the White Residents’ Political Association whose guiding principle was “to protect by all legitimate means the liberties and privileges of the white residents of Fiji”. See E. Crane, “King Cakobau’s Government.” M.A. Thesis. Auckland: University of Auckland, 1938 cited in Derrick, 1950: 231. The formation of these associations reflect European residents’ own anxieties about being a minority in Fiji, and of their own initiatives to preserve and protect their interests.

⁴¹ Burt was particularly resented by his Colo neighbours for his arrogant and cruel behaviour. His equally brutal partner Underwood had been killed in the meantime by his Tana labourers in Kadavu. See Young and Thornley for details about the cruelty of these planters.

the end of the year, many settlers were convinced that a major campaign would be needed to clear Kai Colo off the land, once and for all. The government however was reluctant to engage in what it knew would be a long and costly war.⁴²

Another significant development of 1872, was the appointment of Ratu Isikeli Tabakaucoro of Viwa (near Bau) as the governor of Ra. As a governor, one of Ratu Isikeli's main responsibilities was to determine taxable individuals and begin collecting one pound per adult male and four shillings from women. The introduction of this tax system necessitated the activation of a census.⁴³ While the main intention of the taxes was to raise money for the government and to force as many villagers as possible into plantation labour, the census functioned as a more subtle means of spreading the government's legitimacy into the homes of people who had never conceived of a polity beyond their own immediate *vanua*. It was one small way in which the government could make itself visible and win the recognition and consent of hereto independent tribes.

This brings to the fore another theme of pre-colonial antagonism: the effect of alliances between the Bauan chiefs, the government and settlers in recruiting plantation labour in subjected communities. Either from ignorance or evasion, very few Fijians responded to the tax. Many were consequently charged and imprisoned for the maximum term of six months. Those planters who paid the debt off with the government could then use the offender for six months though periods of enforced labour often lasted for up to a year and a half. This led to the wholesale emptying of entire districts of their male population.⁴⁴ Two provinces were particularly badly hit. They were the provinces with Bauan governors, Ba and Ra. Ratu Isikeli was himself actively involved in labour recruitment in Ra and the Yasawas and quickly acquired a reputation for unscrupulous behaviour. Resident settlers blamed him for unsettling and upsetting local tribes and for the tragic consequences that would ensue in February 1873.⁴⁵ Gordon later wrote that people in these provinces remembered this

⁴² Not all contact between villagers and planters was characterised by violence. Some relationships were very amicable and embodied much goodwill. This section however, treats with the war of 1876 and traces the roots from which antagonism grew.

⁴³ Kaplan, 1995. 43.

⁴⁴ Gordon, *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 201.

⁴⁵ Ratu Isikeli had bought himself a ketch and was paying for it by supplying 250 labourers to two European recruiters. See *Fiji Times*, 26 March 1873.

River.⁴⁹ In February a Ba planter's men shot two mountain women who had come down to the river to fish for kai.⁵⁰ By now the planters pursued a shoot on sight policy against all 'big heads' (many of the inland warriors had begun to grow their hair as a sign of their opposition to Bau and the mission). The mountaineers (as they were also known) responded with a bloody reprisal of their own. On the fourth of February 1873, the Burns family was killed on their property at Vunisamaloa, as were eighteen of the Melanesian labourers (mostly Tana men). The planters attributed the killing to the natural savagery of the 'big heads' and to the downgrading of the Tui Ba in favour of a Bauan man, which created in the process, "a bitter enemy ... of a previously staunch ally of white settlers".⁵¹ Writing fifty years later, Brewster believed the attack to have been in retaliation for the Burns labourers' killing and eating of a young Colo man.⁵² Scarr and Young both ascribed the killing to land disputes originating from the Tui Ba's land selling frenzy.⁵³

An expedition was immediately sent by the government to punish the murderers. Led by Swanston (Minister for Native Affairs) Major Fitzgerald, Captain Harding, and Ratu Isikeli, the appearance of punishment soon gave way to evidence of a veritable war of subjugation. In his notice calling for Ba settlers to join the force, the Major invited "anyone who is fond of shooting" to accompany him.⁵⁴ Macnaught calculated that more than 2000 men were recruited for the expedition, more than any previous operation.⁵⁵ This was not mere retaliation. The objective was to acquire control over the entire interior. The targets in the north and north-west included the tribes of Qaliyalatina, Naloto, Magodro, Yakete, Vaturu and Sabeto none of which had connections with the Burns murder. Many villagers lost their lives, almost a thousand men, women and children were taken prisoner and several hundred were killed. Most

⁴⁹ Burness to Evans, 3 January 1873. The "Swanston Collection. Correspondence re Military Campaign in the Ba and Ra Provinces. Inwards and Outwards, 1873." M/9. Burness left the area soon after to settle on disputed Vatukaloko lands in Ra where he was again harassed by neighbouring tribes. This is discussed in the next chapter on the Tuka Movement.

⁵⁰ Macnaught, 1971: 13.

⁵¹ See the settlers' petition in the *Fiji Times*, 26 March 1873.

⁵² A. B. Brewster *The Hill Tribes of Fiji*. London: Seeley, Service & Co. Limited, 1922. 32-3. Brewster had been in the planters' militia in the first Ba expedition to avenge the deaths of Spiers and Macintosh.

⁵³ Scarr, 1984: 62, John Young: 370-1.

⁵⁴ Letter from Berry to Place, 22 April 1873. Cited in Colman Wall "Old Fiji Letters." in *Transactions of the Fijian Society*. 1918. 26.

⁵⁵ Macnaught, 1971: 16.

of the villages were burned, the gardens destroyed and those who escaped fled in all directions.⁵⁶

The move to the prized village of Nabutautau in the centre of the island continued into August and it eventually fell on September 11th (though the villagers had been alerted by Fijian soldiers and the village was deserted when it was taken). Several of the prisoners were sent to Lovoni on Ovalau which had since 1871 become a gaol. Other prisoners (men, women and children) totalling 800 and all from the interior of Ba were taken to Koro where in January 1874 they were tried for rebellion. One quarter were acquitted and the rest sent to work on plantations. The revenue of the sale was again used to finance government.⁵⁷ The Magodro (including Sabeto and Vaturu) were allowed back in 1876 but were confined to the village of Nasolo on the Ba coast where they could be kept under surveillance. The lands claimed by the government after the campaign were later returned to them. The Naloto people (interior of Ba) were also kept in servitude in Ba before being moved to Toqe after Cession.

Meanwhile, a few miles east of Ba, another front in the war of attrition between the interior and the government had opened in the Tavua Bay area with the killing of a local chief by labour recruiters angry that his men had deserted.⁵⁸ A few days later, Koroi i Latikau, a Bauan recruiter, was murdered in the same area. Bau and Viwa had been abusing their tributary relationship with Ra to hire labour out to European planters. The emptying of the land of its male population made for a combination of misery and anger which ended in tragic circumstances. To make matters worse, a chief from the Tavua Bay had been killed. To avenge Latikau's death, government troops, consisting of a few Europeans, about forty drilled Fijians and a hundred other auxiliaries, attacked the village of Nakorowaiwai on the 4th of March 1873. Having stormed it, as the clash was later related, a horrible massacre took place. Women and children were shot down as they ran from their burning houses. Living children were

⁵⁶ For a firsthand account of the Ba campaign to subjugate the interior, see the Swanston Papers (Fiji Museum); the Swanston Collection (M/9 National Archives of Fiji); the serial publication of "The War in Viti Levu in 1873 and 1876" by Dovi – Sabeto (pseudonym) published in the *Western Pacific Herald* from June 1, 1901; Colman Wall, "Old Fiji Letters" in *Transactions of the Fijian Society*. 1918; the Carew Papers (Hocken Library, Dunedin); and short discussions in Derrick, Macnaught, Scarr and Young.

⁵⁷ Derrick, 1950: 227.

⁵⁸ Evans to Swanston, 22 January 1873. The Swanston Collection. M/9. NAF.

thrown into fires or had their brains dashed out. Many of these people had just returned from work in Taveuni. They were not mountaineers but coastal villagers.⁵⁹

The massacre, apart from worsening an already deep-seated resentment against Bau and the government, also opened a more profound wound. As Kaplan has argued conclusively, massive damage had been done to the ritual pre-eminence, authority, and autonomy of the Vatukaloko people, the spiritual guardians of the ancestral home of Degei and the sacred Nakauvadra Range.⁶⁰ The battle of Nakorowaiwai had opened a religious as well as a political front. Eventually, it would turn into one of the most potent of Fiji's anti-colonial movements: the Tuka (see Chapter Two).

Cakobau was also stretched in Eastern Colo where he faced a resurgence of hostility in the Naitasiri districts of Naqali, Viria, and Matailobau, and extending as far as Nadawarau (Muaira) and Waikalou (Soloira) in the upper Rewa. A major battle took place at Nasorovakawalu in March 1873 which Cakobau won notably with the support of Wesleyan trainees at the recently opened Navuloa Wesleyan Training Institution.⁶¹ The participation of these trainees only reinforced the perception that this was a war of Bau and the *lotu*. Many villages in Waikalou, Nalawa, and Nasau districts were burnt. In spite of their defeat, this latest military flashpoint was another reminder to the government of the determination of Colo polities to preserve their political, territorial and religious independence.⁶² For the government, these campaigns only worsened its precarious financial situation. Already laden with large debts, and facing a continuous barrage of attacks from hostile settlers, the government could ill-afford to be at war. Its inability to suppress Colo permanently also severely diminished its prestige and credibility among Fijians and settlers alike.

⁵⁹ *Fiji Times*, 26 March 1873. See also the serial publication of "The War in Viti Levu in 1873 and 1876" in the *Western Pacific Herald*, from 1 June 1901.

⁶⁰ Kaplan, 1995: 44.

⁶¹ The institute had been constructed at Cakobau's insistence on land near Kaba to replace the Richmond school in Kadavu.

⁶² It was clear, for instance, to the British Consul Edward March that the interior tribes did not recognise Cakobau's rule. See the confidential "Memorandum by Consul March respecting Affairs in Fiji." 7 May 1873. CO 83/4. Public Records Office, London. Hereafter PRO.

By the end of 1873, the Cakobau Government was on the brink of collapse. A petition signed by 300 “white settlers” had been sent to the Foreign Office, with a request for the British annexation of the islands. They pleaded that

the Government of Fiji is unable to render that protection which is properly the province of a Government to do; that the great body of natives are dissatisfied with it; that the discontent has spread widely, and is yet spreading; whilst among the settlers the discontent has been so great as to lead large bodies of them to take up arms against the Government.⁶³

The British Government responded by sending the Goodenough and Layard Commission to investigate the request and to determine the viability and desirability of annexation. By March 1874, Cakobau, Thurston, and several of the major chiefs of Fiji were summoned by the Commission and coerced into backing-down from their determined stand to continue governing Fiji.⁶⁴ The debts, widespread discontent among Fijians and settlers alike, and the policy pursued by newly elected British Prime Minister Disraeli for imperial enlargement,⁶⁵ made the government’s position almost untenable.

Meanwhile in Colo, news of the government’s imminent demise rekindled old quarrels. Unresolved problems flared up again in which anti-Bauan and anti-*lotu* sentiments again featured prominently. The tension was sometimes such that absence from Colo was construed as a slight on the vanua and treasonous to the cause. A Nadawarau chief who tried to return to his village after an absence of four months was told “you are no longer a Dawarau man ... but a Bau man and we don’t know you

⁶³ The petition is contained in 73/8507, CO 83/4. PRO.

⁶⁴ This British commission had been sent from London to investigate settler requests for the annexation of the islands. The following passage taken from a letter by Cakobau to Goodenough and Layard indicates the desire of the principal chiefs of coastal and Eastern Fiji to continue to rule over the islands independently of Great Britain: “The chiefs of Fiji have discussed as I desired them to do the matter about which you were sent to Fiji by the Queen. After they had discussed it they signed a paper which they sent to me. In this paper their desires are made clear, they do not wish to give the Government of Fiji to any Foreign Power.” 6 March 1874, 74/4994, CO 83/5. This letter was withdrawn on 19 March 1874. See 74/4995, CO 83/5. PRO. Deryck Scarr discusses this incident and other aspects of the power struggle between the Cakobau Government, the chiefs, the settlers and the Goodenough-Layard Commission in “John Bates Thurston, Commodore Goodenough and the Rampant Anglo-Saxons in Fiji.” in *Historical Studies*. 11: 43, October 1964. 378-81.

⁶⁵ His predecessor Gladstone generally regarded colonies to be too expensive.

or care for you”.⁶⁶ A central highlands alliance or Lomaicolo was formed between the interior districts of Nadaravakawalu, Muaira, Noemalu and Naqarawai to bolster political autonomy and resist the spread of Christianity. The Lomaicolo alliance was said to have the backing of Nabutautau, the Navatusila village being fully rebuilt and defiant as ever.⁶⁷ Lomaicolo proved a constant source of frustration for mission teachers and converts alike especially for those who settled in the neighbouring districts of Naboubuco and Nailega to the north and Solojiara, Matailobau in the south and east.

In late March, Lomaicolo forces attacked a Christian village at Naigunugunu in Naitasiri, killing as many as fifty-seven people in the process.⁶⁸ Few sources are clear as to the reasons behind the attack. Thornley deduces a religious motive,⁶⁹ while Brewster pointed out that the whole of the head of the Wainimala was in arms against the government.⁷⁰ One can surmise that the *lotu* and the *matanitu* continued to mean the same thing for many of these interior tribes. Desperate to avoid the loss of recent advances, and the conflict from spiralling out of control, the government immediately despatched Major James Harding (of Ba campaign fame) with an expedition into Wainimala. After moving in from Viti Levu Bay through Nalawa, Harding’s force was attacked at Nagusunikalou.⁷¹ Brewster describes this battle as unprecedented in the history of Fijian warfare.⁷² After less than a month, Lomaicolo’s leadership was weakened by capture and execution. Cakobau’s army took all that could be seized and carried everything downstream on *bilibili* (bamboo rafts). The loot contained many large *lali* (Fijian drums) thus depriving these hill tribes of an important source of communication and mobilisation.⁷³ Resistance from Colo East had been broken and the potential for future alliances with tribes west of the Rairaimatuku and Nadrau

⁶⁶ Cited in Thornley, 2002: 478.

⁶⁷ Macnaught, 1971: 22.

⁶⁸ Carew to Swanston, 30 March 1874. The Swanston Collection. NAF.

⁶⁹ Thornley, 2002: 474.

⁷⁰ Brewster, A. B. “The Chronicles of the Noemalu Tribe or Dwellers in Emalu.” in *Transactions of the Fijian Society*. 1920. 13.

⁷¹ Brewster, 1920: 13. See also the Swanston Collection. NAF. Every effort was made to locate James Harding’s first hand account of the events which were published in “Diary of the Na Dawarau Campaign, 1874” in *Transactions of the Fijian Society*. 1916. However the 1916 volume of the *Transactions* has been missing from the Fiji’s National Archives for a long time and does not figure on the series’ microfilm either.

⁷² Brewster, A. B. “Genealogies and Histories of the Matanitu or Tribal Government of Central Viti Levu.” Torquay, 1923. 21.

⁷³ Brewster, 1922: 62.

plateaus was seriously compromised. Colo West was thus deprived in 1876 of a potentially formidable Colo-wide alliance.

The Causes of the Colo War

This long series of events suggests that there were many reasons for a confrontation to take place in the interior. Firstly, as Kaplan points out, the politics of the interior were constructed differently from those of the coast.⁷⁴ This means, as Routledge infers, that the configuration of the interior homeland stood against the development of any kind of extended authority structure, whether Fijian or foreign.⁷⁵ Reporting to the Fiji Legislative Council in 1914, the Native Lands Commissioner G. V. Maxwell, claimed for instance that Nadroga had “a constitution considerably more civilised than the rudimentary and inchoate social system obtaining in Colo West”.⁷⁶ This was principally because the chiefs in Nadroga appeared to be well established and recognised. By contrast the chiefs of Colo West seemed to benefit a lot less from the privileges of their rank:

One of the most striking features in the communal system of Colo West is the absence of chiefly customs, and the character and manners of the people at the present time indicate great independence of will and impatience of control. They seem to have never rendered to their chiefs the obedience, deference, and respect that is so marked in other provinces. There are numerous instances of the hereditary chief vacating his position in favour of a more efficient warrior; and while that is perhaps inevitable where tribes had to fight for their existence, it appears from the general history of the tribes that the chiefly position was almost nominal in times of peace. The people seemed to do nothing for their chiefs except when definitely ordered, and the orders had to be given with discretion. There was no “sevu” or presentation of the first fruits of the season, no “tama” or respectful greeting, no “veibuli” or ceremonious installation of a chief, no clapping of hands on touching a chief (e.g. after shaking hands), or on his finishing a meal. In fact, the chief appears to have

⁷⁴ Kaplan, 1995: 83.

⁷⁵ Routledge: 216.

⁷⁶ Paper 27: “Native Lands Commission.” in *JFLC*, 1914. 6.

been of little consequence except in actual time of war, and the *Commission could find no hereditary or customary titles or offices in the whole province which carry any special privileges in respect to land.*⁷⁷ (Italics in original.)

Maxwell interpreted this lack of a hierarchy as an indicator of weakness and inferiority. Adolf Brewster who was commissioner in various parts of Colo for about thirty years, disagreed. His view was that:

Under the old patriarchal system, as it existed among the hill tribes, all men were free and equal, and tyranny and oppression not to be borne with. But there was an iron discipline where the welfare of the clan was concerned; members were expected to die for it and sacrifice themselves, when necessary, for the divine head, the chieftain.⁷⁸

There is also evidence that traditional authority was just as fragmented on the northern coast throughout the large province of Ba and the Yasawa Islands.⁷⁹ This degree of egalitarianism prevented large chiefdoms and paramount chiefs from emerging and facilitated instead a system of loose alliances and coalitions. Consequently, the government could not rely on the same degree of collaboration that it received from paramount chiefs and chiefly classes in other parts of the group.

Secondly, their sense of space and territory was different. The ocean is not visible from Nabutautau in the centre of the island. What is more evident is the vastness of the land and the abundance of natural resources. When Brewster first became acquainted with the people of Colo he was astounded to find that “the natives thought their country the biggest in the world”.⁸⁰ The people who inhabited these lands could not have accepted the claims made over their heritage from a man (Cakobau) whom they had never seen, whose power had never been recognised in these parts, and who himself came from a diminutive islet. These wars then, were wars of independence. They had been fought for the preservation of a people who saw themselves leading independent lives, laying claim over large, fertile and enviable expanses of territory,

⁷⁷ Paper 27: “Native Lands Commission.” in *JFLC*, 1914. 2.

⁷⁸ Brewster, 1922: 71.

⁷⁹ Routledge: 154.

⁸⁰ Brewster, 1922: 38.

natural resources, a vibrant religion and way of life. They were fighting to retain their worldviews, their ways of seeing, of understanding, of doing, of remembering, of knowing. This is the world they sought to protect from the increasingly ambitious, hostile and threatening incursions from the coast. Yet, this independent spirit also precluded any pan-Colo unity from emerging. They often suffered from shifting alliances and diverging views about how to proceed. Colo districts were not equally disaffected and not always opposed in the same ways or to the same enemy.

The people of Colo also take pride in claiming to be among the original inhabitants of the land and view coastal peoples as latecomers to Fiji. In spite of their vast land and ancient heritage, Kai Colo often suffered from the cultural denigrations of coastal people. Bauans regarded them as ‘kaisi’ or low class, barbarous people lacking in culture and manners.⁸¹ This view was also adopted by some administrators including G. B. Evans, the government’s Secretary for Ba and the Yasawas, who described the mountaineers as “the most filthy race I ever had to contend with”.⁸² Power is not easily tolerant of defiance and is usually suspicious of difference. Although difficult to prove, it can be assumed that Kai Colo resented these representations.

The third source of antagonism came from the religious transformation driven from the coast by indigenous agents and foreign missionaries. By the 1870s the missionaries had acquired considerable influence in Fijian politics. The island of Bau was the centre of Wesleyanism in Fiji⁸³ and although the mission’s evangelical drive was not inherently violent and the mission rarely took an active role in wars of conquest or subjugation, it was nevertheless widely identified with Bau’s political ambitions. The *lotu*’s reputation was also plagued by the cavalier and occasionally mercenary methods used by some of its most prominent exponents. Among them Semisi Fifita, a protégé of the prominent Tongan warlord Enele Ma’afu, was particularly conspicuous in his use of gun-toting methods to secure conversions.⁸⁴ This is not to deny that Christians themselves were the victims of persecution. But while many tribes welcomed the *lotu* as a source of peace and spiritual well-being, in

⁸¹ From A. J. Gordon’s “Expedition across Viti Levu by Mr. A. Gordon and Mr. Carew.” 18 November 1875. 75/1644, CO 83/7. PRO. See also Brewster, 1922: 38.

⁸² Evans to Swanston, 2 November 1873. Cakobau Government, Ministry of Native Affairs. Inward Correspondence: 41. Cited in Macnaught, 1971: 19.

⁸³ Thornley, 2002: 380.

⁸⁴ See Derrick, 1950: 150, Scarr, 1984: 23, and Thornley, 2002: 199-200, 202, 211.

other places such as Colo, the Bible was emblematic of coercive force and its association with the gun and the government persists to the present day.⁸⁵ As Thornley points out, Cakobau's influence had brought many Fijians to Christianity but driven many others away.⁸⁶

In 1868, Colo had been subjected to campaigns of aggression from the coast by Ratu Kini Nanovo, the Kalevu. Ratu Navula a leading chief from the Nadi coast used the same pretext of evangelism to expand his power base in western Colo. He brought several districts in the immediate vicinity of Nadi under subjection and compelled them to adopt the "sulu" (the recognised outward sign of Christianity). Many were forced to flee into the hills during his "war of Christianity".⁸⁷ The same strategy was used in Ra and Tavua where the advances were led by Cakobau's son and other Bauan chiefs. Coastal chiefs stood to gain much from the opportunities offered by evangelism. They could consolidate their positions and even acquire power over lands and people with whom they had until then exercised very little or no legitimate influence. The moral authority of the Wesleyan mission was thus constantly undermined by the violence of its most publicly visible adherents. The mission's cause was not helped either by the involvement of some of its senior members in land purchases at a time when discontent over land alienation was rife.⁸⁸

The political connection between the mission and the government did not always manifest itself in such overt and dramatic ways. Rather, it often assumed the form of a more subtle partnership to acquire greater information and control. Reflecting on his expedition through Viti Levu in October 1875, A. J. Gordon (one of the Governor's aide-de-camps and distant relative) observed on the usefulness of this alliance:

Native teachers are a most useful body of men because of their constant communication with one another, providing information, and for rapidly circulating orders or advice that might prove to be most dangerous were this power possessed by a body less well affected towards the government than the

⁸⁵ The adage "beneath the Bible was the gun" was used several times during my Talanoa discussions with villagers at Nasauoko, 2 August 2003.

⁸⁶ Thornley, 2002: 380.

⁸⁷ Paper 61: "Report of the Native Lands Commissioner." in *JFLC*, 1915. 2. Ratu Navula later came to the aid of Nadroga and Government troops in the 1876 War.

⁸⁸ See Thornley (2002) for details about Reverend William Moore's land deals in particular.

Wesleyans. They are of great assistance to the government, for while inculcating the precepts of the faith, they at the same time teach the people to obey the law and uphold authority. By their habits they set an example of cleanliness, orderliness, and industry which in time must bear fruit.⁸⁹

This passage suggests that religious transformation was a relatively peaceful process. Yet, evangelism by its very nature involved religious, cultural and territorial aggrandisement. As such, the church was often party to a frequently imperceptible but nonetheless potent attack on the cosmologies of Colo and their powerful keepers. Resisting Christian encroachments became a matter of life and death for the priestly establishment (*bete*) which was charged with the spiritual protection and well-being of their communities. In this context the posting of the Wesleyan teacher Esala Seru at Beimana in the western heartland of Colo in 1874, was perceived as an act of provocation and he was among the first to feel the ire of the Kai Colo in the immediate lead up to the 1876 War.

Fourthly, the series of events underscores the rapid spread of capitalist relations of production in Fiji as a consequence of the arrival of a large number of planters. From the mid 1860s onwards Fiji's reputation for cheap land and labour had attracted hundreds mainly from Australia (but also from New Zealand) hoping to make a quick fortune on the back of the cotton boom. Planters constituted the frontline of capitalism in Fiji. Their dependence and insistence on cheap land and labour and the reluctance of many Fijians to provide either, made the likelihood of conflict almost inevitable. Unlike the traders, these people had come to make their home in Fiji and depended on space for their profits. They pushed inland from Ba, Sigatoka and Rewa where they hoped to acquire the last remaining tracts of fertile land. There, they attempted to establish private properties which they cordoned off and guarded jealously. But these localities brought them into contact with people who had had access to and cultivated these lands from time immemorial and for whom therefore, the significance of these lands extended far beyond their mere material use. Private and communal conceptions of land ownership collided with increasing force as good land became more scarce. Inland, Colo people watched with increasing apprehension as vast tracts of land

⁸⁹ A. J. Gordon, "Expedition across Viti Levu by Mr. A. Gordon and Mr. Carew." 18 November 1875, 75/1644, CO 83/7. PRO.

bordering theirs changed hands, new owners moved in, entire villages were forced off their ancestral homes, large areas declared out of bounds, and labourers ordered to shoot trespassers on sight.⁹⁰

The interior districts were also witness to the sale, one after another, of entire islands in the Yasawas to land sharks (such as Evans) by enterprising Bauan chiefs. The powerful but unscrupulous Ratu Epeli Nailatikau (Ratu Seru's eldest son) had, from the late 1860s, warned chiefs in the islands that if they didn't sign the deeds of sale, they would be arrested and carried away. Once the land was sold, planters placed tabus on everything on the island and effectively forbade villagers from using the land. Some old women were sentenced to hard labour for three months for digging their own crops. Youths found guilty of eating coconuts were sentenced to twelve months.⁹¹ Anyone who dared complain would be flogged or sent away for long periods of prison labour mainly on Vanua Levu plantations. While working as a tax collector for the Cakobau administration, Alex Eastgate reported that he had found in Yasawa-i-Ra twenty men returning from the Macuata coast where they had been fishing for *bêche de mer* at Ratu Epeli's behest. After working there for seven months, all they had to show for their labour were two bags of fish.⁹²

The Yasawa alienation was all the more menacing for Colo given that some islands (such as Viwa) had been claimed by settlers in spite of the fact that the people living on them had never owed allegiance to Bau, were never consulted on the sale of their islands, had never sighted or signed any of the deeds, and never received any payment.⁹³ The presence of the armed native constabulary created an atmosphere of fear and intimidation. This was compounded by the merging in the same man of the military, administrative and legal apparatus of the state. Major James Harding was at once commander of the armed constabulary and commissioner for the Yasawas where he ruled without exception in favour of planters. His Fijian troops were charged by many with outrages and cruelties perpetrated especially against women.⁹⁴ The soldiers who accompanied him around the islands were "allowed full liberty to

⁹⁰ See Derrick, 1950: 231; John Young: 199, 207; France: 92-3; and Routledge: 178.

⁹¹ Eastgate to Gordon, *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 500.

⁹² Eastgate to Gordon, *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 500.

⁹³ Eastgate to Gordon, *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 500.

⁹⁴ See despatch 7, Robinson to Carnarvon, 16 October 1874, 74/14550, CO 83/5. PRO.

plunder and destroy property at will, and to ravish women at their pleasure”. In one town only one woman had survived the soldiers’ assaults.⁹⁵

Another source of anxiety and irritation was the tactic used by planters and their local chiefly allies to provoke clashes in certain districts with “the almost avowed object of aiding the Exchequer by obtaining lands to sell and prisoners to dispose of”.⁹⁶ One Ba planter (Fitzgerald) went as far as setting fire to his own house and claimed it was burnt by the mountaineers, so that he could then claim compensation and get the government involved in a punitive expedition. Such an expedition, some planters hoped, would free up more land and labour from dispossessed landowners and get their own claims endorsed. Writing in 1875 about agitation among planters near the mouth of the Sigatoka River, Governor Gordon alerted the Colonial Secretary to this abuse:

Fox is a notorious alarmist. ... There can ... be no doubt that he and a considerable number of the white settlers in his neighbourhood wish to bring about a collision, which will eventually lead to the destruction of the tribes who now occupy the extensive and fertile plains of the Sigatoka. Those great tracts of rich lands will thus, they think, be rendered easy of acquisition. Nor will it be easy to dispute the defective titles which they have obtained from the late Ratu Kini of Nadroga, of lands over which he exercised no shadow of authority, and to the property of which he had no claim.⁹⁷

Land loss and proletarianisation were thus tied together. Once the land was sold, planters needed manpower to render it productive. Racial ideas of the time dictated that no self-respecting white man would himself work the land (though many did). This created a huge labour crisis because Fijians had little incentive to work for the meagre wages offered by planters. Enforced recruitment and taxation were two of the strategies used to get around the problem. Both had direct bearing on the escalation of

⁹⁵ Eastgate to Gordon, *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 500.

⁹⁶ Gordon to Carnarvon, 21 August 1875. *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 169.

⁹⁷ Gordon to Carnarvon, 30 October 1875. *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 280. Writing to Carew in January 1876, Gordon warned him that Fitzgerald had reappeared in Nadroga and that he had requested an armed guard: “Probably his idea is to get a few armed men and then by hook or by crook force a collision with the mountaineers which may compel the government to take measures leading to their extermination.” Governor to Carew, 14 January 1876. Carew Papers. Hocken Library, Dunedin.

tension in the interior. Forced recruitment offered several entrepreneurial chiefs the opportunity to profit from selling the labour of subject districts. In Ra for instance (where the Bauan chief Ratu Isikeli was governor), men from whole districts were dragged out of their homes to work on plantations.⁹⁸ In Qaliyalatina (northern Colo), men were taken to work on plantations in return for *tabua* (whale's teeth) and a promise to be returned at the end of a year.⁹⁹ Taxation produced hundreds of prosecutable individuals who had not paid their dues. These men and women were driven onto plantations where they worked long hours to maximise the profit of an often ill-disposed planter and learn to respect, protect, and expand his private property. Aside from causing widespread social, economic, and demographic displacement, such practices also fuelled more discontent and resentment.

Omnipresent in relations between Europeans and indigenous population was the conviction among the former of their racial superiority.¹⁰⁰ Many Colo Fijians first experienced this as labourers working for planters. Most planters saw themselves as constituting a homogenous group with similar problems, interests and aspirations. They stuck together in what they perceived to be a hostile environment. Although there were exceptions, their general expectation that space between 'races' (already enforced by some missionaries) should be demarcated and legalised, did not endear them with their indigenous neighbours and subordinates.¹⁰¹ Few were those who formed relations of trust, goodwill, and mutual respect with adjoining Fijian communities. Some had good reason to fear Fijians, for like the *lotu*, the settlers were usually perceived to be in league with Bau, and to have acquired their present properties by ill means.

⁹⁸ Derrick, 1950: 231.

⁹⁹ A. J. Gordon, "Expedition across Viti Levu by Mr. A. Gordon and Mr. Carew." 18 November 1875, 75/1644, CO 83/7. PRO.

¹⁰⁰ For literature on European theories of racial superiority see among many others, Edward Said, *Orientalism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978; Robert Miles, *Racism*. London: Routledge, 1989; Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. London: Routledge, 1990; Nicholas Thomas, 1994; Ann Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995; Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. London: Routledge, 1995; and Robert Nicole, *The Word, the Pen and the Pistol: Literature and Power in Tahiti*. New York: SUNY Press, 2001.

¹⁰¹ For a representative view on questions of race in the European community, see the numerous articles published in *Fiji Times*.

Aside from the general origins of the conflict already explored, there were also more immediate reasons for the deterioration of relations between Colo and its adversaries. The signing of the Deed of Cession in Levuka on October 10 1874 is a case in point. Goodenough had been happy to use minor chiefs' discontent to discredit Cakobau and his government in the lead-up to Cession¹⁰² but they were promptly ignored in the ensuing process of formalising the British takeover and negotiating the post-Cession distribution of power. Colo was not party to the cession of the islands to the British Crown. None of the districts North of the line from the Kalevu's province of Nadroga in the west to Tailevu in the southeast, were represented at Cession talks by their own leaders. Walter Carew is reported to have been at the signing of Cession but he could hardly be said to represent Colo. Kai Colo did not recognise him as their spokesman, neither did they see themselves as constituting one unified entity.

This exclusion is hardly surprising. Chiefdoms other than Bau, Cakaudrove and Lau were not considered prominent enough to participate in the making of decisions about the future of the colony. Perhaps more importantly, Colo chiefs would not have agreed to surrender sovereignty even if they had been consulted. Colo was never a part of the process because its participation was likely to inhibit rather than facilitate the transition. When it became clear that annexation was no longer a question of choice but of time, the established chiefs of the coast and the east endeavoured to secure for themselves and their families a continuing power and influence in post-cession politics. They were not about to concern themselves with the wishes of their traditional enemies in the interior. Cakobau likened Fiji to a piece of driftwood and while his boat was certainly sinking and rudderless, this was not so in Colo where most districts remained fiercely independent and self-sufficient. Colo was not involved because it had much to lose and little to gain from the new order. It had not been nor intended to be party to the emerging 'nation' that other chiefs around Fiji were beginning to imagine.

As we saw earlier, the interim colonial administration was well aware that the annexation of Fiji had been undertaken without the consent of the interior districts of

¹⁰² See the "Commodore's Report on Annexation." Goodenough to CO, 6 April 1874, Admiralty Paper 74/3714, CO 83/5. PRO.

Viti Levu.¹⁰³ Two strategies presented themselves as it sought to enforce a new law and a new order in the interior. The first, favoured by acting governor Sir Hercules Robinson, proposed that force was most desirable and that the government should “send a native force across the mountains to command their submission”.¹⁰⁴ Others however, including Layard and a number of senior advisors to the Cakobau government, believed that it would be best for Colo to be ‘eased’ into the new order. Anxious to avoid a repeat of the New Zealand Wars and its costly consequences, the government charged Walter Carew with the responsibility of convening a meeting between the government and the interior districts.¹⁰⁵ Carew was a New Zealand born former planter who had served in the 1871 Ba Campaign but who had since become well-acquainted with Colo residents who gave him almost unlimited access to the region. Carew’s individual ability to liaise with and mediate between antagonistic groups in the region helped to ease conditions that would otherwise have precipitated a more immediate and bloody conflict.

The meeting took place at Navuso on 22 January 1875, bringing sixty-nine chiefs mainly from the more pacified areas of eastern Colo. If the meeting is to be judged by the official response, it was “completely successful”, and “a thorough understanding has been come to with Kai Colos from whom no serious trouble need now be anticipated”.¹⁰⁶ “They have come to give themselves to Britain,” declared Layard.¹⁰⁷ The people had cut their hair as a token of their submission and five of the chiefs went voluntarily to Levuka with Mr Layard to look at the town and pay heed to her Majesty’s warship “Dido”. Several coastal chiefs were there too to vouch for the new order and to plead with them to give up their “false sense of importance and strength”.¹⁰⁸ After being warned of the consequences of any misbehaviour they were told to return to their districts and honour their pledge of loyalty. The chiefs of Colo raised but three concerns. They were anxious to retain their lands, hold on to their custom regarding polygamy, wary of the *lotu* being thrust on them, and asked the

¹⁰³ “Memorandum by Consul March respecting Affairs in Fiji.” 7 May 1873. CO 83/4. PRO.

¹⁰⁴ Despatch 12, Robinson to Carnarvon, 20 October 1874. 74/14555, CO 83/5. PRO.

¹⁰⁵ Swanston to Carew, 10 November 1874. Carew Papers. Hocken Library. The government was particularly keen for the Nabutautau chief Nawawabalavu to attend and Carew was asked to induce him to come.

¹⁰⁶ Goodneough to CO, 8 February 1875, 75/1449, CO 83/6. PRO.

¹⁰⁷ The Layard report on his meeting with Colo chiefs is enclosed in despatch 21, Robinson to Carnarvon, 17 March 1875, 75/5786, CO 83/6. PRO.

¹⁰⁸ Layard in 75/5786, CO 83/6. PRO.

right to renounce Christian education. After receiving assurances on all counts that change if needed would be gradual and implemented only after consultation, the chiefs returned to their homes.

Unbeknown to them, they had been infected with the deadly measles virus, sparking a huge epidemic that would take one in five people throughout Fiji.¹⁰⁹ The disease was particularly devastating in Colo. Almost all the chiefs who had come to the Navuso meeting perished and with them vanished the tentative promises to submit. Measles heralded a vastly more perilous enemy than had ever been encountered before. It was invisible and could not be repelled by conventional means. Influenced by priests in danger of losing their social and political prominence, Kai Colo ascribed the new mysterious malady to the wrath of the ancestral gods. With half of Colo's leadership eliminated within three months of the Navuso meeting, it is not surprising that many believed the new rulers had conspired to introduce the pestilence to weaken Colo's strength.¹¹⁰

The consequences were immediate. Reporting on his expedition through the centre of Viti Levu with Walter Carew, Arthur J. Gordon wrote that they had met at Navuso, a teacher fleeing from Navosa. He told them the people had gone back to worshipping their own gods and that they now saw the epidemic, the *lotu*, and the government as the same enemy.¹¹¹ Similar reports came from all over the interior. People were throwing off the *sulu*, expelling Wesleyan teachers, and reverting to heathen practices. The disease had severely undermined all previous progress made at pacifying the interior. Colo bore the brunt of the disaster. For while Cession had borne little significance for the people of Colo, measles was to affect their destiny in the most

¹⁰⁹ The disease had been contracted by Cakobau and his sons on a trip to Sydney a few weeks earlier. They were allowed off their ship in Levuka without following proper quarantine procedures thus allowing the disease to spread. Some infected people attended the Navuso meeting and from there the disease spread to all areas of Colo. In all of Fiji, it is estimated that up to 40,000 people died from the disease. Gordon suspected that almost a third of the total Fijian population lost their lives in the epidemic. Gordon to Shaw-Lefevre, 6 July 1876. *Records of Private and Public Life*, II: 69. For a more detailed discussion of the 1875 measles epidemic see R. A. Derrick "Fiji's Darkest Hour." *Transactions of the Fiji Society*. 6: 1, 1955. 3-16.

¹¹⁰ Gordon to Shaw-Lefevre, 6 July 1876. *Records of Private and Public Life*, II: 70. See also the comments made by the Roko Tui Nadroga about measles being the main cause of the war at the *Bose Vakaturaga* (Council of Chiefs meeting) at Waikava in November 1876. "Notes of the Proceedings of a Native Council," 1876. 6.

¹¹¹ A. J. Gordon, "Expedition across Viti Levu by Mr. A. Gordon and Mr. Carew." 18 November 1875, 75/1644, CO 83/7. PRO.

dramatic ways. For many years later, time was not referred in terms of pre or post cession, but rather of pre and post measles days.¹¹² Hence, Routledge's argument that the 1875 measles epidemic was the determining phenomenon of Nineteenth Century Fiji History, is particularly pertinent.¹¹³

The 1876 war was precipitated by a number of other important factors. First, there was the decision by the Wesleyan mission to send a teacher, Asela Seru, to Beimana in the heartland of Colo West in 1874. While he was tolerated, his presence also provoked a lot of tension. In a letter he wrote to the governor in November 1875, Walter Carew reported that in his meetings with villagers in the interior, they had indicated that "religion is the only thing they hate and fear".¹¹⁴ As the go-between for all concerned parties, Carew was now conducting, on foot, extensive shuttle diplomacy in the Colo region to keep hostilities in check. To this end he advised ordained ministers based in Cuvu (traditional seat of the Nadroga Kalevu) "to leave the people to themselves for a while, and not to attempt to push Christianity upon them against their wish".¹¹⁵

But religion was only one part of a complex and intricate web of issues in which local and regional politics also played an essential role. The ambitions of Nadroga form the second important factor which precipitated the war. Esala Seru's banishment to the coast (at Vatukarasa) in the wake of the measles epidemic, furnished Colo's coastal adversaries with a pretext to press their claims inland. When Colo prisoners of war were interrogated about their motives for going to war, they replied that if the *lotu* was the principal cause, the taunting of the Nadrogans to "convert or fight", was a close second.¹¹⁶ Ever since the buccaneering days of Ratu Kini Nanovo, a fragile peace had prevailed between the coastal province of Nadroga and the districts immediately inland from the mouth of the Sigatoka. Evidence of friction between the two had already come to the attention of officials in early 1874 when fearing for his

¹¹² Brewster, 1922: 68.

¹¹³ Routledge: 218.

¹¹⁴ Carew to Gordon, 20 November 1875. *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 339.

¹¹⁵ Carew to Gordon, 3 September 1875. *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 187-8.

¹¹⁶ A. J. Gordon to Gordon, 28 April 1876. Arthur Hamilton Gordon, *Letters and Notes Written During the Disturbances in the Highlands (Known as the "Devil Country") of Viti Levu, Fiji. 1876*. Edinburgh: Privately Printed by R. & R Clark, 1879. Volume I. 106. See also Knollys to Carew, 29 April 1876. Carew Papers.

life, the new Kalevu of Nadroga Ratu Luke Nakulanikoro, had refused to accompany the touring Goodenough-Layard Commission up the river.¹¹⁷

The situation in 1876 was somewhat different. The British were, at least nominally, in charge. The Kalevu of Nadroga had been rewarded for his loyalty with the position of Roko Tui Nadroga (provincial commissioner) in the colonial administration, measles had weakened the interior, and Christianity had again become a convenient justification for waging war inland. Nadroga was gaining ascendancy and a gaudiness to match. Carew had nothing pleasant to say about Nadroga in the first few months of 1876: “They keep me fully occupied, and I have had to write very long and very plain letters to them, both officially and privately; and if they do not improve their behaviour I shall be compelled to ask your Excellency to dismiss the native magistrate, or even to take him to Bau for a while.”¹¹⁸ The stakes were high, including ownership of the Sigatoka valley’s fertile tracts of land.

Thirdly, the planters formed another interested party and had their eyes firmly focussed on the land for as most knew, the Sigatoka river district comprised without doubt “the most valuable portion of Fiji, both soil and climate being everything to be wished for”.¹¹⁹ The planters were small in number, isolated, and lived a risky life in a potentially dangerous environment. As such they had reason to be fearful and some were the unfortunate victims of aggression. In Nadroga, however they were often its instigators. Like their adversaries in Colo and their friends on the coast, the planters were never just on the fringe of the conflict. They were an important constitutive part of it. Neither were they a homogenous group. Some planters were cohabiting very well and were respected by Kai Colo for their hard work and friendly character. However, such bonds were rare and greatly overshadowed by suspicion and increasing hostility.¹²⁰

Soon after arriving in June 1875 Gordon met one of the Nadroga planters settled on the coast between Korotogo and Cuvu. The man, Cowen, informed him that villagers

¹¹⁷ Carew to Gordon, 18 October 1875. *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 280.

¹¹⁸ Carew to Gordon, 22 March 1876. *Letters and Notes*, I: 61.

¹¹⁹ Carew to Colonial Secretary, 19 January 1876. *Letters and Notes*, I: 10.

¹²⁰ For a description of relations between planters and Kai Colo see Carew’s reports to Gordon in Gordon, *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 279-81 and 304-5.

from the mouth of the Sigatoka River were going to give trouble. Gordon had then remarked that even if it was so, the planter “clearly wishes it, and he and others may do much to render a collision inevitable”.¹²¹ Two months later Carew reported from Cuvu that “Page and others who will not leave the natives alone are animated by the sole desire to bring matters to a crisis”.¹²² As part of their taunts, planters told their rivals that,

... annexation had abolished their laws and customs; that their laws for transmission of property no longer existed; that their cherished habits had become illegal; that their lands were now property of the Crown; and that they were now expected, even required, to labour on white men’s plantations.¹²³

Such reports were intended, as the administration believed, “to compel government to send an expedition into the interior, for the capture of the inhabitants and the confiscation of their lands”.¹²⁴ Planters claimed that the government was on their side and told villagers that it would come to make war on them. Fearing the worst, the lower half of the Sigatoka valley responded by uniting and preparing itself for war. In October 1875, war-painted inhabitants of Tavuni village intercepted Page’s steamer suspecting it to be moving upstream with a war party. A few days later Captain Stevens,¹²⁵ commanding officer of the HMS Barracouta, moved his man-of-war into the area. This act of intimidation had been executed at the behest of one of the planters and prompted an immediate rebuke by the government. This unauthorised interference, the governor complained, was calculated to frustrate the administration’s plans to permanently pacify the districts. It encouraged “coastal natives and hostile whites” and made it “difficult if not impossible to restrain them from an attack on the mountaineers”.¹²⁶ Near Korotogo, the American Meader who was illegally occupying Conua land, was shooting at Kai Conua. Another planter, Byrnes, was making accusations against Kai Conua about the theft of hundreds of his goats, which were proven upon investigation to be without substance.¹²⁷

¹²¹ Gordon to Lady Gordon, 6 August 1875. *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 153.

¹²² Carew to Gordon, 27 October 1875. *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 304.

¹²³ Gordon, *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 195.

¹²⁴ Carew to Colonial Secretary, 29 October 1875. *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 284.

¹²⁵ Stevens later sailed to Samoa where he became embroiled in deadly clashes with Samoans.

¹²⁶ Gordon to Captain Chapman, 29 October 1875. *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 289.

¹²⁷ Carew to Gordon, 4 February 1876. *Letter and Notes*, I: 29.

Fourthly, and coinciding with this escalation of hostilities, was the visit to the interior by the Lands Commissioner. His presence only heightened the suspicions and anxiety of the Kai Colo and Carew was forced to make another emergency visit to the interior to explain the motives of the commission in terms that would reassure the people. Carew made it known to Kai Colo that he intended to take

a number of officers into the interior, and there establish a government village; that it would not be a white man's affair, nor a Bau man's camp, nor a camp of sea-coast people, but that I should ask all the tribes to give me some young men to be trained as officers with the others, and ... that I was the enemy of oppression in all its forms.¹²⁸

He also promised them that they would not be forced to pay taxes and that those who tried to force Christianity on them would be punished. He had also been given the authority by Gordon to inform Colo chiefs and people that the government intended to protect their rights to land, that no "white man" would be allowed to buy land except through the government and then only if it was clearly the wish and interest of the indigenous proprietors.¹²⁹ This placed the government at considerable variance with the immediate objectives of the planters.

The fifth immediate reason for the deterioration of relations was the arrival of a detachment of sixty armed native policemen (mainly from the coastal districts of Ba, Nadi and Nadroga) in November at Cuvu, home of their traditional Nadroga enemy. The interior villages were immediately unsettled and Carew was furious. He pleaded with Gordon to have the contingent returned to Levuka. Gordon however, believed that properly handled, the police would be "a great civilising and educational instrument" and declined Carew's request.¹³⁰ This latest development forced Carew into further shuttle diplomacy. Ironically, as his life had become "of essential value to

¹²⁸ Carew to Colonial Secretary, 29 October 1875. *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 282.

¹²⁹ Gordon to Carew, 13 July 1875. Carew Papers.

¹³⁰ Gordon to Carew, 10 November 1875. Carew Papers.

the state,”¹³¹ the actions of the state made his own position inland increasingly precarious.

Amidst these conflicting agendas and mounting tension, the Kai Colo were themselves engaged in deliberations about how to protect themselves. Numerous meetings were taking place up and down the country attended by delegates from as far north as Cawanisa (near Tavua) and as far south as Naqalimare (near Sigatoka). In some districts, the meetings were so regular and protracted that some of the villages were running out of food.¹³² These gatherings helped foment among them a sense of belonging to a unified entity. In years past, some of these districts had been rivals in wars waged within the interior. They certainly came with different grievances, preoccupations and experiences with the world beyond their borders. But they also shared a common heritage and a similar desire to preserve it, and hold off common adversaries. The regularity of the gatherings also improved the already extensive and sophisticated network of communication that would be necessary for a successful operation in such an extensive and often rugged terrain.

The meetings generated considerable debate over issues of policy and tactic. While several tribes were inclined to preserve peace and favoured a wait-and-see approach (such as Beimana), an increasing number of leaders took a more militant position. Chief Nabisiki of Driodrio near Namoli in the district of Noikoro, was one of the leaders urging intervention. In anticipation of open warfare, he had been training his ‘sotia’ in imitation of the police for the past two years¹³³ and was said to be ready for action. Large food rations and stockpiles of ammunition and muskets were collected and stored in strategically located caves. Messages were sent to potential allies in Wainimala to keep escape routes open to the east in case of defeat. After much thought, consultation and planning over the risk of engaging foreign intrusion, it was agreed that Colo would protect itself by all means other than force. Colo would defend itself, but it would not fire first.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Gordon to Carew, 16 October, 1875. Carew Papers.

¹³² Carew to Colonial Secretary, 19 January 1876. *Letters and Notes*, I: 12.

¹³³ Carew to Gordon, 22 March 1876. *Letters and Notes*, I: 61.

¹³⁴ Carew to Colonial Secretary, 10 March 1876. *Letters and Notes*, I: 58.

In anticipation of further trouble, the Legislative Council had passed on September 8 1875, the Peace and Good Order Ordinance which provided for the deportation of anyone from any district if necessary by force. Its deterrent effect was negligible, and Carew was forced to advise Gordon that a meeting would soon be needed to defuse the situation:

I have the honour to state to Your Excellency my firm conviction that great trouble will shortly arise in the section of the Colony represented by the hill tribes of Serua and Nadroga, unless action be at once taken in the matter; ... I further take upon myself the liberty of suggesting to Your Excellency the advisability of calling a meeting of the hills tribes of Nadroga and Serua as soon as convenient.¹³⁵

This meeting was eventually convened at Navola on the Serua Coast on the 4th and 5th of January 1876. Gordon himself addressed the meeting and laid down the law. While he promised that Christianity would not be imposed and that taxes would not initially be levied, he also declared his intention to establish a police camp in the interior and confirmed the appointment of a person (Carew) to rule over the interior.¹³⁶ In a rare admission that the disputes might be linked to the manner in which the Crown took possession of the islands, he added:

Understand this: it is not pretended that Great Britain has conquered you, as though you had been taken in war, to be enslaved or carried off to other places. You are not a conquered people but Great Britain has joined you to her in order that peace might be established in the country, and for the welfare of all alike.¹³⁷

It is difficult to know how this speech was received by the assembled leaders. A mere two days later, with hardly enough time for delegates to take the news back to their communities, Carew and a detachment of 140 armed policemen made their way from

¹³⁵ Carew to Gordon, 3 September 1875. *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 188-9.

¹³⁶ Ordinance XVI (November 1875) provided for the judicial administration of certain districts by resident commissioners appointed to oversee “native affairs” without jurisdiction over “whites”. Gordon used this strategy of containment in the hope that the difficulties in suppressing and pacifying the interior could be dealt with more summarily.

¹³⁷ Gordon, *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 390.

Cuvu to Nadi and then thirty-six miles into the centre of the island to the area's only government aligned village, Nasaucoko.¹³⁸

In the wake of this deployment, the shortcomings of the Navola meeting became immediately apparent. Kolikoli, chief of Beimana, informed Carew on his arrival in Nasaucoko that his force would be met head on if they persisted in marching further inland.¹³⁹ The police detachment was perceived in Colo as an armed invasion and Carew as its head was no longer welcomed. In a message to the Roko Tui Nadroga, one of the chiefs exclaimed:

Behold, now I see and know that you are bad minded toward us, and therefore gave us to a whiteman. You mean war; or why is it that soldiers have gone up to the waters of Nasaucoko? It is now a clear thing that you hate us.¹⁴⁰

Navola had failed because almost all tribes north of the line from Beimana had boycotted the meeting. The villages of Wala and Waibasaga in Naqaga which had broken rank to attend the meeting had instantly become targets of harassment. The other Naqaga tribes were not Christian. They had not attended the Navuso meeting and they had never submitted to a coastal chief let alone a foreign power. They were aware of land claims made against them and their neighbours and felt confident in their military capability to defend themselves.

The people of Noikoro too were angry that the chief of Navola, Manumanunivudi had claimed at the meeting to be their representative and that he was speaking on their behalf. They considered themselves an independent *vanua* and regarded Manumanunivudi's claim to be deeply offensive. Most of the tribes represented at the meeting were from the lower Sigatoka valley. But even amongst them there was discontent with the meeting. The Conua people were vexed at being placed under the

¹³⁸ Nasaucoko in Namataku district was the only village in that area with strong traditional ties to the Kalevu of Nadroga and close connections with Nadi. The inland route from Nadi was the same taken a few years earlier by Ratu Lewanavada and his two brothers when they had brought the *sulu ni lotu* to the village. It was the only secure route available. Talanoa discussion with villagers at Nasaucoko village. 2 August 2003.

¹³⁹ Carew to Gordon, 15 January 1876. *Letters and Notes*, I: 4.

¹⁴⁰ Roko Tui Nadroga's testimony at the *Bose Vakaturaga* in Waikava, 1876. "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1876. 7.

management of their bitter Nadroga enemies. Like Noikoro and the people of so many other Colo districts, they considered themselves as independent *vanua*.¹⁴¹ And as always, they were wary of Nadroga's political and Christian ambitions in the area. The Navola meeting did not therefore, as colonial officials had hoped, resolve anything. This was due in large part to the rapidity and manner in which the armed constabulary was despatched into the interior and a month after the meeting, Gordon conceded that the establishment of the camp at Nasaucoko had been premature.¹⁴²

The official purpose for the camp had been to exercise moral influence in the area, "partly to encourage and protect the well-disposed, and partly to overawe their neighbours".¹⁴³ Instead it caused panic. "The enemy were in such force" wrote Carew, and were "so excited by the sudden and unexpected nature of our arrival" that we could "have commenced a war". Obviously nervous about the effect created by the presence of the force Carew alerted Gordon that their arrival had thrown "the whole of this part of the interior, consisting 150 villages, into the greatest consternation, and I consider it almost certain that they will, in a spirit of desperation, make a combined attack on us in our camp".¹⁴⁴ Carew was also concerned about the comportment of the armed constabulary. Captain Olive and his men seemed to understand their mission as one of making war. In this respect, the men from Lau and Cakaudrove were said to be particularly impatient.¹⁴⁵ Their demeanour would not have been lost on Colo warriors. Ordinary men and women too were said to be agitated fearing that they would be removed in the same way that their neighbours from Magodro and Sabeto had been three years earlier.¹⁴⁶

Staying true to their pledge not to fire first, the Kai Colo continued to hold meetings. They kept communication lines open with Carew and his force at Nasaucoko largely through the intermediary of women. He was informed for instance that "the whole of the tribes from Nabutautau to the mouth of the Sigatoka were assembling a great force" and that if they proceeded further, they would be cut off from the coast.¹⁴⁷ The

¹⁴¹ A. J. Gordon to Gordon, 27 April 1876. *Letters and Notes*, I: 105-6.

¹⁴² Gordon to Carew, 4 February 1876. Carew Papers.

¹⁴³ Gordon to Shaw-Lefevre, 6 July 1876. *Records of Private and Public Life*, II: 70.

¹⁴⁴ Carew to Colonial Secretary, 19 January 1876. *Letters and Notes*, I: 13.

¹⁴⁵ Carew to Gordon, 19 January 1876. *Letters and Notes*, I: 9.

¹⁴⁶ Olive to Gordon, 4 February 1876. *Letters and Notes*, I: 31.

¹⁴⁷ Carew to Colonial Secretary, 19 January 1876. *Letters and Notes*, I: 12-13.

garrison had effectively been surrounded and the food supplies cut. To make matters worse for them, the cash that colonial officials had brought for trading purposes had no value inland and negated any opportunity they may have had to bargain themselves out of starvation. In these early days of attrition, the resolve and organisation of Colo seemed to gain ascendancy over the confusion and disarray which prevailed in the colonial camp. The first victim of this war of nerves was Captain Olive who after a close encounter with Kai Colo and severe rebukes by Carew and Gordon, became mentally unstable and was ordered back to Levuka for stress leave.

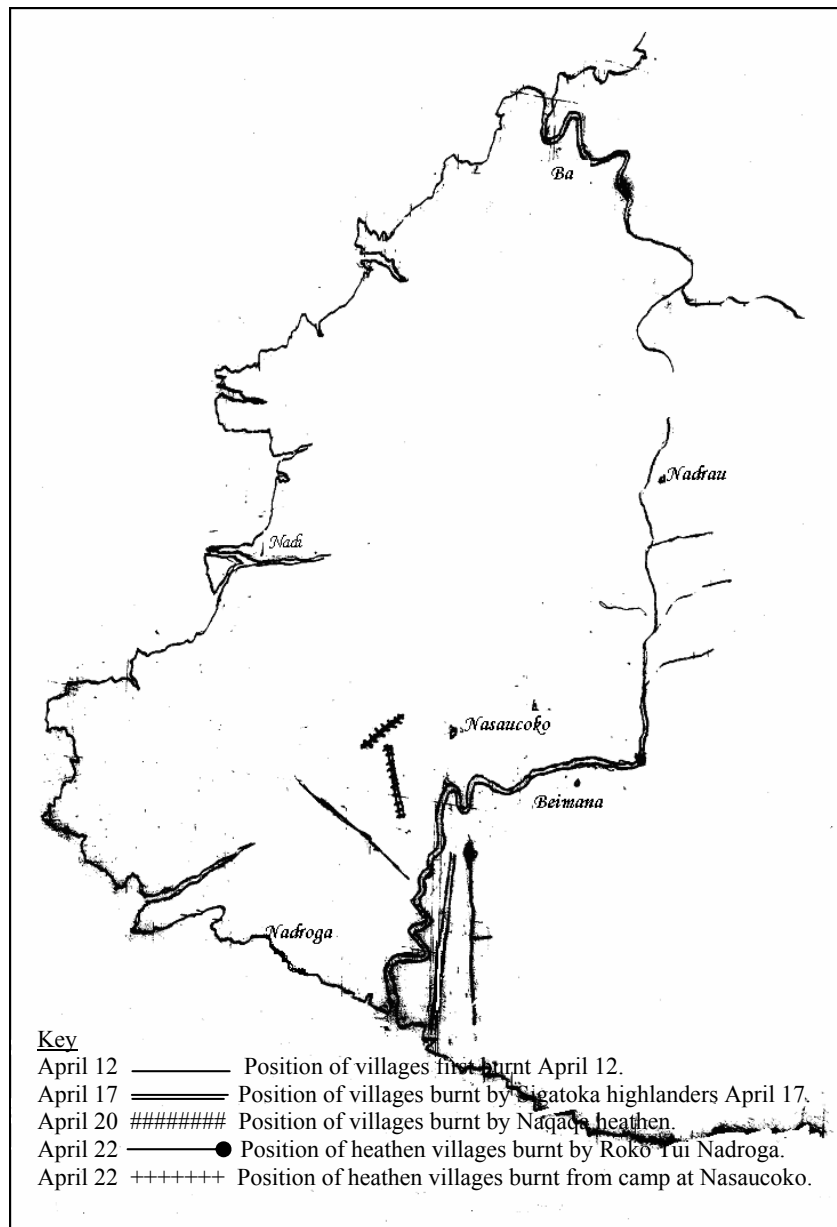
Carew's response to the siege was to continue with a policy of prudent diplomacy and "to proceed most carefully and slowly for a considerable time". His proficiency in the language, his appreciation and familiarity with the culture, and his close friendships with many Kai Colo had engendered in him an untypical degree of admiration for them. From the confines of the camp, he wrote to Gordon, "I myself respect these men for their daring, their activity, and love of freedom, and hospitality to those they do not suspect of being connected with their enemies".¹⁴⁸ Carew was determined to hold out against the now incessant and increasingly impetuous calls from the coast to launch an all out war. "Our policy is a waiting one", he wrote. "The outside world in Fiji cannot understand any other than a fighting policy, and reckless running here and there, and blazing off of guns, etc."¹⁴⁹ He too chose to communicate with loyal and enemy towns "in a most round-about manner with the agency of women".¹⁵⁰ He also used the intelligence of Fijian mission teachers stationed on the fringe of unsettled districts to find out about the true allegiance of chiefs.

At this point, far from being formidable in its organisation or acting as an all-knowing, all conquering, and all-powerful machine, colonialism in Fiji appeared fragile, vulnerable, and quite susceptible to attacks from disaffected quarters of the population. In addition, and despite Carew's presence, the administration's knowledge of the interior was at best patchy (see the adjoined map by Arthur J. Gordon).

¹⁴⁸ Carew to Gordon, 23 January 1876. *Letters and Notes*, I: 22.

¹⁴⁹ Carew to Gordon, 7 February 1876. *Letters and Notes*, I: 36. See also Carew to Colonial Secretary, 10 March 1876. *Letters and Notes*, I: 58.

¹⁵⁰ Carew to Gordon, 26 January 1876. *Letters and Notes*, I: 24. The agency of women in resistance is discussed further in Chapter Seven.



Map 7: Arthur J. Gordon's map of the war area.¹⁵¹

Gordon could not count on much military support either. Gordon also had to contend with dissention from within his own ranks. Colonel Pratt who commanded a small force of royal engineers (about twenty men) preferred to see the conflict spread so that there would be more land to confiscate, and a better chance of “clearing off the natives”.¹⁵² In any case, the engineers were hopelessly ill-equipped and unprepared for this kind of conflict and would probably have been defeated. Pratt refused Gordon

¹⁵¹ From despatch 88, 6 May 1876, 76/7646, CO 83/10. PRO. I have retyped the key and place names for better legibility.

¹⁵² Gordon, *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 430.

the services of his men to serve in battle (at least until reinforcements could be secured from other colonies), and it became increasingly evident that the government would rely extensively on the goodwill and support of local allies first for its survival and later, for its success.¹⁵³

Probably unaware of their opponents' own frailties and limitations, Kai Colo continued their deliberations about the most expedient and effective means of negotiating a resolution to the immediate crisis created by the establishment of the Nasaucoko camp. Two broad camps emerged from these discussions. Kolikoli, chief of Beimana remained steadfastly committed to the pledges he had taken at Navuso and Navola. Rabalabala of Koroinasau and Vakayavanuku, the newly appointed Buli (district officer) of Vatukarasa (Serua coast) seemed keen to back the new colonial order. For them, cooperation was probably the most effective way of retaining some power and autonomy. But these men must also have realised the danger that a substantial military confrontation and a potential defeat would pose for the well-being of their people. With such motives in mind and a sense of urgency to avert an open war, these chiefs initiated meetings of their own. The last of these was held at the end of March at 1876 at Vatukarasa.¹⁵⁴ Neither side managed to persuade the other of the soundness and sensibility of its position and the impasse continued.

The opposing faction took a much more militant stance on the violation of Colo space. Its position was further hardened by the arrival in mid-February of reinforcements at the Nasaucoko camp followed by reports that a number of "whites" had "come to Nadroga to make war".¹⁵⁵ A month later, a state of emergency was proclaimed for the provinces of Namosi, Serua, and Nadroga and the districts of Vuda, Nadi, Veitoga, Nadrau, Nalawa, Nailega, Matailobau, Nadawarau, Soloira, and Navunaqumu except those areas situated within two miles of the coast.¹⁵⁶ This measure effectively suspended the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and restricted all movement in and out of interior districts. In their combined effect, these

¹⁵³ Gordon, *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 430.

¹⁵⁴ Carew to Colonial Secretary, 1 April 1876. *Letters and Notes*, I: 64.

¹⁵⁵ Carew to Gordon, 24 February 1876. *Letters and Notes*, I: 52. See also Gordon to Carew, 17 February 1876. Carew Papers.

¹⁵⁶ *Royal Fiji Gazette*, 18 March 1876.

developments rendered the conciliatory position less defensible and the militant stance more justifiable.

Gaining prominence at the head of the anti-*lotu* and anti-government movement was Mudu, chief of Naicobocobo in the Naqalimare district of the lower Sigatoka Valley. With the support of Nabisiki, Nagusudradra (a prominent chief of Matawalu in Naqaqa district east of Nasaucoko¹⁵⁷), Nauluniqili¹⁵⁸ (also of Naqalimare), Nagusulevu chief of Nadralla (lower Sigatoka), Reba (of Navunasoni) and several chiefs from Tavuni (lower Sigatoka), Mudu persuaded other disaffected tribes that the time had come to meet force with force, to drive the police out, and remove the governor's commissioner from their territory. Joining forces with them was the intractable village of Nabutautau. Gordon claims that the village had become a haven for refugees from previous conflicts and several fugitives from the law, and that consequently the village was bound to instigate trouble.¹⁵⁹ While there may be some truth in this observation, it is also possible that such comments were intended to discredit Nabutautau's long history of fiercely guarded independence.

That this movement was gaining a significant following is confirmed by reports that government employees including a member of the armed constabulary and a senior government official (or Buli) had defected and joined ranks with Colo. From the lower Sigatoka Valley, through Naqaqa in the centre, and eastwards to Noikoro, large bands of men were practising *kalou rere*, described by a nervous missionary as "a process by which they are supposed to become as invulnerable as Achilles".¹⁶⁰ By the first week of April, the district of Beimana had switched its allegiance and the people had become impatient with Kolikoli's persistent efforts to work with the government. They declared that "they, the people, are rulers, and not the chiefs, who are only

¹⁵⁷ Nagusudradra had already made his position known on the second day after the colonial force's arrival at Nasaucoko by offering Carew and his troops a whale's tooth and begging them not to venture beyond the village. He had informed Carew that the whole country was up in arms, well supplied with ammunition, and well organised to fight. Carew to Colonial Secretary, 19 January 1876. *Letters and Notes*, I: 12.

¹⁵⁸ Mudu and Nauluniqili had been at Navuso but had been annoyed by the display of twelve-pound rocket practice at the meeting, saying that the Government had tried to frighten them. Carew to Gordon, 16 January 1876. *Letters and Notes*, I: 6.

¹⁵⁹ Gordon, *Letters and Notes*, I: xi.

¹⁶⁰ Webb to Gordon, 10 February 1876. *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 516.

appointed to carry out the public will".¹⁶¹ In a despatch sent on April 2, Carew explained to Gordon that the Kai Colo would rather go to prison than surrender their independence.¹⁶² Matters had finally come to a head.

Hence before the onset of the war, resistance in Fiji manifested itself through multiple points of engagement with power. In its build up, resistance was not exerted against colonialism per se. Rather it came from various deployments of power by rival tribal groups with a long prior history of enmity, the threat posed by religious incursions, and the unpleasant experience of tax and labour. It also came from the autonomic status of the polities and their desire to protect territory from the designs of foreigners (both local and foreign). The failure of a long process of negotiation indicates that both sides were willing to reconcile their differences before the onset of a major conflict but that both were confident of winning the war if hostilities were to begin. The perception that the measles epidemic was a sign of the treacherous intentions of the new administration only aggravated the situation. It also shows that colonial power was fragmented, keen to impose its will and yet limited in its capacity to do so, sensitive to local welfare yet guilty of important errors of judgement, heavily dependent on the support of coastal chiefs and yet often at odds with the interests of other European allies.

The 1876 War

On April 10 1876, Kolikoli was again visited by Mudu and Nauluniqili and asked to join a planned attack on Vunarosawa, the outpost town of the Koroba district. Finding himself caught in a dangerous tug of war, and torn between his fear of Nadroga, his loyalty to the government, and his kinship ties with his Colo brethren, the old chief opted for a retreat into neutrality. He refused Mudu's overtures to join the fight just as he had declined Carew's offer to send government soldiers to Beimana for his own protection. Several hesitant villages on the fringe of the conflict, particularly in the upper Wainimala and certain areas of Noikoro, also remained undecided and opted for caution. They were torn by their fear of government, their sense of political pragmatism, and their sympathy and obligations to their relatives and traditional

¹⁶¹ Carew to Gordon, 2 April 1876. *Letters and Notes*, I: 66.

¹⁶² Carew to Gordon, 2 April 1876. *Notes and Letters*, I: 66.

trading partners. The struggle was delicately poised and many adopted the safety of a wait and see policy.



Map 8: Map of Colo villages and vanua involved in the 1876 war.

All evidence indicates that armed hostilities began on April 12 1876 with a combined Colo attack on eight small Christian villages around the Mount Koroba area on the Nadi-Nadroga border. Having secured control over the area west of Nasaucoko, the Colo forces effectively surrounded the colonial garrison. But while Carew was in hourly expectation of an attack in the next few days,¹⁶³ the Colo force seemed satisfied with the neutralising effects of the encirclement. In the meantime it pursued other more pressing objectives. Among those was the town of Burua which, had it fallen, would have delivered the entire coast between Cuvu and Nadi to the Colo force. In the event, Ratu Navula (Buli of Nadi and in charge of the defence of the town) sent a whale's tooth to the Kalevu (Ratu Luke) asking him for assistance.¹⁶⁴ The town held out and the Colo army was forced to direct its next move to the village

¹⁶³ Gordon, *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 432.

¹⁶⁴ Grayburn to Gordon, 29 April 1876. *Letters and Notes*, I: 110.

of Nadromai, a mere four miles from Cuvu. In customary fashion a herald was sent to inform the Kalevu of the intention to attack the village.¹⁶⁵



Map 9: Map of the 1876 general war area.

As a front was established to Nadroga's north on April 17 with the attack on Nadromai, another was opened simultaneously to the east with a large-scale assault on Batiri villages (see maps 7 and 8). These villages were all located on the east bank of the Sigatoka River south of Tavuni and eastwards along the coast to Korotogo. The Colo warriors all came from the neighbouring villages of Tavuni, Nadrala, Nokonoko,

¹⁶⁵ For a description of the attack see Knollys to Carew, 29 April 1876. Carew Papers.

Vatuvoko, Nakasaleka, Koroivatuma and Bukutia. In the same fashion as those of Koroba, all Christian villages in the area were burnt. However, a number of women (about four in total) and a child who had failed to evacuate in time were caught in the mayhem and killed. All other women and children had already been moved to safer places on the west bank of the river. Reports indicate that two Nadroga men, and five “devils” died in the fighting but the figure is likely to be a little higher. Estimates of people killed on the Nadroga side during this attack vary from six to twenty.¹⁶⁶ The nature of the raid suggests that coastal villages were waiting, prepared and ready for the assault.

These attacks by Colo forces were widely described by colonial officials as treacherous, savage, destructive, and disorderly. Such representations reflect the authority and power of the forces that controlled the process by which “savage” and “savagery” were defined. Contrary to popular belief, these were not wholesale slaughters followed by rowdy cannibal feasts. The target villages had been warned of the attack and evacuated accordingly. In the attacks on the Koroba villages only two deaths were reported. They occurred in the village of Nawaqa just two miles north-west of Nasaucoko. These were deliberate strikes on villages deemed to be aligned with the *lotu*. They were calculated to stop the advances of Christian, coastal, settler, and colonial interests in the area and the threats to the territorial, political, and religious independence of Colo, that they posed. The attacks on Koroba permitted Colo to cut the camp from its main communication, supply, and escape routes to the Nadi coast. It is significant that the people from surrounding villages who had profited from a brisk trade with the camp before the beginning of the war were merely turned away by Colo soldiers. No unnecessary force seems to have been used there. The evidently pre-concerted arrangement to attack Nadromai and the Batiri towns simultaneously was probably intended to cordon off the area and severely restrict the movement of the Kalevu and his forces.

The counter-offensive, however, was swift and decisive. The very next day (18 April), Ratu Luke Nakulanikoro (the Kalevu) led his forces on a drive up the eastern bank of

¹⁶⁶ Esala Seru to Buli Serua, 17 April 1876. *Letters and Notes*, I: 74. See also despatch 88, 6 May 1876, 76/7546, CO 83/10. PRO. The most likely number of people killed during the attack on Batiri villages is thirteen. See the list of murdered villagers produced at the August trial of the accused. Gordon, *Letters and Notes*, I: 424.

the river and forced Colo soldiers into Tavuni Fort. The size and speed of the response suggests that the Nadroga force had been expecting and preparing for war for a considerable time. Tavuni Fort was quickly taken as were the towns of Nadralla (20th April) and Nokonoko (on the west bank). These were the same villages that his father Ratu Kini Nanovo had tried to conquer a few years earlier. The towns were promptly burnt forcing the Colo army to withdraw and regroup at the Naqalimare strongholds of Bukutia and Koroivatuma. Three days later, the Nadroga force retired to the coast.

On April 24, a third front opened in the centre of the island at Tatuba (one of only two pro-government villages in Naqaqa), where the tribes of Wairoro, Nabutautau, and Naqaqa had assembled a large force intent on forcing any last remaining dissenting villages to join the fight. Tatuba was always likely to be a flashpoint after breaking covenant in January and participating in the Navola meeting. Reports indicate that three Tatuba men died in the ensuing clash, although no details are available of casualties on the Colo side. This incident provided the colonial force at Nasaucoke with a reason to intervene in the conflict. A detachment was sent to Tatuba and the other besieged village of Wala, with instructions to secure the villages and drive the mountaineers out. The expedition came back triumphantly two days later claiming to have burnt two Colo villages, killed Nabisiki, and secured Tatuba and Wala. Carew reported somewhat victoriously that “these savages have now received such a severe check upon the head of the river to the mouth, that I believe they will no longer be able to act on the offensive”.¹⁶⁷ Carew’s enthusiasm was premature. Nabisiki was not dead. He was in fact preparing a march to Vatumali (a few miles from Nasaucoke) from Waibasaga, one of the villages supposedly burnt by government soldiers.

There would be several other such reports during the war claiming the defeat of Colo forces and their impending demise. But the government was continuously overrating its efficacy and calculating its success by the number of villages it was burning.¹⁶⁸ But most villages attacked and burnt by the colonial force were already empty when the soldiers moved in. In the initial stages of the war therefore, very few Kai Colo were caught. They were fighting a guerrilla war. After the destruction of their village

¹⁶⁷ Carew to Colonial Secretary, 26 April 1876. *Notes and Letters*, I: 95.

¹⁶⁸ For similar tendencies by the British imperial army against Maori tribes in the New Zealand Wars, see James Belich, *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict*. Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1986.

bases, they would disperse and reconvene in other locations from where they would regroup, recover and launch more counter-attacks. As always, a prime consideration for them was to minimise the loss of life. In fact, the war was likened to a huge game of hide and seek¹⁶⁹ in which thorough knowledge of the terrain gave the Colo force a slight edge over their opponents.

By the end of April, the Governor had sent his aide de camp, Arthur J. Gordon, to Cuvu with instructions to oversee military operations from the Nadroga coast and to restrain the Kalevu and his apparently overzealous force from excessive military engagement with the enemy. By then however, the Kalevu and his allies were firmly in control of the situation. Ratu Luke had sent tabua to his allies in Serua, Namosi, and Nadi and had amassed a considerable force of auxiliaries capable of undertaking a war without the supervision of the young and inexperienced A. J. Gordon. This war would be fought over local issues on Fijian terms and Gordon's command over the southern campaign was never more than nominal.

The initiatives taken by coastal chiefs in the south were to prove fortuitous for the colonial administration. They had mustered a sizeable army at no cost to the cash-strapped government. All 1200 men of the southern army gave their aid as feudal services, neither receiving nor expecting pay. Thirty-two pounds and ten shillings was all Gordon had to find to pay for the wages of Arthur J. Gordon's twenty bodyguards.¹⁷⁰ The chiefs of the southern coast also disposed of more knowledge and intelligence about the terrain and were better acquainted with the tactics and stratagem of the enemy than colonial troops could ever be.

Weakened by the withdrawal of Pratt's support, the Governor chose to place his faith in the hands of his local allies. He ordered each province to supply thirty men to reinforce the war campaign. This, he thought, would get the whole country involved in the suppression and avoid giving it the appearance of a conflict between whites and blacks.¹⁷¹ An enemy of the state was thus successfully converted into an enemy of the 'nation'. Fijian leadership and participation played an essential role in this process

¹⁶⁹ Brewster, 1922: 59.

¹⁷⁰ Gordon to Shaw-Lefevre, 6 July 1876. *Records of Private and Public Life*, II: 71.

¹⁷¹ Gordon to Carnarvon, 18 November 1876. *Records of Private and Public Life*, II: 225.

and allowed Gordon to fight a short, cheap and successful war in Colo.¹⁷² The campaign was also plagued from the beginning by differences of opinion and clashes of personality among the handful of British officials who presided over the operations. The most senior of these officers, Captain Knollys, had the embarrassment of having his own guide (Black Brown) apprehended by Ratu Luke for supplying powder to the enemy.¹⁷³ Progress on the battlefield was also slowed because in spite of their success, Fijian officers were rarely trusted by their British superiors. In the end however, all key battles were won through the astuteness of these Fijian chiefs. They saved the governor from certain embarrassment and the likelihood of a serious reprimand.¹⁷⁴

The month of May brought more volatility and insecurity to the regions directly affected by the war. Walking along the western edge of the conflict on the track from Nadi to Cuvu, Gordon noticed several burning villages in the distance. He also observed that the friendly villages in which he slept had been stripped of their able-bodied men,¹⁷⁵ causing increasing social and economic disruption and apprehension. By mid May, the Colo blockade of Nasauoko had become so effective that the camp had exhausted its food supply. Facing certain starvation, the new commander of the garrison, Captain Knollys, ordered raids deep in enemy country not so much to fight but to plunder gardens. The little that his troops found suggests that both sides were beginning to feel the costly effects of war. In Naqalimare, villagers were busy fortifying their positions with palisades and earthworks, and securing provisions in anticipation of a long drawn out struggle.¹⁷⁶ Clearly, the Colo army was much better organised and coordinated than the colonial administration had presumed. Mudu and

¹⁷² The Colo war of 1876 was one of Britain's least expensive colonial wars. In all, the governor found it necessary to seek a supplementary vote of only £1000 (for additional recruits and transport costs) from the Legislative Council to suppress the disturbances. Despatch 97 to the Colonial Office, 7 June 1876, 76/8542, CO 83/10. PRO. By his estimates the total cost of the war was no more than £1600. Gordon, *Letters and Notes*, I: xx.

¹⁷³ Knollys to Carew, 29 April 1876. Carew Papers.

¹⁷⁴ Questioning Gordon's strategy of using Fijian chiefs to fight the war, Lord Carnarvon wrote in July 1876 "failure would have involved more than defeat of a few Fijian chiefs: it would have compromised the whole of the government and made absolutely necessary the employment of troops under very unfavourable circumstances." Cited in Macnaught: 63. Two years later, Gordon acknowledged that without their help "a very long and dangerous contest would have ensued". Gordon to Secretary of State for Colonies, 30 September 1878. *Records of Private and Public Life*, III: 174.

¹⁷⁵ Gordon, *Records of Private and Public Life*, II: 19.

¹⁷⁶ Despatch 112, 1 July 1876, 76/10039, CO 83/10. PRO.

Nabisiki were proving to be more talented strategists than it had been prepared to admit and Gordon was forced into offering a reward for their apprehension:

It might not improbably result in their being killed, which would be a good riddance, but it might possibly lead to their being taken alive, which I should much prefer, for the act of their being tried and hanged, as they probably would be, would strike infinitely more terror than their being knocked on the head in a scrimmage.¹⁷⁷

In the coastal villages of Nadroga and Serua, the cost of providing for accommodation and food for an army of such a size, placed a huge burden on the labour and resources of these host communities. This perhaps more than a desire to conquer was the factor that led Ratu Luke to take matters into his own hands and to launch a major offensive.

The southern force had established a camp about ten miles up the Sigatoka River at Navalili. The force consisted of more than a thousand fighting men under the leadership of Ratu Luke Nakulanikoro. Also there to lend a hand were the Buli of Serua Ratu Kinijaoti Qaqabokola, and Ratu Matanitobua the Roko Tui of Namosi. There were also small detachments from the islands of Malolo and Vatulele, and a number of men from Koroinasau commanded by chief Rabalabala. On May 31st, Serua soldiers intercepted a warring party from Naqalimare intent on attacking the Navalili camp. They were beaten off and a “noted priestess and fighting woman of the Qalimari tribe” was killed along with a number of other Kai Colo.¹⁷⁸ While Colo soldiers retreated, the Nadroga force launched an all out assault on the towns of Bukutia and Koroivatuma. By the 8th of June, both towns had been destroyed and the fugitives including many women and children had found refuge at the impregnable Matanavatu marble rock fortress near Toga.

The fortress contained an extensive labyrinth of caves, fresh water, food provisions to last several months,¹⁷⁹ and a large stock of knives, axes, muskets and ammunition.

¹⁷⁷ Gordon to Knollys, 26 May 1876. *Records of Private and Public Life*, II: 42.

¹⁷⁸ Despatch 112, 1 July 1876, 76/10039, CO 83/10. PRO.

¹⁷⁹ The quantity of food stored at Matanavatu was so huge that it fed the Nadroga army for a whole week and neighbouring Beimana villages for another two months after the battle. Gordon to Knollys, 10 July 1876. *Records of Private and Public Life*, II: 73.

Both sides thought it unassailable with the Colo army determined to hold out and outlast their foes. However, on the 17th of June, a lapse of vigilance by Colo sentries allowed Ratu Luke the break he needed to secure the entrance of the main cave. After a brief battle in which thirty eight Colo men were killed (and two on the government side) the rest of the occupants surrendered.¹⁸⁰ Late on the scene and surprised by the speed of the capture, Arthur J. Gordon wrote that the number who turned out of the caves was almost equal to that of the government force (about 1200). Some were from as far away as Nabutautau.¹⁸¹

The taking of Matanavatu was a turning point in the war because although most of the Colo army managed to escape they did so in disarray. Those who fled were too demoralised, dispersed, and hungry, and no longer capable of mounting further substantial resistance. But rather than surrender to their Nadroga rivals, they ran towards the Nadi border where as they hoped they were captured by Nadi forces and taken to Burua. Thus deprived of their prize, the enraged Nadroga soldiers burnt Nadi gardens on their way back to Cuvu.¹⁸² By June 24th, the whole area south of Beimana had been taken. Severe retribution followed the fall of southern Colo. In its sweep northwards, the southern army left a long trail of villages plundered and burnt. Every single village great or small had been reduced to ashes.¹⁸³ Mudu, the principal leaders of other southern Colo tribes, about eight hundred other prisoners, together with some two hundred muskets had fallen into government hands.¹⁸⁴

The sudden and unexpected success of the southern army rendered the position of Naqaqa, Noikoro and Navatusila tribes immediately more perilous. The government had opened a new front in Nadrau a few miles north of Nabutautau with a contingent of more than 500 men under the leadership of Captain Knollys (who had been relieved in Nasaucoko by Le Hunte) and Ratu Navolioni Vuki, the Bauan Roko Tui of Ba. Most of the men were members of the trained and drilled police force encamped at Nasaucoko, and had been replaced there mainly by reinforcements from the eastern islands of Kadavu, Lau and Cakaudrove. Immediately after settling into Nadrau, word

¹⁸⁰ A. J. Gordon to Carew, 18 June 1876. Carew Papers.

¹⁸¹ A. J. Gordon to Carew, 19 June 1876. Carew Papers.

¹⁸² Knollys to Gordon, 30 May 1876. *Letters and Notes*, II: 258.

¹⁸³ Gordon to Knollys, 22 June 1876. *Records of Private and Public Life*, II: 49.

¹⁸⁴ Despatch 112, 1 July 1876, 76/10039, CO 83/10. PRO.

had been sent to Nabutautau to surrender. In the south, several Noikoro villages had sensed the tide turning and sent word to Carew that they wished to *soro*.¹⁸⁵ The loss of these allies further weakened the alliance of Colo tribes. The diplomatic efforts of Carew were also bearing fruit to the east. The border towns of Wainimala had adopted a neutral position at the beginning of the conflict. Now they formed a major obstacle for Kai Colo attempting to escape east.¹⁸⁶ Surreptitiously of course, they hoped to be rewarded by having the government extend their influence over the neighbouring but disobedient Noikoro tribes. With Nasaucoko completing the encirclement of the interior by guarding escape routes to the west, Nabisiki and his allies were effectively trapped between Beimana in the south-west and Nadrau in the north-east.

Confronted by such odds, many insurgents chose to tempt an escape east to Wainimala and north-west to Sabeto. Many others chose to remain in the area in small less detectable groups, hoping to survive through evasion. Among them were several leaders including Nabisiki and Nagusudradra who were both finally captured in mid-July. Some others determined to defy the government until the end, chose to remain in their villages. In this manner, entire villages with stocks of food prepared to last for several weeks, journeyed across the hills to seek shelter in remote caves. For instance, when the government force stormed Nabutautau on July 2nd, it had already been evacuated. It took the government a month to finally locate these people and their hideouts. On the 16th of July, a report was received that an entire Naqaqa tribe was hiding in the Lobo ni Koro caves. After a siege of two days and two nights, the occupants were enticed out. Had they been aware that the government's stock of ammunition at Levuka was exhausted a week earlier,¹⁸⁷ they might not have surrendered so easily. They had large supplies of yam, ample fresh water fifty-six guns and plenty of ammunition.¹⁸⁸ The last battle took place ten days later in the northern district of Nacawanisa where at the Nanuwai caves, Nasaqanivere, a deserter from the armed constabulary, led the last Colo stand. After a week of obstinate defence involving many clashes, several losses on both sides, some trickery, some

¹⁸⁵ Traditional Fijian apology.

¹⁸⁶ Carew estimated that without the support of Wainimala tribes, the conflict would have been much longer and more expensive. See the entry in his "Notebook" for 29 July 1876. Carew Papers.

¹⁸⁷ Gordon to Knollys, 10 July 1876. *Records of Private and Public Life*, II: 73.

¹⁸⁸ Macnaught, 1971: 53.

negotiation and even aural torture, the last remaining mountaineers gave themselves up.

Most captured Colo men from this latter half of the conflict were marched to Ba. The principal leaders however, were taken to Vatula where the Governor himself was preparing charges and a trial against them. He had done the same at Nasigatoka on the 29th of June. On that occasion, thirty-seven prisoners had been tried with fourteen of them receiving the death sentence.¹⁸⁹ The next day, those found guilty of treason and the Batiri murders were hanged at one end of the *rara* while the others were shot in the middle of the ground. Mudu was one of the latter though he resisted until the end by running up and down the ground and urging his comrades to do the same. He was wounded first before a shot to the head finally killed him.¹⁹⁰ The bodies were buried in three graves, Mudu's in a mat. There was one escape during the night when Tabuarua, a professional poisoner, managed to free himself, but he was later recaptured in Naqaqa and shot by firing squad in Nasaucoko. These executions were not only necessary to eliminate the threat that these men posed as military adversaries. The men also represented a challenge to the legitimacy of the colonial administration as the new arbiter of power in Fijian affairs. This challenge needed to be eradicated publicly as a demonstration of the new government's capability and determination to quell any other rising.

Seventy men were tried at Vatula. Eighteen received the death penalty but twelve had their sentences commuted including Nagusudradra who was later re-instated as chief of Matawalu.¹⁹¹ The other six were executed in the village on the 4th of August including Nabisiki who was shot on August 8th allegedly while trying to escape. Nabisiki's escape would have been fortuitous for Gordon was struggling to find the necessary evidence against him to impose the death penalty.¹⁹² Nasaqanivere was also

¹⁸⁹ Despatch 112, 1 July 1876, 76/10039, CO 83/10. PRO. See also Gordon to Carew, 30 June 1876. Carew Papers.

¹⁹⁰ Gordon, *Records of Private and Public Life*, II: 54-5.

¹⁹¹ Despatch 5, Thurston to Secretary of State for Colonies (hereafter SS), 11 January 1886. Colonial Secretary's Office (hereafter CSO) Despatches to SS. NAF.

¹⁹² Gordon to Knollys, 22 July 1876. *Records of Private and Public Life*, II: 89. See also Carew's Notebook entry of 20 July 1876. MS 105 – 2. Carew Papers.

among those executed.¹⁹³ Others were rounded up over the next two months, tried and executed on two separate occasions at Nasaucoko.¹⁹⁴ In response to calls for clemency (particularly from William Macgregor and David Wilkinson),¹⁹⁵ Gordon justified his decision by arguing that these executions were exemplary punishment needed to secure “future good behaviour” of others. This very public display of force would “strike terror” among the people by making an example of the leaders. It would be more efficacious than to pursue a policy of deporting entire tribes as was the practice under the former Cakobau administration.¹⁹⁶

Gordon also had a few of the more dangerous prisoners deported outside of Viti Levu under the Peace and Good Order Ordinance of 1875. About 120 others were sentenced to hard labour on public works for periods ranging from two to five years. The rest were allowed to return to their districts. However, all persons whose villages were situated on hills or in positions difficult of access were prohibited from returning and they were ordered instead to build new villages in more accessible locations. The military headquarters at Nasaucoko were eventually removed to Natuatuacoko (Fort Carnarvon) for easier access to all districts requiring continued surveillance.¹⁹⁷

Reflections

Before he left Nasaucoko on the 14th of August, Gordon wrote one last despatch to the Colonial Office in London to inform them of the “entire suppression of disturbances in Viti Levu and restoration of order”.¹⁹⁸ But there had always been an order in the interior. This was the installation of a new order, a colonial order. And these were not mere “disturbances”. Gordon went out of his way not to use the term “war” or any other term implying warfare in any his despatches. He could not call it a “war” because he would have had to surrender command to the military and employ Her

¹⁹³ A total of nineteen men were condemned to death at Vatula. All except six had their sentences commuted. Two were hanged and four were shot by firing squad. See the August 1876 entries in Carew’s “Notebook”. MS 105 – 2. Carew Papers.

¹⁹⁴ Carew speaks of the trial of thirty-three men and the execution of seven of them in early October. Gordon returned later in the month to try fifteen more, pardoning three, commuting seven others to imprisonment, and executing five. Gordon, *Records of Private and Public Life*, II: 193. The trunk of the tree from which these men were hanged still stands today.

¹⁹⁵ See in particular Dr. Macgregor’s letter to Gordon, 16 July 1876. *Letters and Notes*, II: 173.

¹⁹⁶ Gordon to Macgregor, 22 July 1876. *Records of Private and Public Life*, II: 89.

¹⁹⁷ Gordon, *Letters and Notes*, I: xix.

¹⁹⁸ Despatch 124, 14 August 1876, 76/12219, CO 83/10. PRO.

Majesty's troops at considerable expense and delay.¹⁹⁹ It was only once the war had been won that he called it his "little war". This appellation has survived into modern historiography as "Gordon's Little War".²⁰⁰ But neither was it ever "Gordon's", nor was it "little". It was a war whose roots lay in the power struggles of pre-cession days and particularly the unresolved question of Bauan and Christian influence in the interior of Viti Levu. During the war itself, Colo's opponents were variously referred to as the *lotu* (Christian), the *matanitu* (government) and sometimes the coast, reflecting the multi-layered constitution and agenda of the colonial force. It only became a colonial war once the government established the police post in the interior. Until then, colonialism had been nominal and its signs and symbols were limited to the occasional visit of a European official. The continuity was provided by a profound desire by Kai Colo to remain autonomous and a rejection of all attempts (Christian, Bauan, coastal, chiefly or British) to form a larger political entity in which they would play a subordinate part. They were Kai Colo, not Kai Viti.

Kai Colo were not all united in this endeavour. Those who chose the side of colonial power did so with good reason. Compliance and collaboration (even when feigned) as opposed to armed resistance, can be the subtle means by which a degree of control can be retained, and desired outcomes achieved.²⁰¹ There always were therefore, numerous players on centre stage all struggling to shape the outcome of the war. They came to the conflict with varying agendas, loyalties and sympathies. They fought or collaborated for various reasons against various forces at various times. No one single group therefore, could ever claim monopoly over power or agency at any time.

On the basis of the evidence presented in the chapter, I am presuming that Kai Colo fought for the preservation of their order, their territory and resources, their people and the way they understood the world around them. They chose a military option to

¹⁹⁹ Gordon to Carnarvon, 18 November 1876. *Records of Private and Public Life*, II: 225.

²⁰⁰ "The story of a little war" is the subtitle of Gordon's *Letters and Notes Written During the Disturbances in the Highlands (Known as the "Devil Country") of Viti Levu, Fiji*. 1876. Edinburgh: Privately Printed by R. & R Clark, 1879. Among others who have used the term, see Brewster, 1922; 34, 47, 67. William Morrell, *Britain in the Pacific Islands*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960. 364-9; Scarr, 1984: 76; and Martha Kaplan and John Kelly "On Discourse and Power: 'Cults' and 'Orientals' in Fiji." in *American Ethnologist*. 26: 4, 1999. 843-63.

²⁰¹ For other Oceanic examples of this strategy, see Peter Hempenstall, *Pacific Islanders Under German Rule: A Study in the Meaning of Colonial Resistance*. Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1978; and Peter Hempenstall and Noel Rutherford, *Protest and Dissent in the Colonial Pacific*. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies University of the South Pacific, 1984.

secure their geographical, economic, and cultural space. Their stratagem was adapted for Fijian warfare. In this war they faced an enemy with multiple dimension to which their methods of warfare proved ultimately ill-suited. Laxity in the patrol and surveillance of key defence positions undermined the successes achieved notably in guerrilla warfare. It can also be argued that Colo soldiers often surrendered prematurely. Yet, minimizing loss of life always seemed of primary importance in their engagement with the enemy. The government force itself lost relatively few troops. This has less to do with superior tactical ability than with the Colo protocol of announcing intentions to the enemy before the act. Consequently the burning of a village for Kai Colo was more symbolic of victory than killing a large number of its inhabitants. A burning village signified loss of sovereignty. Defeated occupants expected to lose ownership of surrounding lands and to be forced into new tributary relationships with their conquerors. That Colo suffered many more losses than government forces can be attributed partly to the fact that the armed constabulary was not bound by similar protocol.²⁰² Their reputation was for reckless, violent, and vile behaviour. Evidently, government troops also benefited from a larger arsenal of weapons and numerical advantage over their Colo counterparts.

For the people of Colo, the war was less about resistance than about the preservation of independence. It did not take place simply because of colonialism or uniquely in response to colonialism. It had a long prior history with many interweaving factors, actors, events, and locations most of which are different from those normally given significance by existing histories of Fiji. Cession had represented the end of an epoch and the beginning of a new one for most Europeans and Fijian chiefs. But for the people in the interior, the measles epidemic of 1875 was much more of a watershed. So was the war of 1876. With their leadership decimated first by measles and then by the war, it would take a long time for ordinary people to recover from their first experience of the new colonial order. The government force had left the whole Colo country burning – “a land wasted by fire in very truth”, as Gordon remarked upon leaving the interior.²⁰³ More than a thousand men and women had been displaced to Sigatoka and Ba to serve prison terms. Food was scarce and the land had been laid to

²⁰² By the end of May, Knollys estimated Kai Colo losses to have run into the hundreds, while those of the Government did not reach fifty. Knollys to Carew, 29 May 1876. Carew Papers.

²⁰³ Gordon, *Record of Private and Public Life*, II: 112.

waste. Furthermore, the draconian Ordinance XXIX of 1876, the original intention of which was to severely discourage movement in the “disturbed” districts and prevent the potential spread of the conflict to other areas of the group, now served to seal the area off from the rest of Fiji. Colo was divided into two (east and west) and effectively quarantined. Non-residents were prohibited from entering the area unless in possession of a pass. Most of what we know of Colo for the next few years came via the official reports of the all-powerful resident commissioners at the new government headquarters of Fort Carnarvon in Natuatuacoko (Colo West) and Vunidawa in Naitasiri (Colo East). It is not surprising then, that Gordon, in a letter to his wife, wrote that the war was “without the smallest chance of renewal”.²⁰⁴

Resistance however, did not end. Its military character had proven impracticable, even counter-productive. The brutal nature of this conquest certainly acted as a deterrent for any further overt military confrontations. Yet, military conquest can achieve only a certain degree of pacification. The desire of Colo people to retain control of their lives and destinies lived on and continued to inspire subsequent subversions of the new order. The war went underground where it assumed a variety of forms which are discussed in several of the next chapters. The nature of Colo agency was radically transformed by the failure of the military campaign. No longer capable of finding expression on its own terms, agency in Colo acquired a character much more concomitant with the power of the colonial establishment. In this regard, Nicholas Thomas has argued that Gordon’s colonial style was not militaristic. Rather it was expressed through knowledge, vision and regulation.²⁰⁵ This is precisely the manifestation that the most consequential of rebellious movements within and outside Colo would take in the future.

²⁰⁴ Gordon to Lady Gordon, 11 August 1876. *Letters and Notes*, II: 249.

²⁰⁵ Thomas, 1994: 110.

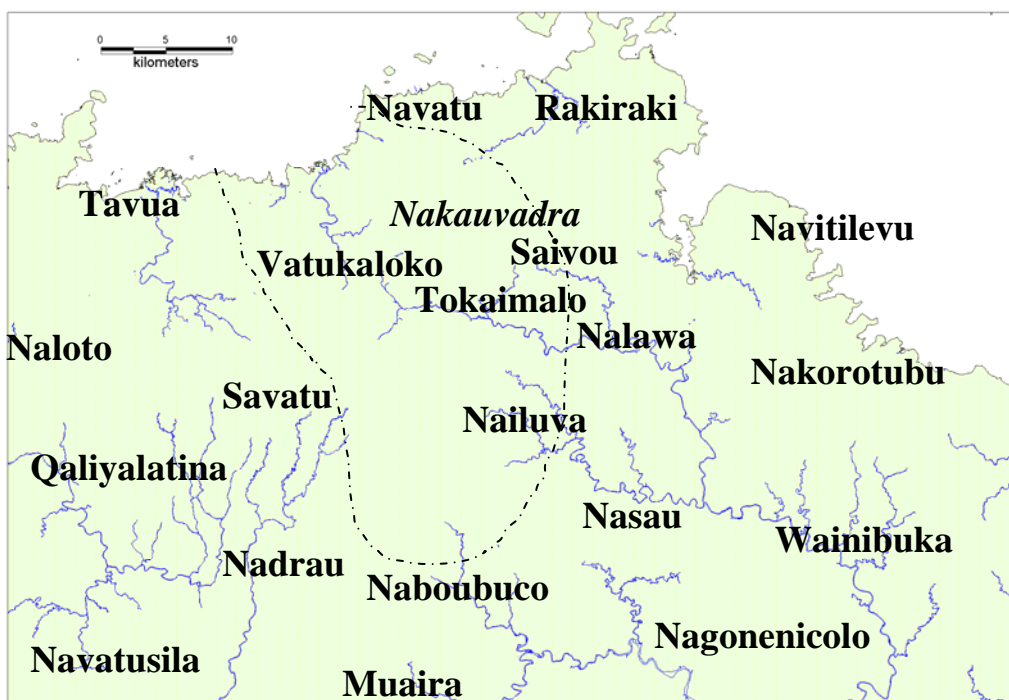
Chapter Two

Navosavakadua and the Tuka Movement

The Colo War did not signal the end of an era. While it suppressed further armed resistance and brought the area of Colo under the ambit of colonial rule, it did not take away the underlying antagonism which had been at the source of the conflict. Neither was the antagonism confined to Colo. It resonated among the tribes of the Ra Province and around the north western quadrant of Viti Levu where the Tuka Movement rose in three successive waves during the late 1870s, the mid 1880s, and early 1890s. In many ways, this movement extended the Colo War but changed the means and sites of resistance. If Kai Colo fought with military weapons, Tuka's weapons took a more religious, cultural and symbolic form, but they were used to express similar fears and grievances against the presence and designs of foreign forces and individuals such as Bauans, settlers, labour recruiters, the mission, and the colonial government. Local intra-Ra politics gave this conflict its particular distinctiveness as did the majestic presence of the Nakauvadra Range which formed the geographical and mythical backdrop of the rising. Nakauvadra is the sacred mountain range from which most Fijians trace their origins. The close proximity of rebelling communities to the Range, the identity they derived from their guardianship of this sacred site, and the inspiration and leadership provided by the priests in the area all combine to make the role of religion and religious syncretism a central feature of this chapter. Yet, the religious nature of this movement is best understood by beginning our analysis with concrete examples in the Ra province of land dispossession, local rivalries, chiefly ambitions, abuses of labour recruitment, lost autonomy and prestige, all of which furnished the movement with its initial impetus. The background to the movement, its nature and historical development, the religious philosophy of its leader Navosavakadua, and the significance of Tuka to our understanding of resistance in Fiji form the substance of this chapter.



Map 10: Map of north-western Viti Levu.¹



Map 11: Map of Ra and Northern Colo with Main Districts.²

¹ Note that these are approximate locations. Many of the villages involved in Tuka activities were ordered demolished and inhabitants relocated to other sites. See despatch 53, Thurston to SS, 12 August 1891. CSO Despatches to SS. NAF.

The Battle of Nakorowaiwai: 1873.

When tracing the origins of the Tuka Movement, the same key elements that shaped the Colo conflict become immediately apparent. To begin with, the encroachment of Bauan power in Ra was especially resented in this region of independent chiefdoms, where people claimed primacy in the chronology of Fijian settlement. The cultural and religious significance of the Nakauvadra Range gave those in its proximity the distinctive status and identity to form well-defined and autonomous polities. In this context, Bauans were regarded as impostors and invaders. Their propensity to extract excessive tribute, taxes and labour from Ra caused much offence and hostility.

In appointing Ratu Isikeli Tabakauoro as Governor of Ra in 1872, the Cakobau Government hoped to facilitate the extraction of taxes, the recruitment of labour, and maintain Bauan influence in the area. During his term, Ratu Isikeli achieved this aim by capitalising on local rivalries between local Ra factions, strategically playing chiefs against each other and siding with some to better control all.³ However, people resented his “high-handed” and “arbitrary” rule,⁴ including his involvement in the labour trade. Using his influence, Ratu Isikeli had assisted labour recruiters to procure numerous Ra and Colo men to labour on distant plantations. With his help and the cooperation of several other local chiefs who sold the services of the men of their tribes for their own enrichment,⁵ north western Viti Levu was gradually emptied of much of its manpower, and quickly became the largest supplier of plantation labour in Fiji.

Ratu Isikeli was also in the habit of selling land to European settlers without consultation with local landowners.⁶ Ratu Isikeli was not alone in this practice. The early 1860s had seen a spate of land sales in Ra, identical to that of Ba and Nadroga (see Chapter One). It prompted the transfer of large tracts of Ra’s best coastal land to

² The dotted line indicates the approximate area of the twelve yavusa claiming membership of the Vatukaloko polity.

³ Report 735. Land Claims Commission and Executive Council Sitting for the rehearing of Claims to Land, 1875-1887. Hereafter LCC. NAF.

⁴ R 735. LCC.

⁵ Despatch 60, Gordon to SS, 23 May 1878. CSO Despatches.

⁶ Deryck Scarr, “A Roko Tui for Lomaiviti: The Question of Legitimacy in the Fijian Administration: 1874-1900.” in *Journal of Pacific History*. 5, 1970. 12.

settlers and speculators in return for guns which local tribes used to attack or ward off enemies.⁷ In one particular transaction which was to prove highly consequential by its repercussions, a large area at Yaqara (also known as Raviravi) extending from Drauniivi and Rabulu on the coast to Naseyani in the foothills of Nakauvadra, was sold by the Tui Vatu (or chief of Vatukaloko), Tavakece Rareba, to Clough a Canadian settler in 1861.⁸

When Clough died in 1869, one of his neighbours, Samuel A. St. John, persuaded William Isaac Thomas, a Levuka based settler, to occupy the land while he attempted to contact Clough's heirs. The measure was intended to prevent Vatukaloko people from recovering possession of the land. Thomas considered the land ideal for cotton farming and the scheme was immediately implemented. As St. John had anticipated, the local Vatukaloko people understood that by Clough's death the land should revert to them and questioned the manner and legality of Thomas' occupation. However, in August 1870, and without the knowledge of other landowners, Tavakece resold the land to Thomas instantly making Thomas the largest European landowner in Fiji.⁹ However, Yaqara was also claimed by several Vatukaloko yavusa including Nubu, Mali and Wacakena, all of which denied Tavakece's right to sell alone and contested Thomas's right to use the land.¹⁰ A deep and lasting wedge was thus formed in the area between Thomas and surrounding land claimants. Over the next thirty years, a spirit of animosity prevailed in the area creating in the process an environment conducive for conflict.

As we saw in Chapter One, the killing of a chief by labour recruiters in the Tavua Bay area in January 1873 brought an already volatile situation to boiling point. It is difficult to link this killing with the murder a few days later of the Bauan recruiter Koroi i Latikau because in his letter to Swanston, Evans does not mention where the deserting labourers or their chief came from.¹¹ However, given the close kinship ties that existed between people of the bay area, the possibility that Latikau's murder by men from Nakorowaiwai was in retaliation for the killing of the chief cannot be

⁷ R. 778. LCC.

⁸ The background to this land sale is taken from R 778. LCC.

⁹ *Cyclopedia of Fiji 1907*. 1907. Suva: Fiji Museum, 1984. 248-50.

¹⁰ R. 777. LLC.

¹¹ Evans to Swanston, 22 January 1873. The Swanston Collection.

discounted. The location of Nakorowaiwai on land adjacent to Yaqara (and possibly claimed by Thomas) by people who disputed Thomas's right to the land only increased the likelihood of confrontation in the area. Hence, the killing of the local chief and of Koroi i Latikau, the grievances about Bauan leadership and dealings, the abuse of labour, and grievances about land alienation created an environment ripe for a showdown.

When it eventuated in early March 1873, the Battle of Nakorowaiwai (already mentioned in Chapter One) epitomised the determination of the local Vatukaloko people to retain control of their affairs, to resist Bauan and other foreign claims to their lands and way of life. The response of the Cakobau Government revealed the determination with which it was prepared to act when its legitimacy was openly challenged.

When they fought at Nakorowaiwai to avenge the death of Koroi i Latikau, government troops could not have struck at a more sensitive site. Its location in the midst of the Nakauvadra Range placed Nakorowaiwai in the heart of what Brewster called "Fiji's Holy Land",¹² the spiritual home of Degei, arguably the most important of Fijian gods. The massacre marked a serious loss of ritual pre-eminence, authority, and autonomy for the traditional guardians of the sacred mountains – the Kai Vatukaloko. Nakauvadra is the epicentre of the Vatukaloko polity and those who died at Nakorowaiwai had relatives and other close traditional ties with the other twelve constituent tribes of the polity.¹³ These connections spread in concentric circles all around the mountains and the massacre had repercussions in areas where antagonism to the new order had previously been negligible.

¹² Brewster, 1922: 82. Basil Thomson referred to Nakauvadra as "the Olympus of the Fijians". See his "The Kalou-Vu (Ancestor Gods) of the Fijians." in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. 24, 1895. 341.

¹³ For a detailed sketch of the historical development of the Vatukaloko polity, see Martha Kaplan's, "Land and Sea and the New White Men: A Reconsideration of the Fijian Tuka Movement." PhD Dissertation. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988, and *Neither Cargo nor Cult: Ritual Politics and the Colonial Imagination in Fiji*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995. Among the twelve constituent yavusa of Vatukaloko are Mali, Wacakena, Namacuku, Nadokana, Nakorosoqo, Nacolo, Naliwani, Tokaimalo, Nasoqo, Korosovaulevu, and Nubu.

The First Wave: Tuka 1876-1878.

Repercussions from the sacking of Nakorowaiwai did not become apparent to officials until after Cession. Cession passed in Ra as it had in Colo: without any consultation. The people's consent (or lack of it) to annexation was usurped by Ratu Isikeli when he signed over Ra's allegiance to the Queen at the ceremony. Yet, the collapse of the Cakobau Government, the transition to British rule, and the prospect of a substantial re-arrangement of political power in Fiji, must have prompted some optimism in Ra that things were about to change and that years of Bauan oppression were at an end. Supporters of annexation had led many ordinary men and women to believe that under the new administration they would be free of taxes, that they would be protected from the power of their chiefs, that certain laws would no longer apply, and that in general everyone would be able to follow their own will and pleasure.¹⁴

Reporting as Native Commissioner in the early months of 1878 on recurring tension in the Ra Province, David Wilkinson wrote that ordinary people had placed much faith in promises of change and that they were bitterly disappointed when these were not fulfilled.¹⁵ Instead, new laws came into being which made a mockery of the dream of liberty that was supposed to materialise under the new *Matanitu*. To make things worse, Ratu Isikeli retained his position as administrative head of the province allowing him to continue to intervene in local affairs with his customary heavy-handedness, and Bau to maintain its extraction of tribute from Ra. Several traditional chiefs had their power eroded by the reorganisation of power and space in the area. Districts (including Vatukaloko) were parcelled off by the new administration thus breaking the traditional unity that previously formed the identity of these areas. For instance, the Vatukaloko and Navunivou people of Raviravi in Tokaimalo, who claimed land and allegiance northwards to the coastal village of Drauniivi, were

¹⁴ Wilkinson and Eastgate to Gordon, 5 February 1878, CSO 78/550: "Report of Special Commission to Enquire Charges Against Roko Tui Ra." All CSO files are located at the National Archives of Fiji (NAF). I am heavily dependent on this file for the contextual background of the Tuka Movement. It is one of the few primary sources that contain detailed information about the development of the agitation from late 1876 to early 1878 that mark the early stages of the Movement. The file consists of the following two reports: the "Report of the Special Commission of enquiry into charges against the Roko Tui Ra," 5 February 1878; and the "Native Commissioner's Report of his visit to the Provinces of Ra and Ba during the month of February 1878," March 1878. The file has been used briefly by Kaplan and Scarr in larger studies. See Kaplan, 1995 and Scarr *Viceroy of the Pacific: The Majesty of Colour A Life of Sir John Bates Thurston*. Canberra: ANU, 1980.

¹⁵ CSO 78/550. "Native Commissioner's Report."

redirected eastward to Saivou and Ra's new administrative centre of Nanukulua the seat of the Roko Tui Ra, Ratu Isikeli Tabakauoro. This rearrangement resulted in the bypassing, dismissal or replacement of several traditional chiefs who instantly turned against the administration and began to agitate against key political appointments.

One such appointment was the posting in 1876 of Ratu Semi Davui, Ratu Isikeli's brother, as the new Buli and Native Stipendiary Magistrate of Rakiraki to replace two local chiefs. The two chiefs, Ratu Alipate Vutoni and Tavakece (not to be confused with deceased Tui Vatu), were former rivals but their dismissal drew them instantly together against their common Bauan adversary. Their objective was to resume the power over their people which they felt unjustly deprived of, and in the process to prepare the way for open revolt. The campaign got under way in secrecy in late 1876¹⁶ and gained momentum through the following year. The *reguregu* for a deceased high chief of Tavua in February or March 1877, provided Tavakece and his supporters with an ideal opportunity to consult with potential allies from Navatu, Vatukaloko and Tavua with the objective of forming a united front to repossess the government of their land.¹⁷ In the absence of concrete plans, they would complicate the Roko's rule by refusing to obey his orders and by actively preventing others from performing their duties towards him. The results were immediately visible as the frustrated Ratu Semi's report to the Bose Vakaturaga of December 1877 attests.¹⁸

Back in the Ra province, numerous meetings were called and a genuine movement was beginning to take shape. These meetings heard the same call:

if we are to be successful we must proceed vakaviti we hate the Roko, we hate the magistrate and we want our land back. Let us stick to that and when they see what we are able to do they will hear us. Let every man woman and child say we hate the Roko and his brother and will endure them no longer. And when we go

¹⁶ Reporting on the rising, Gordon estimated that the rapid suppression of Kai Colo had prevented the conflict from erupting in Ra. Despatch 60, Gordon to SS, 23 May 1878. CSO Despatches.

¹⁷ CSO 78/550. "Report of Special Commission."

¹⁸ See his comments about Ra people's refusal to work in "Notes of the Proceedings of a Native Council," Rewa, December 1877. 6.

to meet them let no man come empty handed let it be seen we are in earnest and let no man that is true to us remain at home if he does he is no true man.¹⁹

The older Rakiraki chiefs urged the younger men to take the lead in the agitation. One of them pleaded that

our land is being differently governed to any other land. These two children from Bau have come and ruled over us – Let us discuss the matter – Our land is our land – Let it be so and of the truth – I said I am old, it is with you youths to recover our rights.²⁰

Being divided about who among them should succeed Ratu Isikeli, they were united in their preference of Ratu Tevita Suraki, a chief from Bua (Vanua Levu), to be installed as the new Roko Tui once the current one had been disposed of.²¹

While much of the agitation was directed against “Bauan foreigners”, Wilkinson also linked the Rakiraki rising to discontent about labour practices. He remarked on the strongest remonstrance made by people everywhere about the trouble that was caused by the absence of almost all able-bodied men and the consequent inability of the rest to produce food and other necessities. This rendered village and community obligations exceedingly oppressive or altogether impossible for those who stayed behind. The result was a great scarcity of food, filthy towns, bad houses, roads not attended to and the inevitable failure to produce the assigned quota of produce for taxes.²²

Wilkinson also reported that young Ra labourers were frequently abused by planters, recruiters and local magistrates. They were threatened with forced enlistment in the Armed Native Constabulary without pay if they refused to renew their indenture. The magistrate in Taveuni was in the habit of re-enlisting the men for another twelve months without seeking the approval of the men’s chiefs, in direct violation of the

¹⁹ CSO 78/550. “Native Commissioner’s Report.”

²⁰ Cited in Scarr, 1980: 57.

²¹ Support for Ratu Tevita in Ra may have been facilitated by his marriage to a Ra woman, and because while Ra and Bua are traditional rivals or *tauvu*, their close proximity to each other across the Bligh Waters encouraged close kinship ties, similar dialects and identical customary traditions.

²² CSO 78/550. “Native Commissioner’s Report.”

agreement under which people left their homes.²³ This exploitation of labour caused anguish and resentment to grow among labourers and their families back home.

Wilkinson also mentioned the great trouble caused by European settlement in Ra. He was particularly critical of a dispute involving Thomas and his neighbour, Tom Burness. In spite of the objections of the Kai Vatukaloko, Thomas had continued his occupation of the land, but switched from cotton to pastoral grazing. The Yaqara deal acquired a new complexion in September 1874 when the new Tui Vatu, Naivulalevu, leased the entire area claimed by Thomas to Burness. Burness already claimed ownership of Vunitogoloa and Toqovere lands and ruled over nearby villagers with quasi-absolute authority.²⁴ The 1874 lease brought about a long and bitter dispute between Burness and Thomas over the right to use the land. Yet, because the dispute involved neighbouring tribes, the threat of instability extended well beyond relations between the two planters.²⁵ Official documents frequently blame Burness for instigating the trouble, and for unsettling good order among Fijians in the area. Such was Gordon's exasperation with Burness that he wished him deported.²⁶ Whatever Burness's role was in the disturbances, the decision by the Tui Vatu to lease the land to Burness, reflects the perception among Kai Vatukaloko that Thomas was the illegitimate occupant of their own land. As will become evident, with or without Burness's coaxing, they continued to publicly display their resentment of Thomas.

Local land and settler politics thus complicated an already complex situation. The power of the administration suffered from these local conflicts in which strongmen, local or foreign, openly defied the orders and commands of appointed officials. Settlers, magistrates (native and European), newly appointed chiefs, old traditional leaders, Wesleyan catechists, all competed for influence among the people. But the competition of these interests also created a kind of disorder and uncertainty among ordinary people which led them in their insecurity to join a movement that promised

²³ CSO 78/550. "Native Commissioner's Report." We have seen however, that many chiefs worked in collusion with labour recruiters to sell the services of their own villagers.

²⁴ At first Burness prevented villagers them from collecting, using, or trading any of the coconuts in the area. By 1877 however, he was threatening them with expulsion if they disobeyed his edicts. See CSO 78/550. "Native Commissioner's Report."

²⁵ R. 778. LCC.

²⁶ Gordon to Le Hunte, 19 March 1878. *Records of Private and Public Life*, III: 74.

to be both more stable and empowering. Wilkinson attributed disaffection among the people of Ra to this lack of union in authority.²⁷

By disrupting the previously undisputed power of traditional priests, the spread of Christianity in the area also precipitated the formation of a religious adversary. While it was never in the interests of missionaries to antagonise or eliminate Fijian religiosity, the mere presence and advance of Christianity around them was likely to cause some discomfort to Nakauvadra's hereditary priests. The mission's reputation was not enhanced by the irreverence of some of its indigenous emissaries. A desolate reverend Lorimer Fison recalled how in 1862, Rawaidranu led a party of Wesleyan teachers up to Nakauvadra and stripped Degei's temple "sacrilegiously robbing the sacred shrine of some of the most holy relics".²⁸ If they did not already resent the presence of Christianity in close proximity of their most sacred site, traditional priests charged with the guardianship of Nakauvadra must have felt deeply aggrieved by this desecration. The circulation in the 1870s of more Fijian catechists is likely to have caused further offence and alarm among the customary priests of Nakauvadra. Among the latter was a man who was destined to lead Tuka, one of colonial Fiji's most enduring and insidious popular movements.

While preparations were under way in Rakiraki for a political confrontation against Bauan influence in the area, the embryo of a parallel movement was being organised from the village of Drauniivi under the guidance of a man called Navosavakadua. Since 1873, several escapees from the Nakorowaiwai rout had sought refuge at Drauniivi and the village became a sanctuary for those who had survived the terror and those seeking redress and the re-establishment of Vatukaloko's customary prestige in the area.²⁹ Navosavakadua had been born Dukumoi in Drauniivi's Nakubuti clan of oracle priests. His family was noted for its anti-Bauan stance, his father having been flogged by Cakobau in pre-Cession times.³⁰ Like many other young Ra men of his age, Dukumoi had left his district in the early 1870s to work as a

²⁷ CSO 78/550. "Native Commissioner's Report."

²⁸ Fison cited in Thornley, 2002: 231.

²⁹ A. B. Joske to Colonial Secretary (hereafter CS), "Report on the Suppression of Tuka in Colo East," 1 August 1891, CSO 91/2344.

³⁰ Despatch 53, Thurston to SS, 12 August 1891. CSO Despatches.

labourer on Selia Levu plantation in Taveuni.³¹ It is difficult to ascertain with certainty whether Navosavakadua made the trip willingly or if, like many others, he was forced to go for failing or refusing to pay taxes to the Cakobau government.³² However, his experience of indenture, like that of so many of his contemporaries, must have had some influence on his receptiveness to foreign domination. Over time, Dukumoi acquired the title of Navosavakadua³³ by virtue of his leadership, charisma, life giving ability, and apparent infallibility in the face of such powerful adversaries as the colonial administration and the church.

Soon after his return to Ra, a vision appeared to Navosavakadua (late in 1876 or early 1877) that the land was soon to be visited again by Degei's twin nephews, Nacirikoumoli and Nakausabaria. There are various accounts as to why the twins had left Nakauvadra but most tell of a quarrel between uncle and sons involving the shooting of Turukawa, Degei's pet pigeon, after which the twins were banished. However, the version which emerged in the late 1870s was that the twins had left in disgust at the people for adopting Christianity and other modern innovations.³⁴

Word of Navosavakadua's miracles and prophecies soon spread inland to Colo where people believed that spirits had appeared at the head of the Wainimala River. In August 1877 the twins were believed to have visited Drauniivi, his home village. By the end of the year and coinciding with the annual council of chiefs meeting in Rewa, he was prophesying the end of the world. There can be little doubt that the timing of this prophesy was meant as a direct challenge to the legitimacy of the new

³¹ Reference to Navosavakadua's time in Taveuni is made by William Sutherland in "The 'Tuka' Religion." in *Transactions of the Fijian Society*. 1910. 53; Laura Thompson in *Fijian Frontier*. New York: American Council Institute of Pacific Relations, 1940. 117-8; Durutalo, 1985a: 243; and Kaplan, 1995: 41. However, none of these authors cite their source for this information and I have not been able to establish its validity from any of the primary source materials.

³² It must be noted however, that abuse of office was to some extent checked by the Roko's need to weigh this loss of labour against the loss of village manpower needed to meet his provincial tax quota. See Eastgate to CS, 3 November 1876, CSO 76/1476. This file is about Ratu Isikeli's refusal to let all young men in one Ra village leave for plantation work in Taveuni, and his insistence that some stay to help meet tax and other obligations.

³³ Navosavakadua means "he who speaks but once" and Fijians first conferred this title on the position of Chief Justice because of his perceived power over life and death.

³⁴ CSO 78/550. "Native Commissioner's Report." The best account of the "Ciri" or flood which beset Nakauvadra and led to the exile of the twins is given by Basil Thomson in "The Kalou-Vu (Ancestor Gods) of the Fijians." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. 24, 1895. 340-359. Read also Adolph Brewster, *The Hill Tribes of Fiji*. London: Seeley, Service & Co. Limited, 1922; France, 1969; and Kaplan, 1995.

government and the chiefs who had surrendered the government of Fiji's people to a foreign power. This resurgence of Vatukaloko power was symbolised by the reoccupation of Nakorowaiwai by survivors of the massacre and of the use of its sacred meeting place, Vale Lebo.³⁵ Led by Nabolawaqa, new houses were built and it appeared as if the site would be restored to its former glory.³⁶ Meanwhile, Navosavakadua called on his followers to prepare for *siganilewa* or judgement day which would take place in four years' time. This occasion would reward all *tamata dina* or dedicated faithfuls who would be granted *tuka* or immortality.

Immortality rituals were not unusual in Fijian custom. They were performed in preparation for war and for more benign occasions such as *luveniwai* (see Chapter Five). In 1867, Rev. Fison had been told of an old priest in Ra who professed to have found a "wai ni tuka" or "elixir of life".³⁷ Navosavakadua synthesised this element of local origin with other components of Fijian mythology, added a selection of Christian principles and what Wilkinson simply labelled "white man's ideas", to create what officials called a "superstition".³⁸ Unbeknown to Wilkinson, this "superstition" was about to grow into a potent philosophy and an extensive mass movement. Together with the agitation of the Rakiraki chiefs, Navosavakadua's new religion developed into a rallying point for the organisation of a potent political force. If the original motivations of the Rakiraki chiefs had been anti-Bauan, with Tuka they assumed a wider scope. Gordon spoke of it in terms of a "movement" acting "against the authority of the Government" and working towards "the overthrow of Christianity".³⁹ In the first months of 1878, the religion had been propagated by its emissaries "to some considerable distance",⁴⁰ with evident success, and Wilkinson warned that if Tuka was united with any disaffected movement against authority, the result would be "disastrous to all peace or progress" in the colony. As he wrote:

³⁵ Vale Lebo is an important historical spot and means "the House of Concealment" in the Nakauvadra dialect because it became the hiding place of the twins after their quarrel with Degei. See Joske to CS, 1 August 1891, CSO 91/2344.

³⁶ "Notes of the Proceedings of a Native Council," Rewa, 1877. 43. See Recommendation Nine in particular.

³⁷ Cited in Kaplan, 1988: 60.

³⁸ Despatch 60, Gordon to SS, 23 May 1878. CSO Despatches.

³⁹ Despatch 60, Gordon to SS, 23 May 1878. CSO Despatches.

⁴⁰ Despatch 60, Gordon to SS, 23 May 1878. CSO Despatches.

There is one thing I would specially notice about the tenets or doctrine or teachings of the fraternity they are evidently anti-every thing modern. Anti-*lotu*, anti-*matanitu*. Though it is not announced publicly ... It is believed and regarded by the great majority of the people as opposed to authority and the good order of the present day. ... It is simply a revival of the ancient.⁴¹

The “revival of the ancient” posed a significant threat to the new administration because among other things it sought to reassert Ra’s historical precedence in terms of the origins of Fijian settlement, the ritual pre-eminence of Nakauvadra in Fijian religious belief, and the recovery of the government of Ra lands. In this, the chiefs of Rakiraki and Tuka were always likely to form a politico-religious alliance.

Taking advantage of the Bauan brothers’ absence at the Bose Vakaturaga in Rewa, a public meeting took place in Rakiraki in December of 1877, in which it was decided to write a letter of complaint to the Governor against Ratu Isikeli and Ratu Semi so “that these two brothers be pushed away from us”.⁴² Chiefs from Nakorotubu were invited to form part of the anti-Roko alliance but the plot failed when one of them (Buli Nanuya) reported the matter to Ratu Isikeli and the administration was alerted to the scheme.

A commission of enquiry was appointed to look into the matter. It consisted of Ratu Vuki (Roko Tui Ba and Yasawas and related to the two brothers), Alex Eastgate (Stipendary Magistrate of Ra and Tailevu), and Wilkinson as Native Commissioner. When it convened at Navolau in January 1878, hundreds of people descended on the town with clubs, spears and axes and demanded that the Roko Tui gather his belongings and leave the place. After some tense moments during which Wilkinson sensed a dangerous indefiniteness among the protesters, an element of calm returned and the commission was allowed to conduct its work. By surrendering the initiative back to the commission, the rebels lost their advantage and they were made to pay dearly for it. Ratu Isikeli was cleared of any wrongdoing and the commission commended Ratu Semi for suppressing the oppression of Ra people by their chiefs. The commission also ventured to claim that the people much preferred the current

⁴¹ CSO 78/550. “Native Commissioner’s Report.”

⁴² CSO 78/550. “Report of the Special Commission.”

form of government to that of the past.⁴³ It then recommended the immediate removal of all the “indolent and mischief making fellows” at the centre of the insurgency. Among those who were deported to various parts of Fiji were Nabolawaqa, Tavakece, and several Buli of the region.⁴⁴ Realising the symbolic significance of Nakorowaiwai, Gordon also took the opportunity to order the houses at Nakorowaiwai pulled down.⁴⁵ For his part, Navosavakadua was deported to Lakeba in the Lau Group.⁴⁶

While the rebellion had been snuffed out before it could develop on a grander scale, the signs were ominous that the movement had brought a wide range of people together, all of them united in their disaffection with the current state of affairs and in their desire for a greater degree of self-determination. Sympathy for the rising can be estimated to have involved almost the entire north-western quadrant of Viti Levu. Commenting on the affair at the Bose Vakaturaga in 1878, Ratu Vuki warned of the extremely turbulent character of the disturbance and that “what they have said has affected the minds of the people even, as far inland as Colo, and all messages were carried in a warlike manner”.⁴⁷ He also expressed his fear to Wilkinson that this disturbance could end up causing far greater “evil” than that which had been put down in Colo in 1876.⁴⁸

However, because it contained no explicit anti-foreigner rhetoric and was conducted according to Fijian protocol, Wilkinson regarded the whole conflict as “vaka viti”, “a Fijian affair from beginning to end a combination started carried on and matured in pure native fashion”.⁴⁹ He advised Gordon to deal with it as such by letting the people be “as long as they don’t breach morals and good order”. He also suggested that government needed to improve its image in the area if it was to avoid another such outbreak: “let the native feel that the government is his friend his protector in the broadest and commonest sense ... and Kalourere-sm and every thing belonging to it will pass away into the legendary lore of his land but he will be a peaceful and

⁴³ CSO 78/550. “Report of the Special Commission.”

⁴⁴ CSO 78/550. “Report of the Special Commission.”

⁴⁵ Gordon to Chief-Justice, 7 May 1878. *Records of Private and Public Life*, III: 134.

⁴⁶ Joske to Carew, 22 December 1885, enclosed in CSO 85/3059.

⁴⁷ “Notes of the Proceedings of a Native Council,” Bua, 1878. 10.

⁴⁸ Wilkinson to Gordon, 7 June 1878. *Records of Private and Public Life*, III: 145.

⁴⁹ CSO 78/550. “Native Commissioner’s Report.”

respectable member of his mataqali.”⁵⁰ Wilkinson was therefore aware that the mass removal of ringleaders would not solve the problem of transforming a fiercely independent population into pacified, submissive, and obedient subjects.

While the deportations caused a leadership vacuum and successfully prevented further organised resistance, it was not long before reports of renewed discontent and defiance from the interior came to hand. In 1879 for instance, the Buli Nadrau who had until then been a key government ally in the interior, was reputed to be upset over the government’s failure to honour its Vatula promise about placing Qaliyalatina district under Nadrau rather than Ba. This prompted Le Hunte to warn that if the dispute was not settled “the greatest mischief may arise”⁵¹ Losing Nadrau’s support would certainly cause neighbouring districts to follow suit. In Naboubuco, along the frontier between Ra and Colo East, the people of the large village of Nasoqo were refusing to pay taxes to the Roko Tui Ra. The village of Nasoqo is the most inward point of the Vatukaloko polity though it also shared intimate relations with Nadrau. Its people had family who had died in the battle of Nakorowaiwai. They were in regular contact with relatives on the coast at Drauniivi, Togovere, and other Vatukaloko districts such as Tokaimalo. The death of Ratu Isikeli Tabakauco after the 1879 Bose Vakaturaga and his replacement by Ratu Tevita Suraki may have appeased some insurgents but by December 1880, the new Roko Tui Ra, regarded Nasoqo people as generally troublesome.⁵² The deportation of Tamanivalu, one of Nasoqo’s disruptive leaders, to Bau did not have the desired outcome. By 1883 the district of Nasoqo was in disarray. The people disobeyed orders at their convenience while a considerable number of them left the villages particularly to Tailevu, mostly in search of work.⁵³ In these parts therefore, formal colonial control was essentially nominal.

The Second Wave: Tuka 1884-1886.

Things were deemed quiet enough for the Bose Vakaturaga of May 1883 with the support of Governor William Des Voeux, to recommend that Navosavakadua and

⁵⁰ CSO 78/550. “Native Commissioner’s Report.”

⁵¹ Le Hunte to CS, 25 November 1878, CSO 78/1697.

⁵² “Notes of the Proceedings of a Native Council,” Vanuabalavu, 1880. 31.

⁵³ “Notes of the Proceedings of a Native Council,” Naduri, 1883. 12. The Land Claims Commission reported that Ratu Isikeli’s death allowed suppressed grievances to surface in abundance. R 735. Land Claims Commission. NAF.

another leader of the Rakiraki agitation be allowed to return to their home districts.⁵⁴ Navosavakadua returned to find the villagers of Drauniivi impoverished by five years of poor harvest, the main cause of which was the destruction of crops by Thomas's wandering cattle.⁵⁵ In a letter to William Sutherland, then Stipendiary Magistrate of Tailevu, the villagers complained that as of December 1884, no less than 28,428 yam hills had been destroyed by Thomas's cattle. Numerous other dalo (taro) and vudi (large banana) plants had also been lost. The extent of destruction spread across vast areas from Drauniivi through to Naseyani, and Vunitogoloa. Among those claiming lost produce was Navosavakadua.⁵⁶ Thomas was immediately written to and asked to fence his property. But five months later, the cattle were still not properly fenced in and continued to stray,⁵⁷ a problem which persisted until July 1887.⁵⁸ Thus, when Navosavakadua came back from exile, he returned to a climate of discontent similar to that which had prompted the first rising.

However, Navosavakadua himself was a changed man. His exile had only strengthened his resolve and he came back with a more sophisticated philosophy. More important to him than the loss of food crops was the need to rebuild the ancestral, spiritual, and political ascendancy of his people. Upon his return to Ra, he informed the people that he had been to Tonga where he was received with distinction and where he had left his soul in safe keeping, bringing only his body to Fiji. He also proclaimed his invulnerability, alleging that the authorities had tried to kill him but that his divine *mana* had always saved him.⁵⁹ If he ever was to be killed, his followers should trust that only his body suffered: "Kevaka Kau na mate dou vakabauti au ga" or, "If I die believe in me."⁶⁰

Navosavakadua had come back with a modified doctrine predicting that the world would shortly be turned upside down or *tavuki*. This meant, in Brewster's words, that "all existing affairs would be reversed; the whites would serve the natives, the chiefs

⁵⁴ "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1883: 14.

⁵⁵ Sutherland to CS, 22 May 1885, CSO85/1427.

⁵⁶ See letter dated 24 December 1884 in CSO 85/1427. Navosavakadua's claim of 800 lost yam hills seems a little inflated given the number cited by other claimants and his recent return from exile.

⁵⁷ Sutherland to CS, 22 May 1885, CSO85/1427.

⁵⁸ See Ross to CS, 20 July 1887, CSO 87/1612.

⁵⁹ Brewster, 1922: 240.

⁶⁰ Carew to CS, 15 December 1885, CSO 85/3259. Translation by Resident Commissioner Colo East, Walter Carew.

would become the common people and the latter would take their places”.⁶¹ He prophesied the expulsion of foreigners white and Bauan, the expulsion of Church and Government,⁶² and the return of the twins whom he identified as the true Jehovah and Jesus. He professed that while the Bible was virtuous and compatible with Fijian mythology, the missionaries had deceived the people by claiming Jehovah and Jesus as Christian gods. Their real names were Nacirikaumoli and Nakausabaria. They were Degei’s twin sons and they were Fijian gods.⁶³ Navosavakadua quoted freely from the Bible and used Jesus’ teaching in guiding and directing his followers, the keynote being to leave all and believe in him with the certain reward of tuka or immortality.⁶⁴ “Wai ni tuka” was the sacred water which he used to anoint his followers, like a baptism. Those thus blessed were granted immortality. It was the physical form through which he transmitted his power to his people⁶⁵ All those who did not believe in him would become the slaves and servants of his faithful disciples.⁶⁶

In 1884, the first signs that Tuka was being reactivated began to show. Three men from Vunitogoloa were deported to Matuku in the Lau Group for “illicit heathen practices” and “conspiracy against their chief” implicit in the tuka religion.⁶⁷ When A. B. Joske took up his position in October 1884 as the new European Stipendary Magistrate for Colo East and visited Naboubuco, he found the people turbulent, refractory, in the habit of evading the district courts, and being generally disobedient to the orders of the Native Magistrate.⁶⁸ He ordered the Nasoqo people to build a lepers’ house but unbeknown to him, they built a large *bure kalou* instead.⁶⁹ They also built a new village which they called Navala and styled it a *Koro ni vunivuni* or “place for the concocting of schemes or conspiracies”. Navosavakadua visited the village some time in mid 1885 where he was received with great welcome and feasted.⁷⁰

⁶¹ Brewster, 1922: 237. See also the *Fiji Times*, 3 July 1886.

⁶² See Carew to CS, 15 December 1885, CSO 85/3259; Sutherland, 1910: 56.

⁶³ See Joske to Carew in CSO 85/2946, and Carew to CS 15 December 1885, CSO 85/3259.

⁶⁴ Sutherland, 1910: 55.

⁶⁵ Kaplan, 1995: 106.

⁶⁶ Joske to CS, 1 December 1885, CSO 85/3125.

⁶⁷ “Notes of the Proceedings of a Native Council,” Nadroga, 1887. 9.

⁶⁸ Joske to CS, 12 February 1886, CSO 86/397.

⁶⁹ Carew to Administrator, 6 December 1885, CSO 85/3059.

⁷⁰ Carew to Roko Tui Ra, 5 December 1885, CSO 85/3259.

Writing retrospectively in 1910 about this second wave, the Native Commissioner William Sutherland described it as a phenomenon that had been favourably received by local inhabitants, that it was an organised movement, that the ground had been prepared for it beforehand, and that Government officers had been successfully kept in ignorance of what was transpiring.⁷¹ In 1885, the Wesleyan missionary Reverend Arthur Webb was one of the few who seemed to have any notion of the presence, growing strength and spread of the movement. He described Tuka simply as “Radicalism”:

It is a movement that goes behind the Government and is inimical to it and goes behind the Lotu and in some instances aims directly at its subversion ... There has been ... far more of political aim than of religious departure in these disturbances. ... They most frequently occur in seasons of general distress ... and at seasons when the native mind is, from some causes or other, in a state of unrest or dissatisfaction.⁷²

Notwithstanding people’s grievances or the general state of distress that they were experiencing, Navosavakadua was an excellent organiser. He moved around the countryside and with his lieutenants, effectively planned the enlargement of the movement and disseminated his vision to a people keenly receptive to the promise of change. Lodges for him and his followers were said to exist in every village.⁷³ In August 1885, Ratu Tevita Suraki reported with concern that a large number of “Togavere men and like tribes” were living at Udu and Savudoi (in the district of Muaira) on the Wailoa River, only a few miles south of Nasoqo (see map 15). Udu had been one of the staunchest anti-Christian villages prior to Cession⁷⁴ and the Togavere people who lived there were refugees of the Nadawarau campaign of 1874, and other pre-Cession wars.⁷⁵ They were now settled permanently in Udu with the blessing of the current Buli Muaira.⁷⁶ The presence of this Togavere colony in the heart of Muaira but with ties all the way to the northern coastline, made it an ideal strategic location from which to propagate Tuka into Colo East. On 26 October 1885,

⁷¹ Sutherland, 1910: 51.

⁷² Webb, 1885: 411.

⁷³ *Fiji Times*, 3 February 1886.

⁷⁴ Scarr, 1980: 224.

⁷⁵ Despatch 53, Thurston to SS, 12 August 1891. CSO Despatches.

⁷⁶ Joske to CS, 12 February 1886, CSO 86/397.

about thirty young men from Drauniivi under the leadership of Bete and Tauvoli proceeded to Udu. Their purpose was to ‘bukuta’ or propose a compact that would allow Tuka advocates access to the village.⁷⁷ They had blackened their faces (a habit usually adopted in war time), were armed with a few guns, wore shoulder sashes and occupied themselves with military drill. Prayers were learnt and new Tuka meke (traditional songs and dances) were taught and performed.⁷⁸ Upon being expostulated with by the teacher and some Wesleyan Church members, the men refused an explanation of their conduct and replied that they would report “only to Navosavakadua of Nakauvadra who would bring about their [Wesleyans] death”.⁷⁹

The Government only became aware of these Tuka activities on November 10th 1885. By then Tuka had filtered through undetected to an even greater proportion of the area than the 1877 rising. Confirming Thurston’s worst fears, Tuka had spread to Naboubuco, Muaira, Nadrau, Qaliyalatina, and even to Ba in the west. These interior districts were all pre-Cession enemies of Bau and were situated on the fringe of Navatusila and other adjacent districts still isolated by Ordinance XXIX of 1876 prohibiting the movement of people in and out of Colo. The infiltration of Tuka in areas which were recent adversaries of the government in the Colo War, raised the potential for a resumption of hostilities. These developments were regarded as “extremely dangerous” by some of the old hands in the administration.⁸⁰ On the other side of Tomaniivi (or Mount Victoria, Fiji’s highest mountain) and in the direction of Viti Levu Bay, Tuka had become endemic in the Saivou and Nalawa districts where Tuka leaders could now depend on a new and ardent following.⁸¹ In addition to the religious principles that guided this lotu ni vanua (religion of the land), the government also discovered a parallel administration with a bureaucracy modelled on the official one. Navosavakadua was at its head, with a hierarchy under him

⁷⁷ Carew to CS, 15 December 1885, CSO 85/3259. In his despatch to the Secretary of State for Colonies, Thurston revised Carew’s estimate of the number of men involved in the drill to about seventy. Despatch 7, Thurston to SS, 15 January 1886. CSO Despatches.

⁷⁸ A Tuka meke was published in the *Fiji Times*, 17 February 1886. In essence, the meke offers praise to the Tuka religion. It tells of the imminent end of *sereki* (bondage) and the impending arrival of *sautu* (abundance).

⁷⁹ Carew to CS, 10 November 1885, CSO 85/2946.

⁸⁰ Brewster, 1922: 237.

⁸¹ When in early December 1885, police officers arrived in the large Nalawa village of Nubumakita to arrest one of Navosavakadua’s key accomplices, all the men of the village congregated together with arms and blackened faces and prevented the execution of Carew’s warrant forcing the police to return empty handed (Carew to Roko Tui Ra, 5 December 1885, CSO 85/3059).

consisting of lieutenants, sergeants, scribes,⁸² and other cadres of men some of whom had done terms of service with the Armed Native Constabulary and knew company drill perfectly. Several men such as the Turaga ni Koros of Udu, Savudoi, Nakorobilo and the Buli of Muaira, held official positions in the colonial administration and received government salaries but supported Navosavakadua.

They did not however engage in armed warfare. Insubordination was a more immediate consequence of the reversal advocated by Navosavakadua. People simply refused to follow the orders of Wesleyan teachers and government officers. This tactic wreaked havoc both with Wesleyan and government lines of command. Those who continued to follow instructions from Suva found their work severely hampered by the popularity of Tuka and much government and Christian work ceased in affected areas.⁸³ Moreover, soldiers, teachers, pastors, and government functionaries also switched their allegiance and joined the movement.⁸⁴ The defection of these state and church officials prompted more ordinary men and women to embrace Tuka.

Complaining to Thurston about Tuka's disregard for constituted authority and its rapid spread, Carew wrote: "these Kai colo people are most persistent and obstinate and think of nothing else than the aggrandizement of their districts."⁸⁵ Yet, because their resistance was expressed through religion rather than arms, the administration was engaged in a form of ideological warfare in which the primary weapons were those of persuasion and faith. Because they appealed to people's proud past, their current difficulties and interests, and future aspirations, Tuka leaders were able to work on the conquest of people's minds and avoid detection and subsequent confrontation with a heavily armed enemy. The conquest of people's minds is difficult to measure but Navosavakadua's widespread support and popularity⁸⁶ suggests that until his arrest, he was winning the war of persuasion.

⁸² Carew to Administrator, 10 December 1885 enclosed in CSO 85/3059. See also the *Fiji Times*, 3 July 1886.

⁸³ Brewster, 1922: 237.

⁸⁴ *Fiji Times*, 3 February, 1886.

⁸⁵ Carew to Administrator, 2 December 1885, CSO 85/3059.

⁸⁶ Carew and Roko Tui Ra believed Navosavakadua's influence to have spread "far and wide". They identified Nadrau in the centre of the island, Tavua on the northern coast, Saivou and Rakiraki in the north-east as the most likely boundaries. The *Fiji Times* estimated that support for Tuka was "pretty general throughout Colo". *Fiji Times*, 3 February 1886.

However, the growing popularity of the movement was tempered by notable exceptions. Reservations about the movement came from various quarters. By venturing into Muaira, Tuka was mounting a challenge on a polity where thanks mainly to Carew's efforts, the chiefs had pledged their loyalty to the government and the Wesleyan church. They were beneficiaries of the colonial order and like the more established Roko Tui, they must have regarded the destabilising effect of Tuka as a threat to their own interests. Those Wesleyan teachers and converts who resisted the Tuka offensive probably felt the same way. It is significant that Udu's Wesleyan teacher, Mesake Vocevoce (from Nadi) remained loyal to the government through the upheavals and that without the information imparted by him and his evidence in court it would have been difficult for the prosecution to procure the punishment of any of the offenders.⁸⁷ This suggests that people were by no means unified in who the oppressors were or how to go about resisting them. It is most likely too that a substantial number of ordinary villagers calculated their involvement in the movement to maximise the excitement and benefits of their participation but also to minimise the risk of being caught in the likelihood of a government crackdown. This precluded overt public involvement or condemnation.

The appearance of inequalities and disjunctions within the movement is also verified by the complaints of women in Navosavakadua's entourage. They were required to chew and prepare yaqona continuously by day and by night. Prepared in this way, it was believed that yaqona could preserve Navosavakadua and other senior priests in the condition of mind and body most susceptible for the entrance into their bodies of the 'yalo ni kalou' or spirit of the gods.⁸⁸ Thurston also alluded to allegations that women who gave themselves up to sexual intercourse with him were promised immortality.⁸⁹ Hence, beyond the air of excitement that descended to disturb the mundane nature of their lives, Tuka offered little else by way of incentives for women to actively support the movement. Aspects of women's resistance are discussed in Chapter Seven.

⁸⁷ Carew to CS, 15 December 1885, CSO 85/3259.

⁸⁸ Carew to CS, 15 December 1885, CSO 85/3259.

⁸⁹ Despatch 53, Thurston to SS, 12 August 1891. CSO Despatches. The veracity of these claims could not be established.

However, the test of Tuka's durability was always likely to come from the colonial administration. By early December 1885, Navosavakadua had been identified as the real force behind the movement and his arrest and permanent deportation were considered paramount and to be effected with utmost urgency.⁹⁰ Writing to Ratu Tevita Suraki with instructions to secure the prophet's arrest, Carew imparted his and other Colo chiefs' fear that "neither Colo nor Ra would ever be at rest" until Navosavakadua's capture.⁹¹

The Government's Crackdown

The whole affair took an unexpected turn on December 8th when Navosavakadua himself fronted up at the trial of dozens of his followers at the Colo East administrative centre of Vunidawa. He was immediately arrested and taken to Suva Gaol as were all other key priests and lieutenants of the movement. Carew warned the colonial secretary that none of these men should be allowed to return "until some considerable time shall have elapsed after the expiration of their sentences. Most were subsequently deported. Close to a hundred others, mostly belonging to the scattered Togavere tribes of Nalawa, were tried in Vunidawa by the provincial court with about half being sentenced to varying terms of hard labour. Most spent their prison terms building bridle tracks in the interior of the island under the watchful eye of A.B. Joske.⁹² Specific instructions were given that upon their release these men should be sent by water to the Roko Tui Ra in Naiserelagi and that on no account should they be sent back inland unless under guard, for it was feared that they would scatter and give more trouble. Carew also recommended that a new government station be established between Naboubuco and Nalawa so as to make its presence more tangible.⁹³ On the religious front, Wesleyan authorities responded with urgency by dispatching "an army

⁹⁰ Carew to Thurston in CSO 85/3059. This file also contains a letter from Joske to Carew dated 22 November 1885, in which the former urges Navosavakadua's immediate arrest and deportation "to Rotumah or some place right out of Fiji".

⁹¹ Carew to Roko Tui Ra, 5 December 1885, CSO 85/3059.

⁹² Joske dedicated much of his time to the construction of bridle tracks. As he wrote later, "Owing to the extent of my districts ... my life was rather nomadic. My office was the roadside ..." See Brewster, 1922: 290. Most of the 250 miles of track however, were built by men punished by him for various offences. The employment of prison labour to build roads saved the government considerable sums of money. It also fulfilled the need to render the interior amenable to pacification and accessible for trade.

⁹³ Carew to CS, 15 December 1885, CSO 85/3259.

of agents” into the area (mainly from training institutions on the coast), “to reason the misguided back to their allegiance” and neutralise the influence of the prophet.⁹⁴

The next three months saw the government move to eradicate Tuka. The *koro ni vunivuni* village of Navala which had been built like a mountain fortress and contained a *bure kalou*, was ordered destroyed and the inhabitants relocated to a more visible and accessible spot at Mataiqamunu in the immediate vicinity of the Buli Naboubuco’s residence. This was resisted for two months notably due to Tamanivalu’s influence at Nasoqo. The “lepers’ house” in Nasoqo was also ordered demolished. Meanwhile, closer to the coast, the Roko Tui Ra’s zeal for stamping Tuka out was manifest from mid-January, with the presence in Naiserelagi of 120 men arrested for their involvement in the movement. They came from villages in Nalawa, Saivou, Tokaimalo, Raviravi and Rakiraki. Such arrests continued through the months of February and March 1886. The provincial court heard from all that Navosavakadua had endeavoured to propagate the “lotu ni vanua” but all the accused were also notably bound by an oath not to divulge any information that might be damaging to Navosavakadua or his cause.⁹⁵ Only ten of these men, all of them known priests of the movement, were convicted while the others were dismissed by the court and ordered to build a road.⁹⁶

In his report on these cases, Joske pointed out that most of the people concerned in this matter had each done three or four terms of indentured service and that this exposure had brought them in contact with “a certain class of whites” and their stories about Freemasonry and secret societies. He deduced that Tuka appeared to be a humble imitation of them: “They seem to use signs and a shibboleth as a means of recognition amongst themselves. In drinking yaqona they make a military salute. This is the vakarokoroko or salutation to the chiefs “over the water”, viz, Nakausabaria and Nacirikoumoli.”⁹⁷ It is also possible that the brutal experience of indenture and the harsh living conditions they had to endure, rendered these men resentful of foreigners (European and Bauan), and made them more resolute about preserving their land,

⁹⁴ Thornley, 1979: 153.

⁹⁵ Joske to CS, 12 February 1886, CSO 86/397.

⁹⁶ See CSO files 97/2036 and 97/3547 and Despatch 53, Thurston to SS, 12 August 1891 for an indication of official confidence in the merit of bridle tracks and road building (especially in Tuka areas) in the process of pacification.

⁹⁷ Joske to CS, 12 February 1886, CSO 86/397.

recuperating control of their affairs, and fashioning their future in their own image. Aspects of plantation resistance are discussed in Chapters Four and Six.

During the months of January and February of 1886, Navosavakadua was kept under surveillance at the police camp in Suva. This allowed the Government time to find and lay charges serious enough to remove him permanently. While he was held there numerous reports came to hand that the government had failed in several attempts to destroy his life.⁹⁸ His legendary hair was the subject of much speculation.

Navosavakadua had grown his hair as a symbol of his opposition to the Christian colonial order, and it was believed by his supporters that much of his power lay in his sacred locks. His hair was thus ordered cropped. Yet rumour surfaced that his hair had miraculously survived and that the scissors had bent backwards in refusal of such a sacrilege.⁹⁹ Navosavakadua was finally tried on 17 March 1886 at Rukuruku in Viti Levu Bay in the province of Ra and sentenced to twelve months with hard labour for Vakatubuca “or conduct calculated to raise evil in the land”.¹⁰⁰ He was incarcerated at the Suva Gaol two days later and allotted a “European cell ... to avoid intercourse with others as much as possible”.¹⁰¹

During his incarceration, Navosavakadua was kept under constant surveillance and forbidden to communicate with any other prisoner. A list of offences he committed while serving time in gaol impresses the danger with which Navosavakadua was regarded. On 16 May 1886, he was placed in separate confinement with reduced diet for four days for singing. In response to this offence, Thurston, now acting Governor, ordered the Superintendent of Prisons to place Navosavakadua in leg irons and not to allow him sent beyond gaol precincts in the performance of any labour. On 14 July, he was placed in solitary confinement for forty-eight hours after being found conversing with another inmate. On 10 September, he was found in possession of half a sheet of foolscap and eight pages of the *Town and Country Journal*. For this offence he was placed in solitary confinement with reduced diet and no bed for four days. A

⁹⁸ Several of these accounts survive to the present day and are transmitted by word of mouth. I heard five of them while visiting the village of Drauniivi on 23 May 2004. While Joske admitted that some in government were keen on having him hung (see Brewster, 1922: 245), it is unlikely that any attempt was ever made on his life.

⁹⁹ Brewster, 1922: 245.

¹⁰⁰ Despatch 137, Mitchell to SS, 19 October 1887. CSO Despatches.

¹⁰¹ Milne (Superintendent of Prisons) to CS, 20 March 1886, CSO 86/599.

week later he was found speaking to another prisoner outside the bathhouse. Both were flogged.¹⁰²

Yet in spite of these restrictive measures, Navosavakadua's mere presence in Suva continued to inspire Tuka and, convinced of his permanent threat, the administration set out to remove him altogether. His prison term having ended, it became imperative to find an alternate way to permanently exclude him from contact with other Fijians. This view was endorsed by the chiefs at the Bose Vakaturaga who resolved during their May 1887 deliberations that Navosavakadua was a "monomaniac" and that they were of one mind about the man: "Let him now be sent far away; to Rotumah if possible."¹⁰³

The draconian Ordinance 20 of 1887 providing for "the deportation and confinement of Disaffected or Dangerous Natives"¹⁰⁴ was immediately drafted and enacted, and the "dangerous fanatic"¹⁰⁵ was shipped to the furthest and most isolated island of the colony: the newly annexed island of Rotuma. He spent the rest of his life there until his death on 13 June, 1897, just four months before the expiry of his confining order.¹⁰⁶

The 1891 Revival

If the leading spirit of Tuka was now out of the way in Rotuma, and his most active deputies deported to all corners of the archipelago (especially Lau, Lomaiviti and Taveuni), the movement lived on. Speaking at the May 1887 meeting of the Bose Vakaturaga, the Buli Saivou reported that while Navosavakadua was still in Suva, the teachers of no less than eight villages had left the district with "no one attending church as their minds were bent on Luveniwei, and they have been without teachers

¹⁰² Visiting Justice to CS, 4 October 1886, CSO 86/1939.

¹⁰³ Resolution XI, "Notes of the Proceedings of a Native Council," 1887. 21.

¹⁰⁴ *Fiji Royal Gazette*, 13 October 1887.

¹⁰⁵ These were the terms used by Governor Mitchell to describe Navosavakadua as he sought to send the man away "by the first opportunity that may occur". Despatch 97, Mitchell to SS, 4 July 1887. CSO Despatches.

¹⁰⁶ Leefe to CS, 13 June 1897, CSO 97/2550. In Rotuma, Navosavakadua married a woman of considerable landed property. Oral tradition speaks of her giving birth to three children including twins. Talanoa Session with Leone Tamaikara Naisua, Drauniivi Village, 23 May 2004. Navosavakadua died from scrofula after suffering from the disease for four to five years. Leefe to CS, 13 June 1897, CSO 97/2550.

ever since”.¹⁰⁷ In several of the areas, Tuka fused with *luveniwai*¹⁰⁸ to make governance even more difficult. In February 1889 the Roko Tui Bua died. Ratu Tevita Suraki was directed to succeed him and promptly left for Vanua Levu to take up his new appointment. With all senior Ra chiefs either dismissed or deported, the government chose to appoint another Bauan chief to the position of Roko Tui Ra.

The new appointee, Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, took office on 1st June 1889. For his subsequent service to the colonial government, Ratu Joni was later praised as “a synonym for rectitude of purpose and high endeavour”. His supporters among settlers claimed that were Fijians allowed to vote, all of them would have voted for him.¹⁰⁹ However, in Ra of the late 1880s and early 1890s he received little cooperation. It is difficult to estimate the extent to which future rebellion in the area was related to his appointment. Ratu Joni certainly did not lack decisiveness in dealing with opponents of the administration. Arrests and deportations continued at a steady rate. On 16 September 1889 for instance, another eleven political prisoners from Ra were deported mostly to Kadavu, Lomaiviti, Vanuabalavu and Somosomo in Taveuni.¹¹⁰

In September 1890, A. B. Joske, the lone European government representative in Colo East (Carew being too preoccupied with the huge upsurge of labour cases at the Naduruloulou government station in Rewa), was sent to relieve the Resident Commissioner of Colo West. While it is difficult to establish the extent to which his absence facilitated the resurgence of Tuka, the lack of any significant outward and visible signs of the colonial administration in the area certainly did not help the government’s cause.¹¹¹ Barely two months after Joske’s secondment, Rokoleba, a priest from Nubumakita appeared among the people at Udu. He had been one of Navosavakadua’s deputies in the 1885 rising and had been summoned to Ra to face charges in connection with his involvement but had somehow escaped deportation. During this preliminary visit, as many as forty men and women (the men blackened from head to toe in warlike fashion) undertook a pilgrimage to a former stronghold of

¹⁰⁷ “Notes of the Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1887. 21.

¹⁰⁸ See Chapter Five for a discussion of ordinary people’s practice of *luveniwai* in everyday resistance.

¹⁰⁹ *Cyclopedia of Fiji 1907*: 211.

¹¹⁰ See Sekope, Luke and Wiliami deportees from Ra to Native Commissioner, 1 June 1891, CSO 91/2240. This is a letter of complaint by some of the political prisoners regarding their treatment by the Roko Tui Cakaudrove.

¹¹¹ Brewster, 1922: 279.

pre-Cession times and attempted to raise the spirits of their forefathers and bring them back with them to Udu in a *Waqā ni yalo* (receptacle for the spirits).¹¹² The promise of everlasting life and the resurrection of the dead were clearly appealing at a time when most Colo villages were experiencing alarmingly high rates of mortality.¹¹³

Rokoleba also claimed to have been visited by Navosavakadua. Rokoleba returned a few weeks later to take up permanent residence in the village and from December onwards, the people of Udu neglected going to church and disregarded the observance of Sunday. This was in line with the Tuka practice of “inculcating disregard of all authority outside of its own limits; teaching that Tuka is the only true way of life; by giving implicit obedience to the command of the Priest or head, and taking its followers from the communal duties”.¹¹⁴ On 27 January 1891, sixteen men and ten women shaved their heads in anticipation of Navosavakadua’s impending return. Many more ranging from “youths upwards to grey haired and toothless old men” from the nearby villages of Nabuecadra and Matainasau villages were also implicated.¹¹⁵

When his movements are placed in the context of other developments in Ra, Naboubuco, Muaira and Nadrau,¹¹⁶ the evidence suggests that Rokoleba was part of a larger and well coordinated drive to intensify the presence and influence of Tuka in the area. Acting in concert with other Tuka emissaries, Rokoleba was the Nalawa circuit’s envoy to the Udu-Muaira sector. Another emissary and key figure in the Boubuco wing of the movement was Dresā from Rewasau village. After his arrest in Nasoqo, officers found a list of twenty two villages in which Dresā could count Tuka faithfuls.¹¹⁷ Reporting on the magnitude of Tuka’s spread in the interior of Viti Levu, Joske wrote that all men from the borders of Matailobau to the confines of Namosi

¹¹² Joske to CS, 11 May 1891, CSO 91/1546.

¹¹³ The Fijian population had been experiencing steady decline since 1885 and by the early 1890s, the mortality rate was so high that many observers believed that the Fijian ‘race’ was dying off. See *Fiji Blue Books* for statistics. One of the reasons for this decline in Colo East was the absence of men on plantations or their incarceration for practising Tuka. In Nubumakita for instance, all the young men were reported to be either labouring on distant plantations or serving time in gaol and building roads as punishment for practising Tuka. See Joske to CS, 10 June 1891, CSO 91/1828. This placed a much greater burden on women who stayed behind in the villages to till the land, fulfil obligations to the chiefs and the village, and raise infants.

¹¹⁴ Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi to Joske, 15 March 1891, CSO 91/1133.

¹¹⁵ Joske to CS, 11 May 1891, CSO 91/1546.

¹¹⁶ Qaluma, the Tuka movement’s roving vuvivola (scribe) was said to have visited Nadrau in late 1890 and had secured the mass conversion of its people.

¹¹⁷ Joske to CS, 1 August 1891, CSO 91/2344.

had been stirred by it.¹¹⁸ Minuted in the same report was an irate comment by Carew: “I believe the superstitions have filled the minds of the people throughout the whole of Viti Levu certainly in Colo West – Navosa and all the way to Suva or near it including Kasavu “not 200 yards from my residence”.

But while Udu may have been one of the first villages to feel the resurgence of Tuka, Nasoqo was certainly the nerve centre of proceedings.¹¹⁹ In February 1891 and still unknown to government, a new Tuka *bure* was being built a few miles up the river from Udu in the village of Navuniwaiwaivula, home of the Buli Naboubuco. Women were busy plaiting twelve mats each to furnish the *bure*. The construction of such an important public display of Tuka power followed the visit to the village of Raicula, Nasoqo’s high priest and his presentation of a *tabua*. Raicula was the head centre of Tuka in Naboubuco and was later considered to be the most dangerous man in the district. He was in regular communication with Drauniivi, Vale Lebo, and other villages of Nakauvadra.¹²⁰

The *tabua* itself had originated from Drauniivi and made its way up into the mountains to him at Nasoqo. He had presented it at Navuniwaiwaivula in the following terms: “I present this that we may be of one mind, that the Government be overthrown and the Tuka flourish.”¹²¹ When the *bure* was completed, Navulalevu of Lamisa, the assistant Buli of Tokaimalo who had been gaoled for his part in the 1885 rising, was invited to assist in the consecration of the building and to take part in an important Tuka meeting. His attendance at this meeting gave it great kudos for he was a relative of Navosavakadua and some regarded him to be as great, if not greater than Navosavakadua in the organisation. He was also said to be the brother of the chief of Nakorowaiwai.¹²² Because of the secretive nature of the organisation, it is difficult to know what transpired. However a prayer was reportedly made for those who held

¹¹⁸ Joske to CS, 1 August 1891, CSO 91/2344.

¹¹⁹ Nasoqo was home of Isireli Nacagilaba, considered by many to be “the grandfather of Tuka”. Other resident senior priests included his son Nacolauli, Raicula, Duaibe, and Seavula.. Joske to CS, 1 August 1891, CSO 91/2344.

¹²⁰ Joske to CS, 1 August 1891, CSO 91/2344.

¹²¹ Joske to CS, 1 August 1891, CSO 91/2344.

¹²² Joske to CS, 1 August 1891, CSO 91/2344.

government appointments, “that they may be punished at the day of judgement whether they be magistrates or Bulis, may they be turned into pillars of salt”.¹²³

The colonial administration was oblivious to any of this until mid-March 1891 when the Buli of Nalawa alerted Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi about the revival of Tuka in his district. In this regard it is telling that a report by Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi a month earlier about more damage done by Thomas’s cattle on Drauniivi plantations, did not yield any intelligence about the latest outbreak of Tuka.¹²⁴ Ratu Joni’s report identified the headwaters of the Wainibuka River and Nalawa as being perpetual hotspots of the superstition and estimated that the movement had not gone beyond the presentation of propitiatory yaqona and feasts to the priests in return for *wai ni tuka* and that some had tried to raise the dead.¹²⁵ This apparent lack of concern or intelligence about Tuka suggests that the government had little access to local indigenous intelligence networks, that people purposefully withheld intelligence, or that it underestimated the capacity and resilience of Tuka to mobilise people.

When Joske returned in April 1891, he found the entire Colo East area rife with Tuka and Luveniwei. Exposed and powerless, he admitted that Tuka had become nothing short of sedition, that the current law was insufficient to deal with the movement, and that punishment ought to be more severe.¹²⁶ This redefinition of Tuka from superstition to sedition was reiterated by Carew who proclaimed, “Tuka does mean the overthrow of Government. I have always said so.”¹²⁷ Thurston himself toured the area, personally ordering and overseeing the flogging of hundreds of men at Nasoqo where he also threatened to hang, shoot and burn the new acting Buli Boubuco,¹²⁸ if he didn’t make his people behave themselves.¹²⁹

¹²³ Joske to CS, 1 August 1891, CSO 91/2344.

¹²⁴ See the report by Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi on “Damage done to crops from Drauniivi to Nakorowaiwai by Thomas’s cattle.” 16 February 1891, CSO 91/730. This file reveals that Thomas finally erected his fences in March 1891. Yet, cattle continued to stray well into the late 1890s. See CSO 99/2931 for more correspondence regarding the dispute.

¹²⁵ Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi to Joske, 15 March 1891, CSO 91/1133.

¹²⁶ Joske to CS, 1 August 1891, CSO 91/2344.

¹²⁷ Joske to CS, 11 May 1891, CSO 91/1546.

¹²⁸ The previous Buli Boubuco was in gaol on a charge of vakatubuca or “spreading evil reports”, the usual charge for Tuka. Scarr, 1980: 224.

¹²⁹ Scarr, 1980: 226.

Punishment and Exile

The government's crackdown on Tuka continued uninterrupted from April to July. There are conflicting reports about the level of violence used by the administration to punish the perpetrators and to permanently eradicate the movement. In his August 1891 despatch to the Secretary of State for Colonies, Thurston detailed his meetings and movements in Colo and to Drauniivi but speaks of only one whipping, that of Senileba, the powerful priest of Nasoqo. However, oral tradition speaks of vast surfaces of *masi* cloth used to soak the large amount of blood that flowed during the public flogging of numerous captured votaries. The sites where these cloths were interned are still revered today.¹³⁰ Eventually, all the leaders were arrested, publicly flogged, gaoled and deported.¹³¹ The attack sparked an exodus of refugees (especially from Nasoqo) who sought shelter wherever they could (including caves) though most ended up in Savulelele and Nubumakita.¹³²

The governor also instructed Joske and Carew to identify a suitable site for a new government outpost in Northern Colo. Nadarivatu was duly identified as the best spot and a number of trainee carpenters from the new Native Technical School at Yanawai (near Savusavu in Vanua Levu) were brought in to build the new camp. The gaol was one of the first buildings to go up.¹³³ A. B. Joske and twenty-five Armed Native Constabulary took command of the post in the hope that this physical display of power would discourage any further dissent.

While most of the drama may have taken place at Nasoqo, the inspiration for disobedience and rebellion continued to flow from Navosavakadua's irrepressible village of Drauniivi. While the village existed, it could continue to infuse the movement with its religious, cultural and political vitality and offer a persistent, well-

¹³⁰ Semi Duaibe, Personal Communication, 3 June 2004. This man is a descendant of one of the Nasoqo deportees.

¹³¹ Joske to CS, 1 August 1891, CSO 91/2344. This file contains a list compiled by the government, of Tuka's principal leaders with their various functions in the organisation and the level of danger they posed. Most were *bete* (priests). They were deported mainly to Gau and to Lau. See also CSO 91/2240, 92/38, and 92/1017.

¹³² Joske to CS, 10 June 1891, CSO 91/1828.

¹³³ CS to Thurston, 18 June 1892, CSO 92/2064. Nadarivatu had already been identified as a potential location for a government constabulary post after the second wave of Tuka in 1886, but a heavy schedule of other government affairs had delayed its establishment. See Despatch 21, Thurston to SS, 16 February 1886. CSO Despatches.

organised and popular alternative to the fledgling colonial administration. The authorities referred to it as a “cancer”¹³⁴ which had to be removed. In August 1891, on the advice of Joske and Carew, Thurston took the unprecedented decision to order the destruction of the entire village and decreed that Drauniivi’s name should forever be forgotten.¹³⁵ The village was razed to the ground and its inhabitants deported to Korolevu in the Kadavu district of Naceva. So were the Wacakena people, inhabitants of the Nakauvadra villages of Natuna, Nayalayala, and Vale Lebo.¹³⁶

With the displacement of hundreds of people,¹³⁷ the decimation of its leadership, and the presence of an armed force in the neighbourhood, Tuka was finally broken. The government also took a number of other measures to prevent any future resurgence. Nasoqo was “straightened up” by Joske,¹³⁸ though the continuous decline of its population reduced it to a mere shadow of its former grandeur. Chiefs and other government officials in Naboubuco, Muaira and other Lomaicolo districts who had been unable or unwilling to restrain their people from joining the movement were severely reprimanded while those whose loyalty was doubtful were replaced.¹³⁹ The administration also restructured and subdivided districts, and removed and amalgamated several of the offending villages into more visible and accessible ones.¹⁴⁰ This was calculated to render their management and surveillance more effective and their future resistance more easily detectable. The policy of regulating space, controlling movement, and imposing discipline through the systematic relocation and amalgamation of villages is discussed in Chapter Five.

¹³⁴ Joske to CS, 1 August 1891, CSO 91/2344.

¹³⁵ Despatch 53, Thurston to SS, 12 August 1891. CSO Despatches.

¹³⁶ For details of the names, number, and provenance of deportees from these villages, see the lists in Roko Tui Ra to CS, 18 April 1902, enclosed in CSO 02/2057.

¹³⁷ For reports on the arrival of more than 250 people who were deported to Kadavu, see the Viwa Circuit Annual Report and Kadavu Circuit Report for 1891 in F/6/1891. The Viwa Circuit Report for 1892 contains information on the “progress” made by the exiles while on the island. These reports further illustrate the usefulness of mission officials in furnishing useful intelligence to the government. For reference to those Kai Vatukaloko who were relocated within Ra, see CSO 04/1473.

¹³⁸ Minute in Buli Boubuco’s “Report requesting the removal of Navala to Nasoqo, 11 January 1898, CSO 98/699.

¹³⁹ Buli Naboubuco and his brother, and the scribe of Noemalu were among several of the government officials dismissed and punished for colluding with Tuka leaders and participating in the movement. See Brewster, “Genealogies and Histories of the Matanitu or Tribal Government of Central Viti Levu.” Torquay, 1923. (ii). See also page 2 in “The Chronicles of Vunaqumu” in the same volume.

¹⁴⁰ Joske to CS, 11 May 1891, CSO 91/1546; Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi to CS, 24 September 1894, CSO 94/4244; and Buli Boubuco’s “Report requesting the removal of Navala to Nasoqo, 11 January 1898, CSO 98/699. See also Despatch 53, Thurston to SS, 12 August 1891 regarding the removal of Udu and Drauniivi villages. CSO Despatches.

Sending people into exile was intended at least partly to change their behaviour. It also had other potential outcomes. It could loosen the link between village and land and help dismantle the bond between land, people and their common history. It could also weaken their troublesome claims to precedence and, as the government hoped, lead to their permanent resettlement elsewhere.¹⁴¹ The exile of the Kai Drauniivi certainly benefited the Thomas Brothers who, in spite of continued but weakened opposition from other local and European claimants, profited by consolidating their claim on Yaqara.¹⁴² In the absence of the deportees, several other parcels of land claimed by Kai Drauniivi and Wacakena were leased to existing and new settlers by other local claimants. The size and number of these leases was such that the government could not find adequate land to resettle them when the term of deportation finally ended.¹⁴³

The return of the exiles was carefully managed. Government had declined successive requests by Ra and Colo North chiefs to repatriate the deportees¹⁴⁴ as well as several petitions by the deportees themselves to be allowed to return.¹⁴⁵ Finally in 1902, after the expiry of the confining order and government's failure to convince them to stay permanently in Kadavu, the deportees returned to the province of Ra. They were resettled in two successive years and dispersed in various districts. In 1902, the Wacakena people were divided and relocated at Naraviravi in Tokaimalo, Naelecibi in Nailuva, and Vatukacevaceva in Naroko.¹⁴⁶ The following year, the rest of the Drauniivi deportees were resettled near the government station at Nanukuloa.¹⁴⁷ This proximity to the Roko Tui Ra was intended to facilitate their surveillance. It was also necessitated by the lack of sufficient land near the original village site.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴¹ Sutherland minute in Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi's "Report on the resettlement of Drauniivi deportees," 18 April 1902, CSO 02/2057.

¹⁴² Joske to CS, 20 June 1899, CSO 99/2931.

¹⁴³ Roko Tui Ra to CS, 18 April 1902, CSO 02/2057.

¹⁴⁴ Buli Boubuco to CS, 8 June 1891, CSO 94/2201; and Roko Tui Ra to CS, 18 April 1902, CSO 02/2057.

¹⁴⁵ Sutherland, 1910: 57.

¹⁴⁶ Roko Tui Ra to CS, 18 April 1902, CSO 02/2057.

¹⁴⁷ The settlement was called Kadavu Lailai (Little Kadavu). Roko Tui Ra to CS, 18 April 1902, CSO 02/2057.

¹⁴⁸ Roko Tui Ra to CS, 18 April 1902, CSO 02/2057.

In 1907 and after sixteen years in exile, the Kai Drauniivi were permitted to resettle on the original site of their village. The administration was cautiously optimistic that the new generation of villagers had grown up with “other ideas to those of their progenitors,” though Joske was quick to advise that the village should be kept under “strict scrutiny”.¹⁴⁹ Yet, within seven years of the resettlement, the village had become the Ra centre of the Viti Kabani, an emerging politico-commercial enterprise which was poised to mount the largest unified anti-colonial challenge in Fiji and forms the subject of the next chapter. The local manager for the Kabani was Taivesi Mamaqarua, Drauniivi’s new Turaga ni Koro and cousin of Navosavakadua.

However, a major change in Drauniivi’s strategy of resistance occurred in 1917 and 1918 with the Ra sittings of the Native Lands Commission (headed by G. V. Maxwell and assisted by two Bauan chiefs). Until then, like many other villages around Fiji, Drauniivi had participated in a countrywide undeclared boycott of the Commission (this boycott is discussed further in Chapter Five). In 1917 however, the Commission’s new terms of reference included the power to appropriate for the Crown any land not submitted for claim by boycotting villages. Faced with the prospect of losing more of their land, the Drauniivi people elected to participate in a project which they also knew would legitimise the colonial administration’s right to arbitrate the validity of their claims.

Leading Drauniivi’s submission was Mamaqarua’s son, Joeli Bavou, who compiled a seventy-five page book¹⁵⁰ documenting Vatukaloko’s tribal history. The book presents a vision of the district as having temporal, genealogical and ritual precedence over all other peoples and polities including those Bauan or colonial. At the head of the polity stands Jehovah from whom descend other deities including Degei, Nakausabaria and Nacirikaumoli.¹⁵¹ The adoption of Jehovah as the spiritual head of Vatukaloko represents an important conceptual shift and reflects a new framework within which the Vatukaloko were willing to venture their claims in the evolving colonial order of things. In this case, resistance was marked by the appropriation of signs and instruments (such as the sitting of the Lands Commission, the act of writing,

¹⁴⁹ Native Commissioner to CS, 12 December 1907, CSO 07/6293.

¹⁵⁰ This book is kept in the village and was consulted by Martha Kaplan during her anthropological fieldwork in Drauniivi.

¹⁵¹ Kaplan, 1995: 150.

and the adoption of religious figures) from within the dominant centres of power. The counter-history which emerged allowed for a redefinition of Vatukaloko identity in ways that were more compatible with colonial expectations. This can be read as a major concession to colonial power, but it simultaneously constitutes one of the earliest written attempts at delegitimising the centralising and normalising practices of colonialism in Fiji.¹⁵² Although the account failed to influence the commission's judgment in the short term, it continues in the present day to infuse Vatukaloko people's efforts to recover possession of their geographical, cultural, religious and political heritage.

Later Outbreaks

As for Tuka, one of its most effective weapons had been its capacity to spread without detection by the administration. From 1891, it was forced to adopt an ever more clandestine character so that if the practice persisted, the government was seldom aware of it.¹⁵³ It was not until 1914 that the government learned of a highly organized Tuka secret society embracing all the leading chiefs and nearly all the men of Qaliyalatina, Toqe (on the Ba River), Naboubuco, and several from Colo West, including Nabisiki's village of Namoli, Nukuilau and Vatubalavu. This offshoot of Tuka is well discussed by Macnaught¹⁵⁴ and contains characteristics similar to those of its predecessors. A sacred society, the Bai Tabua, was formed in the service of the twin gods Nacirikaumoli and Nakausabaria. Its leader Osea Tamanikoro, from Nabatimaoli in Qaliyalatina professed that he would realise the reversals predicted by Navosavakadua and made the same explicit promises that foreigners would become their slaves, and that the church and the government would be driven out. All would then contribute to build a large new house at Vatukoro, the place where their fathers

¹⁵² The formation of such contestatory knowledges and their inscription, like graffiti, in the heart of colonialism's mechanics of truth production, have not been dealt with in this thesis because of space constraints. They deserve, however, a separate study.

¹⁵³ Some Ra men from Naroko were discovered in 1896 to be practising Tuka though on this occasion none of the symptoms of sedition which had been so prominent five years before were evident. See Commissioner Colo and East to CS, 17 February 1908, CSO 08/974. After the turn of the century, several other minor tuka-related cases were uncovered and punished accordingly including one in 1907 in Nadrau where an elaborate hierarchy of sergeants and scribes was discovered. It was presided over by a Vuki, or official responsible for overseeing Navosavakadua's prophesy of turning the world upside down and return Fiji to its original owners. On this occasion, Joske sentenced ten men to two months with hard labour. Joske to CS, 17 February 1908, CSO 08/974.

¹⁵⁴ Macnaught, 1982: 95-8.

had defeated Cakobau's force in 1868.¹⁵⁵ This site would symbolise the end of oppression and the birth of a new Fiji under Tamanikoro's leadership. Tamanikoro's self-serving ambitions aside, there is little doubt that his appeal to the interior's deep-seated resentment of Bau, its suspicions of Christianity, and its contempt for the government and foreigners continued to strike a chord with many people.

The government's response was similar to previous outbreaks. The leaders (seventeen in all) were arrested, those who were holding government positions were dismissed and the district of Qaliyalatina was abolished. Tamanikoro was confined to Oneata in the Lau Group for ten years while his principal accomplices were deported to other islands in Lau and to Kadavu.¹⁵⁶ For their part, ordinary villagers followed the lead of many of their neighbours and registered their dissent by converting to Roman Catholicism and Seventh Day Adventism. This they did both as a mark of protest and in the hope that the regulations administered so stringently by the Methodist Church would not apply so obstinately in other denominations. It also suggests that in many parts, villagers identified authority with the Church rather than the secular state.

Yet, the administration could never be sure that Tuka had been completely eradicated. Writing in 1922, Joske speculated that in spite of Government's best efforts, the practice continued to exist. Macnaught suggests that Tuka persisted into the thirties.¹⁵⁷ My own impression on recent visits to the interior is that Tuka as a movement has all but disappeared from oral history. On the other hand, the memory of Navosavakadua, his prophecies, and magical deeds remain firmly embedded in the collective consciousness of Ra and Colo people.

Reflections

Religion was always of paramount importance in the movement. In many ways, the protest took a religious form because religion was the most effective rallying point existing at the time. While the essence of religion came from Nakauvadra, the leadership was provided by the powerful *bete*, and the following came from the districts where as Thornley points out there was dissatisfaction with economic,

¹⁵⁵ Commissioner Colo North to CS, 16 July 1914, CSO 14/6625.

¹⁵⁶ Macnaught, 1982: 98.

¹⁵⁷ Macnaught, 1982: 99.

political and social conditions and where people “moved out of the church to highlight their predicament and sought instead the gods with whom they were better able to identify”.¹⁵⁸ Hence, far from being a mere superstition leading to native madness, or a drug that worked to perpetuate the privileges of the powerful, religion acted in Tuka as a vehicle through which to channel rebellion. Where Wesleyanism often strengthened the rule of chiefs and imposed a temporal order of work and worship that suited the disciplinary and routinising aims of the administration, Tuka’s malleable syncretism allowed it to appropriate the potent power of Jehovah as a Nakauvadra god and use it as an emancipatory force. Navosavakadua and his associates appropriated the potent elements of Christianity and transformed them into an emphatic affirmation of the strength and pre-eminence of Fijian civilization. This counter-point repositioned Tuka supporters to the centre where before they had been alienated and marginalized.

Tuka did not therefore reject Christianity. While it retained certain ingredients as signs of Fijian particularity, it skilfully claimed some of Christianity’s most powerful motifs to gain for itself a greater degree of universality, standing and acceptance. Biblical names were freely applied to places around Nakauvadra and Navosavakadua’s week was divided into seven days all named after Fijian deities, Tuono being the Sabbath reserved for meetings held at dedicated Tuka houses.¹⁵⁹ No evidence could be found in primary materials to suggest that any intimidation took place against Christians or their buildings and institutions. They appear to have been merely ignored or boycotted. For instance, when the children of Lamisa in Tokaimalo stopped attending school in 1891, Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi noted that this was explicitly linked to the practice of Tuka.¹⁶⁰ Yet, no attack was ever made on the school or its teacher. Navosavakadua and Tuka therefore challenged not through rejection but through appropriation. He appropriated Christianity and simultaneously challenged the normative order it had become associated with.

For ordinary Ra and Colo villagers whose integration in the new order was not working in their favour, Tuka gave them the opportunity to reassert their autonomy by associating with a leader and movement that was more familiar and sympathetic to

¹⁵⁸ Thornley, 1979: 161.

¹⁵⁹ Sutherland, 1910: 54.

¹⁶⁰ Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi to Joske, 15 March 1891, CSO 91/1133.

their interests. For those who adopted Navosavakadua as their leader and Tuka as their religion, the project was neither disorderly nor irrational. It was a restorative movement. As Sutherland put it, “Tuka was a scheme of regeneration”.¹⁶¹ But as much as it was restorative, the movement was not entirely backward looking. Rather, it was grounded in real grievances about very current inequities, and oriented towards a better, more dignified future. As such it was an empowering movement.

Kaplan has argued that because Tuka created a polity of invulnerability and reversals, it became conceivable for its followers to envision a future in which inequities of power and status could be nullified. In this polity of reversals, the people were to have control over their chiefs.¹⁶² James Scott has argued about certain subordinate groups that while they may have trouble imagining other power arrangements than those of their immediate experience, “they have no trouble imagining a total reversal of the existing distribution of status and rewards”.¹⁶³ The extent to which such a vision of was achieved under Tuka is debatable but if it was, then Reverend Webb had good reason to liken Tuka to “radicalism”.

The longevity and persistence of Tuka suggests that Tuka was more than a mere superstition with an unfortunate and misguided anti-colonial agenda.¹⁶⁴ Nor can Navosavakadua be dismissed as a “more or less stupid” “prophet of sorts”.¹⁶⁵ In reality, Tuka’s politics was so closely integrated with the religion that the two became almost indistinguishable. While it failed to recognise and address the wide range of grievances that lay at the origin of the insurgency, the government realised the versatility of Tuka and opted to physically remove its most dangerous characters and four entire villages. In approving these measures, Basil Thomson wrote that stamping out Tuka required the same energy that government would employ against dangerous conspiracies of a political nature.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Sutherland, 1910: 55.

¹⁶² Kaplan, 1995: 113.

¹⁶³ Scott, 1990. 80.

¹⁶⁴ For early representations of Tuka in published works, see Webb, 1885; *Fiji Times* articles on 16 January, 3 February, and 3 July 1886; Thomson, 1908; Sutherland, 1910; and Brewster, 1922.

¹⁶⁵ Brewster, 1922: 237, 245. As a “mad prophet”, Navosavakadua was often compared to Te Kooti (and Tuka to the Hauhau Movement) by settlers who had come to Fiji from New Zealand. (See Brewster, Carew, Thomson, and Sutherland in particular).

¹⁶⁶ Thomson, 1895: 359.

Hence, Tuka caused the administration considerable anxiety.¹⁶⁷ As the head of the movement, Navosavakadua certainly challenged British constructions of legitimate leadership which assumed that only white men and coastal, Christian, Bauan or other comprador chiefs could govern. His apparent imperviousness to the administration's attempts to restrain and contain him, also symbolized the vulnerability of the colonial project, the administration's organisational frailties, its incomplete knowledge and control of people and its incapacity to regulate all things at all time. The strategic manipulation of these weaknesses, opened avenues for people to contest the legitimacy of colonial authority and to imagine and occasionally live their lives independently of it. The movement was therefore never completely outside the confines of the dominant system of power nor was it completely controlled by it from the inside.

There were certainly signs to indicate that Tuka had frailties and inequities of its own. Brewster accused Tuka priests of selfishness and occasional abuse in their quest to recuperate lost income and prestige.¹⁶⁸ In admonishing villagers for practising Tuka, Thurston underlined the excessive demands of Tuka leaders such as Senileba who had coerced Nasoqo people into working his gardens and furnishing him with endless supplies of food, yaqona, mats, and other such goods and services. How could they, wondered Thurston in astonishment, continually choose such a relic of a disorderly past as Tuka over the benefits of peace and good order which British rule had achieved?¹⁶⁹ This colonial order had been embraced by Fiji's coastal chiefs, and their support of the administration inhibited the spread of Tuka beyond Ra and Colo. It is difficult to estimate the extent to which Tuka as an essentially self-contained local challenge found resonance with a wider pan-Fijian audience. In the end, Tuka was crushed before it could challenge the administration on a wider front. Its defeat came not because of any of Tuka's internal flaws or deficiencies but because of the state's ability and willingness to use its coercive power.

This chapter of Fiji's history again underlines the fallacy of understanding Fijians under colonial rule as being passive obedient people at the service of a benevolent

¹⁶⁷ Sutherland, 1910: 56.

¹⁶⁸ Brewster, 1922: 247.

¹⁶⁹ Despatch 53, Thurston to SS, 12 August 1891. CSO Despatches. See also the excesses of Raicula in Udu in Joske to CS, 11 May 1891, CSO 91/1546.

administration. Power was contested at different levels, for a number of complex reasons, and by an enterprising population keenly responsive to its past prestige, present difficulties and future aspirations. Tuka showed colonial authority to be tentative and imperfect, although ultimately, the government was resolute and decisive enough to impose its will. Yet, Navosavakadua and Tuka were to have lasting effects on future manifestations of popular discontent in Fiji's colonial history. Although the movement itself did not resurface with the same force it had in the 1880s and early 1890s, Tuka infused its spirit into other popular movements such as the Viti Kabani. It is to this, the largest resistance movement of Fiji's colonial history, that we next turn to.

Chapter Three

The Movement for Federation and the Viti Kabani

Apolosi Nawai is one of Fiji's most well known rebels and has received relatively more attention from historians than other dissidents. The Viti Kabani is the best known of Fiji's resistance movements. This is not surprising for when Nawai formed the Viti Kabani (Fiji Company) in 1913, he and his supporters mounted the single most important popular challenge to the colonial administration and the chiefs who were part of it. When it peaked in 1915 and again in 1917, the Kabani had established itself as a rival government in all parts of the colony except for Rotuma and stood as a powerful example of unarmed resistance which united a formerly disparate Fijian population of all backgrounds. Yet, in comparison with other historical phenomena and illustrious personalities such as Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna, Apolosi Nawai and his movement remain relatively unknown and under-researched. Among the least understood is the specific political and socio-economic context within which he and his contemporaries evolved and the role that this played in the success of the movement. Until now, all existing historiography on Apolosi Nawai has begun with his rise to public attention in 1913¹ However, the forces that led to the formation of the Kabani were at work well before then. To fill this historiographical void, this chapter begins with the period from the end of Tuka in the early 1890s and surveys a series of historical developments that help explain the emergence of the Viti Kabani in the early 1910s. These moments are also used to bridge the two periods (Tuka and Viti Kabani) and to show the persistence of discontent across time. They include the Seaqaqa War of 1894, the movement for federation with New Zealand (1901-1903), and the popular rising against Bau in Tailevu from 1907 to 1912. The core section analyses the movement as a challenge to the colonial administration up to the period of Apolosi Nawai's first exile to Rotuma in 1917.

¹ A summary of all Colonial Secretary Office (CSO) files about Apolosi and the Viti Kabani up to 1915 is contained in a memo from Allardyce to CS, 1 June 1915, CSO 15/5843. Other primary materials used in this chapter include the "Notes of the Proceedings of a Native Council or Council of Chiefs" (1914 and 1917), documents from Colonial Office file CO 83 (Public Records Office, London), the *Fiji Times*, and records of the Methodist Mission in Fiji. For secondary literature see Couper, 1968; Gaunavou Nawai and David Toma, *Ai Tukutuku Bibi e Baleti Ratu Avolosi R. Nawai*. Nadi: S.S.P. Press, undated pamphlet; Macnaught 1978 and 1982; Durutalo, 1985a; Sutherland, 1992; Kaplan and Kelly, 1994; Kaplan, 1995; Weeks, 1995; and Heartfield, 2003.

The Seaqaqa War: 1894

The people of Ra and the interior of Viti Levu did not have a monopoly on resistance, neither did they resist all the time. Others around the colony had also lost land, polity, autonomy, status or had them diminished or altered. Some chose to express their dissatisfaction privately or in ways that would avoid detection while others chose a more dramatic path. Seaqaqa villagers in the interior of Vanua Levu chose the latter in 1894 when they defied the colonial authorities in the last open armed confrontation between villagers and the government. This war has never been thoroughly investigated by any of Fiji's historians. This can be partly attributed to the loss of the main CSO records pertaining to the war.² Deryck Scarr is the only contemporary historian to pay this war any interest and sums it up as being "of the same nature as the Ra conspiracy seventeen years earlier".³

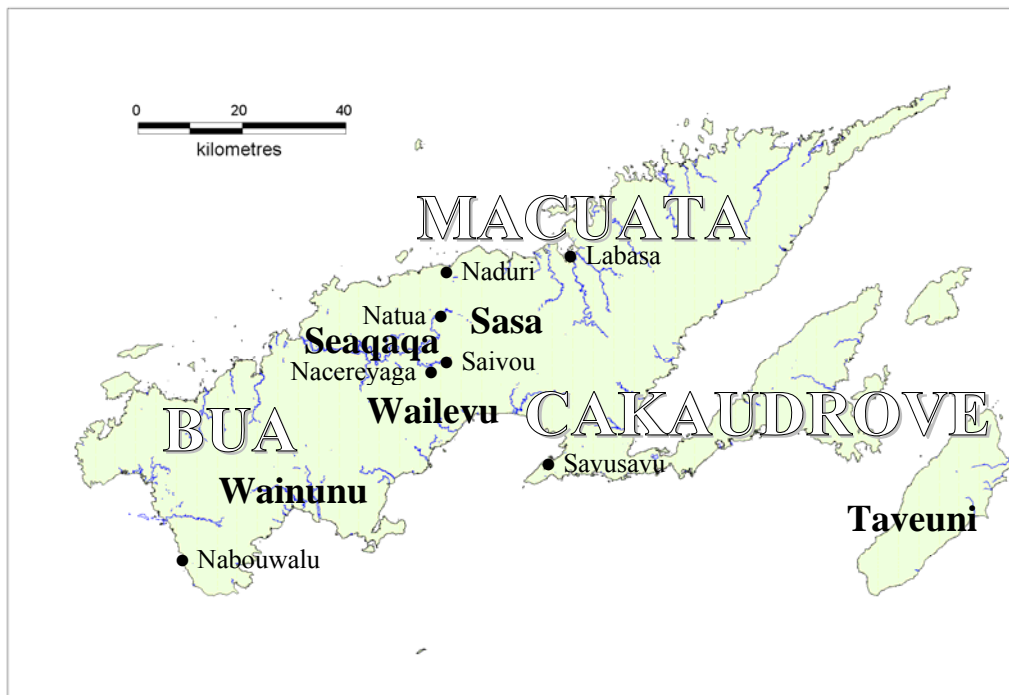
Scarr's allusion to the Tuka movement is not misplaced for the Seaqaqa War, though short-lived, shares some striking similarities with the conflicts in Ra and Colo.

Seaqaqa is located in the interior of Vanua Levu and its people are also known among coastal dwellers as kai Colo. The people had long-established traditional and kinship ties with Wailevu in the south and resented the new colonial demarcations which had placed them, especially those from the tikina of Sasa, under the authority of Naduri in the north, the seat of the Roko Tui Macuata.⁴ In somewhat similar fashion to the Bauan appointments in Ra, the Roko Tui Macuata's brother had been appointed Buli of Seaqaqa ahead of several prominent local aspirants (Ramasieli, Yacadra and Qaranivalu in particular), thereby accentuating the bitterness of the latter and creating powerful enemies.

² In the introductory remarks to his short study of the war in 1962, J. W. Deering points out that many of the documents had already disappeared at the time of his writing. Deering compensated for this lack by using a Radio Fiji interview of Taito Tamatawale to reconstruct the chronology of events. Another indigenous account is that of Ua ni Wasaliwa, the nom de plume of a contributor to the official Fijian newsletter *Na Mata*. This account was submitted for publication a month after the hostilities and should be considered as one of the few existing primary sources of the conflict. It was translated by G.A.F.W. Beauclerc and republished in the *Transactions of the Fijian Society* in 1919. Basil Thomson refers briefly to the war in his 1908 book *Fijians: A Study in the Decay of Custom* London: Heinemann, 1908 in which he contends that the outbreak "had no political importance". 145. For his part Deering described the war as "anti-Christian and anti-British" in nature and "the last oppositional movement to colonial rule". J. Deering, "The Seaqaqa War." in *Transactions of the Fiji Society*. 9: 1, 1962. 113.

³ Scarr, 1984: 107.

⁴ Despatch 53, Thurston to SS, 25 June 1894. CSO Despatches. NAF. See also "Notes of the Proceedings of a Native Council," Suva, 1894. 12.



Map 12: Map of Vanua Levu showing the location of Seaqqa, 1894.

The construction of a new sugar mill in Labasa had raised the strategic importance of the area, and the administration depended on the cooperation of neighbouring districts for the successful extension of sugar production. However, the arrival in such close proximity of their home of such a powerful economic player, the Colonial Sugar Refinery, reputed also to be a land-seizing and labour-hungry company, also raised anxiety. In 1894, the Sasa people were ordered to provide *buabua* posts for the construction of the new sugar mill at Labasa. The posts were rejected because they were not straight and the men were ordered to cut and carry new ones.

Ordinary people were further incensed by the long distances they had to travel to work the cane fields near the Labasa coast and by the maize they had to grow closer to home for tax purposes, but which brought them so few visible benefits.⁵ When three constables arrived at Calalevu on 31 May 1894 to serve summonses on the villagers for non-payment of taxes, they were met by an angry crowd of armed men

⁵ Thomson, 1908: 145, and Scarr, 1980: 286.

with blackened faces, and beaten back.⁶ Under the leadership of Yacadra and Qaranivalu, Calalevu men then set off to the villages of Nacereyaga and Delaiviti and took them without bloodshed before burning villages in Saivou, killing two men.⁷ Preparations for these attacks had been in place for some time and a temple had been built in honour of Vatewa, the god of war, whose worship had resumed in earnest.⁸

News of the insurgency reached Suva on 11 June prompting Thurston to assemble a force of forty armed native constabularies under Bauan command, and to travel immediately to Labasa. With the Tuka rising uppermost on his mind, Governor Thurston feared that if rebellion got a hold in Seaqaqa, it would quickly spread to Viti Levu including the recently disturbed districts of Naboubuco, Tokaimalo and Nalawa and “the whole colony would in all probability and within a week or two be thrown into a state of disorder which could only be remedied at the cost of much time, money and loss of life”.⁹ On arrival in Naduri, he picked up sixteen more Macuata recruits and was assured of the readiness of four hundred more men from Lekutu, Bua, Nayakasiga and Dama to support the government force.¹⁰

In the meantime, Qaranivalu, an old war leader and former turaga ni koro of Calalevu, had taken up position at Caumurimuri, an inaccessible highly fortified hilltop.¹¹ The garrison numbered one hundred warriors at the most and carried no arms other than spears. Basil Thomson, writing fourteen years after the conflict, estimated that the battle was over in a matter of minutes.¹² However brief the clash was, it appears that this battle was fought, as many were in the 1876 Colo War, according to traditional Fijian war etiquette. Once the government force had shot dead seven of the rebels and gained a clear ascendancy on the battleground, a number of the insurgents gave themselves up while the rest took to the bush. Among those who escaped was Qaranivalu who was captured in Cakaudrove three days later. Two others took their own lives and a woman died of wounds suffered from a stray bullet.¹³

⁶ Despatch 53, Thurston to SS, 25 June 1894.

⁷ Thomson, 1908: 145, and Ua ni Wasaliwa, “The Seaqaqa War.” in *Transactions of the Fijian Society*. 1919. Trans. G. A. Beauclerc. (Pages of the *Transactions of the Fijian Society* are not numbered.)

⁸ Despatch 53, Thurston to SS, 25 June 1894.

⁹ Despatch 53, Thurston to SS, 25 June 1894.

¹⁰ Despatch 53, Thurston to SS, 25 June 1894.

¹¹ Despatch 53, Thurston to SS, 25 June 1894.

¹² Thomson, 1908: 146.

¹³ Despatch 53, Thurston to SS, 25 June 1894.

As he had done three years earlier in Nasoqo, Thurston ordered the bure kalou destroyed, and a large black basalt rock – a shrine of Vatewa – was symbolically thrown over the precipice.¹⁴ He then convened a meeting of all the people in the area and informed them that they would be forced out of their province, though he later changed his mind and decided to amalgamate the towns “because small towns without a town-chief, and impossible to be supervised, originated trouble”.¹⁵ The towns of Nacereyaga, Delaiviti, Navakaiteqe, Vuna, Watidratagane, Nukuseva, Naisogolato, Calalevu, and Savuroloka, were ordered removed to Natua to become only one town. Several others were amalgamated so that only three villages remained.¹⁶ For their part, the people of Volivoli, like those of Drauniivi before them, were taken *en masse* to Naduri and placed under surveillance.

As in Colo, Ra and Naboubuco, the entire leadership was either executed, deported or imprisoned for lengthy periods. In late July, Qaranivalu and his associate Masuveni were hung while four other prisoners had their death sentences commuted.¹⁷ Tamailaivou, one of the principal ringleaders of the rising and two chiefs (Ramasiale of Colo Wailevu and Ratu George Katonivere), were banished to Cikobia, Somosomo (Taveuni), and Lau respectively for their accessory roles in the rising.¹⁸ Two other priests received ten years penal servitude.¹⁹

Upon his return to Suva, Thurston addressed the chiefs assembled for their annual council meeting and urged them to weed out all remaining “old” and “evil” practices. Like most other officials, he grouped these practices under the general category of *Kalou Rere* and declared that “such practices are altogether foolishness, and it is a foolishness that leads men’s minds astray, leads them to forget the authority of the land and the word of God, and can only end in their ruin”.²⁰ The chiefs responded

¹⁴ Despatch 53, Thurston to SS, 25 June 1894.

¹⁵ Ua ni Wasaliwa.

¹⁶ Ua ni Wasaliwa. Saivou and Nacereyaga were re-established at some later point for they appear on present day maps.

¹⁷ Despatch 76, Thurston to SS, 13 August 1894.

¹⁸ See Roko Tui Macuata to Acting CS, 2 July 1900, CSO 00/2610.

¹⁹ Deering: 117.

²⁰ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” Suva, 1894. 3.

with “deep regret” in their letter to the Queen, that “a few of the people ... should have reverted to the dark heathen practices of bygone ages”.²¹

This response suggests that the disturbance was misplaced, juvenile and retrograde. Supporting the commonly held view that isolated communities were necessarily the most backward and most likely to resist change, Basil Thomson proposed that Seaqaqa communities had been so “completely cut off from the influence of Mission and Government” that they may as well have been living “in another country”.²² However, missionary accounts suggest that Seaqaqa grievances had been accumulating for more than two months and were explicitly linked to the protest over the payment of taxes to Macuata.²³ The decision by five neighbouring villages to join the “movement” within hours of Calalevu’s first strike on Saivou, and reports that the Qaranivalu’s force had quickly grown to more than a hundred men,²⁴ also suggests that there was more to this rising than the machinations of a few disgruntled individuals in a wild and isolated district of Fiji. Seaqaqa’s integration in the colonial order of things had not worked for its people. When they refused to pay their taxes, expelled the constables from their villages, and openly practised their Kalou Rere rituals, they rejected this new order because it had yielded so few benefits and too many hardships and anxieties.

As in Ra, the religious rituals were the most visual and public signs of the Seaqaqa defiance, but behind them lay a primarily political grievance. When he rebuked the chiefs for the persistence of these rituals in their districts, Thurston was speaking about Kalou Rere rituals mainly in their function as conduits through which political ambitions could be channelled. Thornley makes this point succinctly when he concludes that the districts that were dissatisfied with economic, political and social conditions seldom found in the church an effective spokesperson to understand their disaffection or to highlight their predicament. For this reason, they tended to seek instead “the gods with whom they were better able to identify”.²⁵

²¹ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1894. 71.

²² Thomson, 1908: 145.

²³ See Thornley, 1979: 139.

²⁴ Despatch 53, Thurston to SS, 25 June 1894.

²⁵ Thornley, 1979: 161.

The Movement for Federation: 1901 – 1903

Opposition to the taxation system was not confined to Seaqaqa. As will become evident in Chapter Five, resistance to taxation was pervasive and mostly took the form of day-to-day evasion or as William Allardyce²⁶ described it, “an obstinate mulish sitting down ... accompanied by sporadic acts of violence including incendiarism”.²⁷ But discontent over taxation was also the origin between 1900 and 1902 of a little known movement that sought to federate Fiji with New Zealand.

This movement was facilitated on the political front by the death of Governor John Bates Thurston in 1897. If, as Brewster remarked, “Thurston had left the people actively loyal”, his successor would leave them “passively disloyal”.²⁸ Soon after arriving in the colony, the new governor George O’Brien,²⁹ embarked on an extensive programme of reforms which he hoped would reverse the steady decrease of the Fijian population.³⁰ This involved an intensification of the existing programme of relocation and amalgamation of Fijian villages, a meticulous farming programme to economise time and labour in the production and collection of taxes, and new stringent sanitary measures that, among other things, forced villagers to buy cows and coerced mothers into giving their children cow’s milk in feeding bottles.³¹ It was hoped that this tighter regimentation of village life would free up more time for people to spend on their personal betterment and that of their offspring.³² The state’s attempts to control, discipline, and regiment movement, space, and body are discussed in more detail in Chapter Five as are instances of their transgression.

However, consultation gave way to inspections ordered and supervised by new European work programme inspectors. These reforms unnerved villagers. As

²⁶ For biographical details, see the *Cyclopedia of Fiji*, 1907.

²⁷ Despatch 19, O’Brien to SS, 21 February 1901. CSO Despatches.

²⁸ Brewster, 1922: 155.

²⁹ Governor O’Brien arrived in the colony on 10 July 1897 and left on 17 July 1901. For biographical details see the *Cyclopedia of Fiji* 1907.

³⁰ See the *Report of the Commission on Decrease of the Native Population 1893*. Suva: Government of Fiji, 1896.

³¹ Brewster, 1922: 154. The state’s attempts to control, discipline, and regiment movement, space, and body are discussed in more detail in Chapter Five as are instances of their transgression. See also Thomas, 1990: 149-70.

³² Paper 14: “Supplementary Estimates 1899.” in *JFLC*, 1900. 5.

Brewster observed “we were daily stirring them up and causing resentment”.³³ For example, great exception was taken to new laws relating to the location of pig sties. These had already been relocated a safe distance from villages, but were ordered moved even further away. The people rebelled and slaughtered their pigs. Brewster adds that interfering with pigs in Fiji was “tantamount in England to robbing a poor man of his beer”.³⁴ As Brewster recalled of the immediate post-Thurston years, “there certainly was at that time a good deal of unrest and dissatisfaction”.³⁵

Adding to the resentment was the tax scheme which paid for the salaries of European officials and many chiefs but yielded very few tangible benefits for villagers. In September of 1900, the government came under attack from the Reverend William Slade, a Wesleyan missionary based in Ba, who believed that Fijians were widely oppressed by the government, especially in the matter of iniquitous native taxes. He accused the government’s administration of Fijians of being tyrannical and of ruling by fear. He wrote that Fijians had been reduced to the condition of slaves not just to their chiefs but to the government and he concluded that Fijians were in a far worse position than Maori.³⁶ For this reason, Slade argued, Fijians would be better off under New Zealand rule. The letter was circulated widely throughout the colony prompting the government to accuse Slade of engaging in “a political campaign amongst the natives, with the ostensible object of persuading them to favour federation with New Zealand”.³⁷ The Governor put pressure on the Wesleyan mission to have Slade removed from the colony,³⁸ but the mission stood by him and the pro-federation lobby won its first important battle.

Previous attempts had been made at federating with New Zealand but few had met with any success.³⁹ This time however, it brought together an unlikely alliance of

³³ Brewster, 1922: 154.

³⁴ Brewster, 1922: 156.

³⁵ Brewster, 1922: 156.

³⁶ *Fiji Times*, 1 September 1901.

³⁷ Native Commissioner to CS, 24 December 1900, CSO 00/4899.

³⁸ The *Cyclopedia of Fiji*, 1907 claims that Slade was ordered to leave the country within twenty-one days and that this deportation order was later reversed after the intervention of the Australian and New Zealand premiers. However, the evidence from CSO records clearly shows that both the mission head and the parent board in Australia were satisfied with Slade’s mission work and his denials of wrongdoing. See CSO files 00/4899 and 01/63 in particular.

³⁹ For details of previous attempts at Federation, see R. A. Derrick, “The Federal Movement in Fiji.” in *Transactions and Proceedings of the Fiji Society*. 5: 4, 1951. 122-36.

disillusioned overworked and overtaxed villagers, several chiefs, nonconformist missionaries, and a number of local Europeans. The latter had been frustrated by years of Thurston's protective paternalist style of government which had consistently impeded their access to Fijian land and labour.⁴⁰ When the Premier of New Zealand Richard Seddon⁴¹ announced his plans to federate Fiji to New Zealand and followed this with a visit to Fiji (and other Pacific Islands) in May and June 1900, many rallied behind Humphrey Berkeley, a Suva lawyer, to agitate for constitutional change. The support of several Fijian chiefs was enlisted, most prominent among whom was the Tui Namosi, Ratu Matanitobua, the only surviving signatory of the Deed of Cession. His people and those from neighbouring Serua province had grown dissatisfied with the tax system which among other things, forced their dislocation for long periods to work the distant sugarcane tax fields near Navua.

In their extensive visits to Fijian villages, the leaders of the "New Zealand Party" told villagers that they were overtaxed, that federation would free them of the present tax system and liberate them from all communal obligations.⁴² Late in 1900, reports and letters began to arrive in Suva warning of increased activities by supporters of the movement for Federation. In November, O'Brien received information from Wilkinson that the people of Vanua Levu were preparing a rising "against the whites" owing to their hostility at being put "under the dominion of the white-men", meaning thereby the prospect of Federation with New Zealand. He added that he knew of no other occasion where real danger had been so manifest along this part of the country than during the last two months of the agitation.⁴³ Yet, opinion was divided and if Wilkinson thought that Fijians in Vanua Levu were staunchly loyal to Great Britain, the Roko Tui Cakaudrove begged to differ and wrote to the Colonial Secretary in February 1901 requesting a meeting of the chiefs to talk about Federation. His request was turned down.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ "Proceedings of a Native Council," Nabouwalu, Bua, 1896. 45.

⁴¹ For biographical details and a discussion of Seddon's imperial designs in the Pacific, see R. M. Burdon, *King Dick: A Biography of Richard John Seddon*. Christchurch: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1955. See also Donald Denoon, Philippa Mein-Smith, and Marivic Wyndham, *A History of Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. 2000.

⁴² Despatch 19, O'Brien to SS, 21 February 1901. CSO Despatches.

⁴³ See despatch 13, O'Brien to SS, 12 February 1901. CSO Despatches.

⁴⁴ Roko Tui Cakaudrove to Native Commissioner, 12 February 1901, CSO 01/640.

While some chiefs wrote to say they had no desire to join the movement,⁴⁵ others reported that too many of their people were dissatisfied with new government policies and that federation had become an attractive alternative. A leading chief of Nagonenicolo (close to the former Tuka districts of Nalawa and Naboubuco) expressed his displeasure at the government's handling of the affair when he told Joske ahead of a Colo East council meeting at Burenitu:

You are going to be disappointed to-morrow, sir; the people are going to vote for annexation to New Zealand. The young men are so determined, and we elders as their spokesmen will have to vote in accordance with their wishes. I do not want to do so myself, but I shall have to go with the crowd. Why has the Government given this chance to our youths? They always have a grievance of some sort or other and perpetually grumble. ... Now an opportunity of flouting you has been given and they will avail themselves of it.⁴⁶

By allowing meetings of provincial councils to discuss the proposed constitutional change, the government exposed itself to criticism from that "large part of the country" which Slade had identified as having "the greatest discontent" towards it.⁴⁷ For instance, at the Ba provincial meeting held in Yasawa in November 1900, delegates heard that the Bulu district favoured federation. In the same month, Inspector Potts reported from Lautoka that Fijian labourers were unsettled and that Mr Berkeley and one of his associates had encouraged them to ignore the law.⁴⁸

In January 1901, Serua and Namosi villagers stopped paying taxes altogether and began to collect money and cut buabua logs to raise cash for Berkeley and the movement.⁴⁹ Four of the leaders of the boycott (two from each province) were arrested outside Berkeley's office on 15 January and deported to Tavuki in Kadavu under the same Ordinance XX of 1887 which had been enacted to remove

⁴⁵ See Buli Navolau's letter, 10 January 1901 enclosed in CSO 01/255

⁴⁶ Brewster, 1922: 156.

⁴⁷ *Fiji Times*, 1 September 1900.

⁴⁸ Potts to CS, 19 November 1900, CSO 00/4531.

⁴⁹ Aminiasi to Native Commissioner, 29 April 1901, CSO 01/1796. Buabua is reputed to be among Fiji's strongest native timbers and was keenly sought after by the government and the CSR for the construction of mills, jetties, roads and buildings.

Navosavakadua.⁵⁰ However, in spite of their chiefs' orders against it, the collection of money for the federation movement continued through April and May⁵¹ and in June, the Navua stipendiary magistrate reported on the continually large number of absentees from Namosi tax fields.⁵² Reports also arrived that 'So Kalou' ceremonies or anti-government meetings with the gods had taken place in the province. These consultations with the gods had been practised in the past "when a new measure of Government was introduced, or when some unpopular foreign chief, or government official had been appointed".⁵³ At this time, these rituals threatened to give the movement the same religious complexion that had been such a formidable feature of Tuka. The government responded by threatening to dismiss all Fijian government officials in the province and began contemplating the desirability of dismembering Namosi altogether.⁵⁴

Fresh reports of secessionism were also arriving from other parts of the colony. In Western Viti Levu, information arrived in February and March 1901, that Wesleyan teachers had begun preaching Federation.⁵⁵ The Native Stipendiary Magistrate for Yasawa, Josaia Tupou, reported to the Roko Tui Ba that teachers in the district had been spreading reports that Fiji was now federated to New Zealand, that the governor had been removed from the colony and that the provincial tax inspector had run away to Nadroga.⁵⁶ In May came the dismissal of Ratu Savenaca Radomodomo, the Native Stipendiary Magistrate of Cakaudrove and Bauan chief. Ratu Savenaca had been active in the Natewa Bay area in garnering support for federation. In Taveuni, he had impeded the government's efforts to collect the signature of Fijians who wished to remain under English administration. Ratu Savenaca preferred to facilitate the circulation of a rival petition initiated by the New Zealand Party that favoured federation. After the termination of his services, Ratu Savenaca was ordered back to Bau where he was kept under surveillance.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ *Fiji Times*, 31 August 1901. These men (only known as Timoci Nasau, Ratu Tevita, Sauduadua and Sekove) were released in October 1901 after serving nine months of their term.

⁵¹ Buli Namosi and Buli Wainikoroiluva to Native Commissioner, 15 and 18 May 1901 respectively, CSO 01/1146.

⁵² SM Navua to CS, 17 April 1901, CSO 01/1623.

⁵³ SM Macuata to CS, 11 January 1905, CSO 05/303.

⁵⁴ See minutes by Sutherland and Allardyce, 30 April 1901, CSO 01/1796.

⁵⁵ Ratu Jope Naucabalavu to CS, 1 April 1901, CSO 01/1440.

⁵⁶ Ratu Jope Naucabalavu to CS, 1 April 1901, CSO 01/1440.

⁵⁷ Sutherland minute, 27 June 1901, CSO 01/2747.

In the face of mounting pressure O'Brien decided to introduce new legislation which he thought was needed to prevent "certain persons" from conducting a "systematic campaign amongst the native Fijians with a view to making them discontented with the present form of Government, and inducing some of them, if possible, to express a desire for federation with New Zealand".⁵⁸ This, he thought, would "unsettle the minds of Fijians", "dislocate the machinery of the communal system which is indispensable to their existence" and bring about chaos. He believed that the movement had reached a point where two hostile camps had emerged and the likelihood of bloodshed had become a distinct possibility.⁵⁹ The ensuing Ordinance 2 of June 1901 providing for the "Peace and Good Order of the Colony", stipulated that any person who caused a Fijian to be disaffected towards the Government or induced one to subvert or alter the present form of government was liable to be imprisoned with hard labour for up to six months.⁶⁰ This made it difficult even illegal for Fijians and renegade Europeans to collaborate on constitutional change. The Government did not think either party capable of sustaining the movement and bringing about the desired outcome on its own.

Before leaving the colony in July 1901, O'Brien told a number of senior Fijian chiefs assembled to farewell him that the New Zealand Party was only interested in getting "Fijian land and Fijian labour cheap for themselves".⁶¹ There was some verity in this claim. A survey of the numerous letters received and published by the editor of the *Fiji Times* between June 1900 and June 1903, suggests that settlers were undeniably preoccupied with their own interests and the commercial benefits of federation. And until Reverend Slade's letter, none seemed to care about how federation would be received by ordinary Fijians. Yet, O'Brien's attack on pro-federation settlers failed to account for the motivations of thousands of Fijians in supporting the movement.

The legislation only placed a temporary pause on the activities of Fijian petitioners. With O'Brien recalled and his successor yet to be named, William Allardyce assumed the interim Administration of the colony. But his hard line anti-federation stance and

⁵⁸ Paper 23: "Peace and Good Order Ordinance 1901." in *JFLC*, 1901. 1.

⁵⁹ Paper 23 in *JFLC*, 1901. 1.

⁶⁰ *Supplement to the Royal Gazette*, 2 July 1901.

⁶¹ *The Western Pacific Herald*, 20 July 1901.

heavy-handed treatment of pro-federation activists caused any hope of a change of policy to rapidly dissipate. In mid-October, the *Fiji Times* published letters written to Berkeley by Namosi villagers in which they claimed to be “in a bad way” on account of the Government’s continued tyranny in their province. They also criticised the Roko Tuis of Tailevu, Ba, Ra (all Bauans), Cakaudrove and Bua for signing a letter requesting the King to appoint Allardyce as the colony’s new governor.⁶² The collection of signatures for a petition addressed to the King had resumed and was gathering such momentum that, if allowed to continue unchecked, it would soon cast serious doubts on the Government’s claim to retain the loyalty of Fijians.

On 15 November 1901, the Government initiated a crackdown of the principal Fijian architects and promoters of the petition. Five days later, the Armed Native Constabulary arrested Ratu Avorosa Tuivuya, and then raided Berkeley’s home in search of Ratu Savenaca Radomodomo.⁶³ Ratu Avorosa was the Tui Suva and had been active in Serua and Namosi with the collection of cash and buabua logs to send Berkeley to London with the petition. He was well known to authorities for having masterminded a strike by dockworkers in early October 1890 at Suva’s Queen’s Wharf.⁶⁴ He had also earned a reputation for being “an agitator of the worst type” in 1897 for his support of Nakelo villagers during a particularly acrimonious dispute against surveyors of the Native Lands Commission and rival claimants from Natogadravu (see Map 13).⁶⁵ On that occasion, Ratu Avorosa had secured the services of Humphrey Berkeley to represent the villagers causing the Government considerable exasperation in the process. Allardyce had urged his deportation then,⁶⁶ and now late in 1901, with the entire constitutional future of the colony in the balance, he needed little encouragement to use Ordinance XX of 1887 and confine Ratu

⁶² See *Fiji Times*, 12 and 16 October 1901.

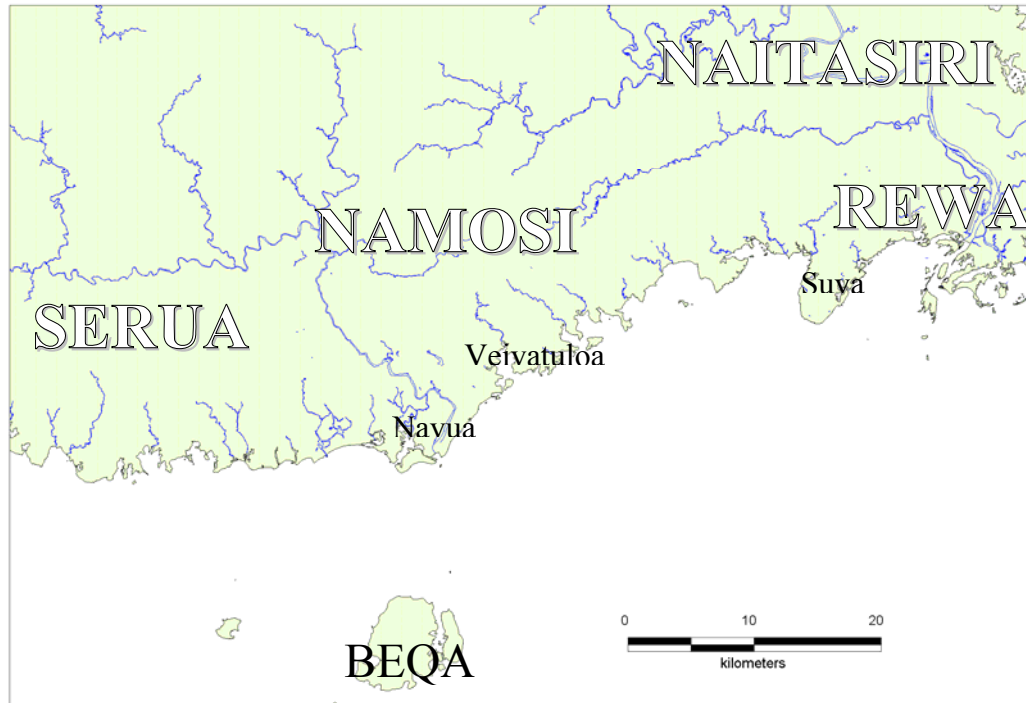
⁶³ For an account of this raid, see *Fiji Times*, 14 December 1901.

⁶⁴ This strike was prompted by similar industrial action in Australia and New Zealand in June and July 1890. The Suva strikers pledged not to work for less than four shillings on steamers, up two shillings on their existing earnings. The strike was short-lived owing mainly to the strikers (all from Ratu Avorosa’s Suvavou village) failing to inform and include other Fijian, Indian and Melanesian workers of their action. See Sergeant Gosstray to CS, 2 October 1890, CSO 90/3088. For details of the strike in Australia and New Zealand, see Eric Fry (ed.) *Rebels and Radicals*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1983; Jim Hagan and Andrew Wells, *The Maritime Strike: A Centennial Retrospective: Essays in Honour of Eric Fry*. Wollongong: Five Islands Press, 1992; and Stuart Svensen, *The Sinews of War: Hard Cash and the 1890 Maritime Strike*. Sydney: University of NSW Press, 1995.

⁶⁵ Roko Tui Tailevu to CS, 12 October 1897, CSO 97/4573. Resistance to land surveying is discussed in Chapter Five.

⁶⁶ Allardyce minute in Roko Tui Tailevu to CS, 12 October 1897, CSO 97/4573.

Avorosa to Oneata for two years. Ratu Savenaca was confined to Nayau for three years.⁶⁷



Map 13: Southern Viti Levu, 1900.

Four more chiefs were deported to Kadavu in the two weeks that followed. They were all from Namosi and had been suspected of aiding the movement. They included Ratu Matanitobua's son and buli of Veivatuhoa, Ratu Alivate Lagivala, the long serving native stipendiary magistrate for Namosi Veceli Verebalavu, and Ratu Matanitobua's two brothers Turaga Vakacawa and Ramari Rokotuivuna.⁶⁸ As political prisoners these six men were confined without trial and the *Fiji Times* was quick to point out that the only crime committed by these individuals had been their attempt to obtain by constitutional means (agitation by petition) some amelioration of the condition of Fijians.⁶⁹ Writs of *habeas corpus* were successfully filed by Berkeley and issued by the Supreme Court for the release of Ratu Avorosa and Ratu Savenaca, and the two leading chiefs of the movement were discharged on 6 April 1902 after serving 130

⁶⁷ See Buli Nayau to CS, 19 February 1902, CSO 02/1546, and SM Lau to Acting CS, 11 May 1902, CSO 02/2678.

⁶⁸ See Beddard to CS, dated April 1902, CSO 02/2010.

⁶⁹ *Fiji Times*, 18 December 1901.

days of their term.⁷⁰ The other four Namosi deportees had to wait for June 1902 and an act of clemency on the occasion of King Edward VII's coronation, before they were freed.⁷¹

One can only speculate the extent to which the deportation of these leaders affected the success of the petition. Nevertheless, by February 1902, Berkeley was in New Zealand campaigning for federation and publicising the contents of the petition. Written in Fijian, the petition was signed by four thousand ordinary Fijians and fifty chiefs. It was translated by Rev. Slade, and a copy appeared in the *Fiji Times*.⁷² The letter was addressed to the King of England and divided into two parts. The first attacked the excessive power of the Government beginning with the Governor, the British officers, the Rokos of the provinces, and the Bulis in charge of districts. The petitioners explained that this elite portion of the population praised the system of government because they were well off and derived unfair advantage from it. The iniquitous tax system allowed chiefs to levy the people whenever they experienced financial difficulties. In some districts the Rokos rivalled each other in compelling the people to produce large quantities of tax produce,

so that they may derive profit from the amount of the surplus, and thus add to their salaries. ... When there is a surplus the people receive two or four shillings each, but the chiefs get a much larger sum.⁷³

The petitioners went on to outline the burdens that government-appointed chiefs imposed on villagers such as the obligation to plant their gardens, to give them property, to build their houses, give them money, supply them with food, to be their messengers, to requisition villagers' boats for free travel, and last but not most oppressive, to make roads.

The petition also condemned the newly appointed provincial tax inspectors for their endless and arbitrary impositions:

⁷⁰ SM Lau to Acting CS, 11 May 1902, CSO 02/2678.

⁷¹ *Fiji Times*, 25 June 1902.

⁷² *Fiji Times*, 8 March 1902.

⁷³ *Fiji Times*, 8 March 1902.

... we are truly their slaves. They vex us every day with their multitudinous orders. They make us increase and widen the roads; they make us remove our villages without reason; they hurry us with building houses and encroach on other work so that what time have we to attend to our own affairs? Or to the affairs of our wives and children?⁷⁴

The second division of Fijians, the petition explained, was comprised of both chiefs and commoners who did not hold any office. Their condition was “very wretched and pitiable”. They were “poor and miserable and hungry” not because they were disinclined to work, but because of the many encumbrances they constantly faced. This, the petitioners claimed, caused much discontent and was the cause of the war at Seaqaqa, the trouble at Nakelo, Serua, and Namosi, and the steady decline of the Fijian population. The petition concluded by reaffirming the loyalty of Fijians to the king but requesting him to launch an enquiry into the existing system of government with the view of allowing Fiji to federate with New Zealand.⁷⁵

The agitation led to several rounds of discussion at the highest levels of government between the Secretary of State for Colonies Joseph Chamberlain, the premier of New Zealand, Seddon, and the recently interested Prime Minister of Australia Edmund Barton.⁷⁶ However, the inability of Seddon and Barton to agree on Fiji’s future status gave the Colonial Office the reason it needed to continue with the status quo. In August 1902, the Colonial Office announced its decision to turn down the annexation of Fiji by New Zealand.⁷⁷

Although he had failed to secure the success of his mission, Berkeley returned in June 1902 to a rousing welcome by two thousand Fijians and Indians. (The participation of Indian indentured labourers in organised resistance is examined in greater detail in the next chapter.) The collection of signatures continued in the latter half of 1902 particularly in the interior districts of Navosa, along the Western fringe districts of

⁷⁴ *Fiji Times*, 8 March 1902.

⁷⁵ *Fiji Times*, 8 March 1902.

⁷⁶ See for instance *Fiji Times*, 28 June 1902.

⁷⁷ *Fiji Times*, 13 August 1902.

Sabeto and Vaturu, and several other inland districts of the Ba province.⁷⁸ The arrest of emissaries, the continued harassment and victimisation of its leaders,⁷⁹ the likely reluctance of other Fijians to seek the tutelage of a country whose indigenous population had been dispossessed of their land,⁸⁰ the Colonial Office's decision to retain the status quo, and the enactment of a further repressive ordinance cited for all purposes as "The Natives' Protection Ordinance" in 1903 by the new governor Sir Henry Moore Jackson, finally saw the demise of the movement.

In Namosi however, the old chief Ratu Matanitobua found yet another way to defy the government. He had resigned in 1901 after twenty-seven years of government service and expressed unease about the recent orientation of the government's native policy:

Our rules have loaded down our diminutive native canoe with bulky engines and machinery beyond its capacity; while professing to improve its carrying capacities, they have simply swamped and sunk it.⁸¹

Ratu Matanitobua was suspected by government officials of giving tacit support for the federation agitation and leading officials of the administration began to call for his deportation as early as April 1901.⁸² After the Bose Vakaturaga of July 1902, where loyal chiefs had publicly criticised and insulted Ratu Matanitobua for his support of the movement and questioned his and his province's loyalty to the King, he and more than eight hundred villagers from Namosi and Soloira deserted Methodism and adopted Roman Catholicism.⁸³ So significant was this mass conversion that it was

⁷⁸ In Vaturu, all the men with the exception of the Buli gave their support for the petition. Many more in Sabeto signed up until the bearers of the petition were arrested by order of Roko Tui Ba. See SM Lautoka, Ba to Sutherland, 5 September 1902, CSO 02/4476. Other agents were active in Nadrau (Colo North) before they too were arrested late in 1902 on the suspicion that they were signing names without the knowledge of the villagers. See Joske to CS, 3 December 1902, CSO 02/5471.

⁷⁹ See for instance the arrest of Ratu Savenaca Radomodomo in August 1902 for deserting his wife and children. Ratu Savenaca was unable to be with his family because he had been deported. See Berkeley to Acting Assistant Colonial Secretary, 19 August 1902, CSO 02/3830.

⁸⁰ Comparisons between Fijians and Maori had been made since the publication of Slade's first letter in which he described Fijians being in a far worse position than Maori. The contents of this letter were said to have been discussed by Fijians in many distant villages. See O'Brien to Acting CS, 17 December 1900, CSO 00/4899. In his 1901 farewell to the chiefs, Governor O'Brien referred to the likelihood of Fijians losing their land under New Zealand administration, of having their communal system broken up, and their becoming a permanent source of cheap labour. The *Western Pacific Herald*, 20 July 1901.

⁸¹ Cited in the *Fiji Times*, 11 April 1903.

⁸² See Sutherland minute, 30 April 1901, CSO 01/1796.

⁸³ *Fiji Times*, 25 March 1903.

regarded as secessionist.⁸⁴ This repositioning is best explained as a rejection of Wesleyanism as a church that symbolised and embodied the established government structures, rather than any particular spiritual or political liberalism offered by the Roman Catholic church. The whole affair and the later burning of Wesleyan Bibles and hymn books belonging to Namosi converts at the Catholic mission in Naililili in Rewa, caused much consternation in the colony, and repercussions were felt far and wide though perhaps more among the mission boards of Australia and New Zealand than in Fiji.⁸⁵

The movement for federation reveals important changes in the organisation and spread of counter-establishment resistance in Fiji. While the movement was again popular in the interior and western parts of Viti Levu, previous insurgencies such as Tuka tended to be localised affairs with limited reach outside the immediate vicinity where they were inspired. The hope of federation brought together a wide spectrum of formerly disconnected people sharing multiple grievances and a common mood of disaffection. And it signalled their readiness to demand change by uniting towards a common cause and goal. While the impetus for the movement was initially provided by a group of ambitious European men with an essentially commercial agenda, it was quickly seized upon and appropriated by disaffected Fijians as a vehicle to voice their own discontent and challenge their administration. Speaking on the agitation, Reverend Slade explained to New Zealanders that Fijians were not explicitly interested in federating with New Zealand. They were more intent on a change of government and a reform of policy:

The great idea in their mind is that federation with somebody would mean a change of policy. They feel the present policy to be burdensome, galling, and that is their idea of change. It doesn't mean New Zealand or anywhere else.⁸⁶

The movement for federation therefore worked at cross-purposes and for different interests and agendas. If its initial aims were articulated principally by Europeans,

⁸⁴ See *Fiji Times*, 4 March 1903. By the turn of the century, antagonism between Fiji's two main Christian denominations (Wesleyanism and Roman Catholicism) had reached a state of open hostility. Many ordinary villagers exploited this rivalry for their own ends.

⁸⁵ See issues of the *Fiji Times* and *Western Pacific Herald* from February to June 1903. See also Thornley, 1979: 187-9.

⁸⁶ Cited in the *Fiji Times*, 11 April 1903.

Fijians saw in it the opportunity to articulate their own grievances and to envisage and then agitate for a political transformation of their own making. This example therefore tends to refute the theories of race and class antagonism already referred to in the “Introduction”, that see the colonial terrain as a space where one race and/or one class is perpetually pitted against the other to achieve political and economic supremacy. The movement for federation suggests instead that complex alliances were forged among disparate groups of people from different ethnic and class origins, with different agendas, expectations, and anticipated outcomes running alongside each other. It also showed Fijians’ willingness to use the legal apparatus of the state (lawyers and petitions) to challenge government policies and initiate change. In other words, Fijians found within the structure of the colonial state, the instruments with which to contest its legitimacy. Yet, the movement failed to bring about any significant transformation. The movement has been credited with spurring the issue of new Letters Patent which provided for the first time the representation of Fijians in the Fiji Legislative Council. This new constitution however, had little impact on the lives of ordinary people and the grumblings of the land were soon to resurface in the form of the Viti Kabani, the largest organised mass movement of Fiji’s colonial era.

Apolosi Nawai and the Viti Kabani: 1913 – 1917

In many ways, the movement for federation was a forerunner of the much more formidable challenge that the Viti Kabani would mount on the government in the next decade. To understand the rise of the Viti Kabani as a country-wide movement, it is first necessary to contextualise the spread of disaffection around Fiji in the first decade of the Twentieth Century and to seek therein traces of the Kabani’s charismatic leader, Apolosi Nawai.

Apolosi Ralawaki⁸⁷ Nawai was born in 1885 in the *tokatoka* Nacavacola of the chiefly mataqali Navatulevu of Narewa village from which the Tui Nadi is appointed.⁸⁸ He was the third son of Panapasa Ralawaki Nawai and Makereta Ranadi. According to oral tradition, he was born in Yanuya on Malolo Island where his father

⁸⁷ Apolosi Nawai often used the initial “R” for his middle name Ralawaki which means “one who can see through deceit and cunning”. Translation by Mr Uate Tale Karavaki.

⁸⁸ See Apolosi Nawai’s death certificate “A Vola ni Mate” ref. 5163 at the Registry of Births and Deaths in Suva.

was a Methodist teacher.⁸⁹ Very little is known of his childhood and youth. His descendants contend that he was blessed, that he was gifted with supernatural powers, and that he excelled in academic work and religious studies.⁹⁰ Nawai certainly attended the Methodist training school at Navuloa but a minute by Ratu Jope Naucabalavu the Roko Tui Ba (also a Bauan) claims that he was expelled from the school.⁹¹

The Nawai family, especially Apolosi's father and his two older brothers Kiniviliame Labalabavanua and Josevata Kunagado (alias Misi Tana), appears to have been a thorn in the side of Ratu Jope Naucabalavu and other senior officials in the Nadi area. Josevata Kunagado was particularly prominent during a dispute over the appointment of the new Tui Nadi in July and August 1907 after the death of the previous titleholder, Ratu Navolioni Muacava Ragigia. This title had become contentious following the appointment at the beginning of the year of Eliasere Waqamate as the new Buli Nadi and his support for the sale of hundreds of acres of prime Nadi land to Europeans. Considerable pressure had been applied on Nadi lands since the CSR's move in the area in 1903 to expand its Lautoka operations.⁹² Waqamate had refused to recognise the installation of Ratu Tevita Nawaqa Tana as the new Tui Nadi and was thought to favour another candidate from the village of Nakavu for the position. His choice was supported by the Bauan and colonial establishment, thereby creating enormous tension between supporters of either camp in the Nadi district.⁹³

The issue of land is vital in understanding the climate of fear, suspicion, and occasional hostility that emerged among Fijians in the first decade of the twentieth century, and which made possible in the second, the emergence of the Viti Kabani. It therefore requires a short but necessary digression. Land had become a highly contentious issue in Fiji following the appointment of Sir Everard im Thurn as the new Governor of the colony. A few months after his arrival in October 1904, im Thurn decided to introduce a new law to the Legislative Council to reverse Arthur

⁸⁹ Talanoa session with Apolosi Nawai and Josevata Kunagado, Vatutu village, Nadi. 23 April 2004.

⁹⁰ Talanoa session, Vatutu, 23 April 2004.

⁹¹ Minute by Ratu Jope Naucabalavu, 25 November 1907, CSO 07/4887. A thorough search of the Methodist Church records did not yield verification of either point of view.

⁹² See Paper 25: "Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1903." in *JFLC*, 1904.

⁹³ The conflict has not been resolved and to this day, there are two Tui Nadi, one supported by the government and the other acknowledged by the people.

Gordon's long-standing laws against the sale of native lands. He was partly responding to the persistent clamour of settlers to free up Fijian land and labour, and partly acting on his own opinion that the colony would be best served by creating an economic environment through which the enterprise of European planters could be maximised. He duly convoked the only council of chiefs meeting of his tenure and informed them of his plans to alter the law. He told them that Fijians owned "a great deal more land than they can use" and that under the new laws, they would be encouraged to lease and sell more land, the money from which would help develop in them the virtues of individualism necessary to save the race from imminent doom.⁹⁴ A month later, Ordinance XI of 1905 came into effect to legalise, with the consent of the Governor in Council, the sale of Fijian land.⁹⁵

The impact of the law was instant and dramatic. Within the next two years, 104,142 acres of land, most of it prime agricultural land, was sold.⁹⁶ While much of the land was acquired in an open and transparent way, other transactions were hotly disputed, with accusations of underhand tactics and breach of faith by government, Fijian officials and buyers alike. Much unease, suspicion, and occasional hostility and confrontation arose during and after this period of land sales. The intervention of Arthur Gordon, now Lord Stanmore and member of the House of Lords, resulted in the repeal of im Thurn's laws⁹⁷ but the aggressive search for leasehold land continued unabated.

In this respect, prominent Bauan chiefs were again conspicuous in their active support and occasional coercive tactics in securing these lands either for the government, as Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi did in Bua. In addition to his position of Roko Tui Ra, Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi was installed as Roko Tui Bua in February 1905 and used his office to identify and release for the government 69,000 acres of Bua land at ten shillings per 1000 acres for 99 year leases.⁹⁸ There were significant monetary gains to be obtained

⁹⁴ "Proceedings of a Native Council," Suva, 1905. 2, 6.

⁹⁵ See the im Thurn Papers MS 2/10 for a comprehensive record of official correspondence regarding im Thurn's land policy.

⁹⁶ In one of the largest transactions, the Thomas Brothers profited from the absence of Vatulaloko people to buy 7,898 acres of the land worth £900 at Yaqara in Ra. This sale alone accounted for more than one third of all lands sold in 1907. See *Fiji Royal Gazette*, 15 May 1908. For details of all lands sold (and leased) during im Thurn's term, see the *Fiji Royal Gazette* 1906 to 1908.

⁹⁷ France: 161.

⁹⁸ See Despatches from im Thurn to SS, 13 and 28 January 1907. MS 2, im Thurn Papers. NAF.

by the leasing of these lands. Under section 4 of Native Regulation 5 of 1881, the Roko and Buli each received ten percent from the lease of native lands in their provinces and districts.⁹⁹

In his capacity as Roko Tui Tailevu, Ratu Kadavulevu was prominent in the freeing of land in the south eastern parts of Viti Levu. A brief discussion of the 1909 land deals in Sawakasa indicates how the new land policies helped to spread disaffection among previously contented people.¹⁰⁰

The Waidalice flats of Sawakasa, Tailevu¹⁰¹ had been targeted by the administration because they were especially fertile and useful lands for grazing and banana farming. The Roko Tui Tailevu and newly installed Vunivalu of Bau (since 1907) Ratu Penaia Kadavulevu, and the Assistant Native Commissioner W. A. Scott, were sent to the district and the neighbouring district of Namalata, on a tour of inspection in July 1909 to investigate the possibility of securing these lands for long term leases to several interested European planters.¹⁰² While touring the area, Ratu Kadavulevu reportedly told Scott that the people of Sawakasa were “more like savages than anything else,” that they were “poor and miserable,” and yet owned some of the finest land in the colony. Because they did not derive the slightest benefit from the land, he advised that the Government should take it over and lease it for them.¹⁰³ The Government then called a meeting at which the people were told that they were “poor”, “badly clothed”, and “possessed no property”. They were also told that they were “too indolent to cultivate their lands”; that they were “dying off”; that they did not derive “a single copper of benefit from their lands in the shape of rents”; that they possessed “thousands of acres of land which were lying idle and unproductive”; and that they

⁹⁹ See by Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi's claims on lease money from Ra land he had helped to set aside for grazing, CSO 02/4902.

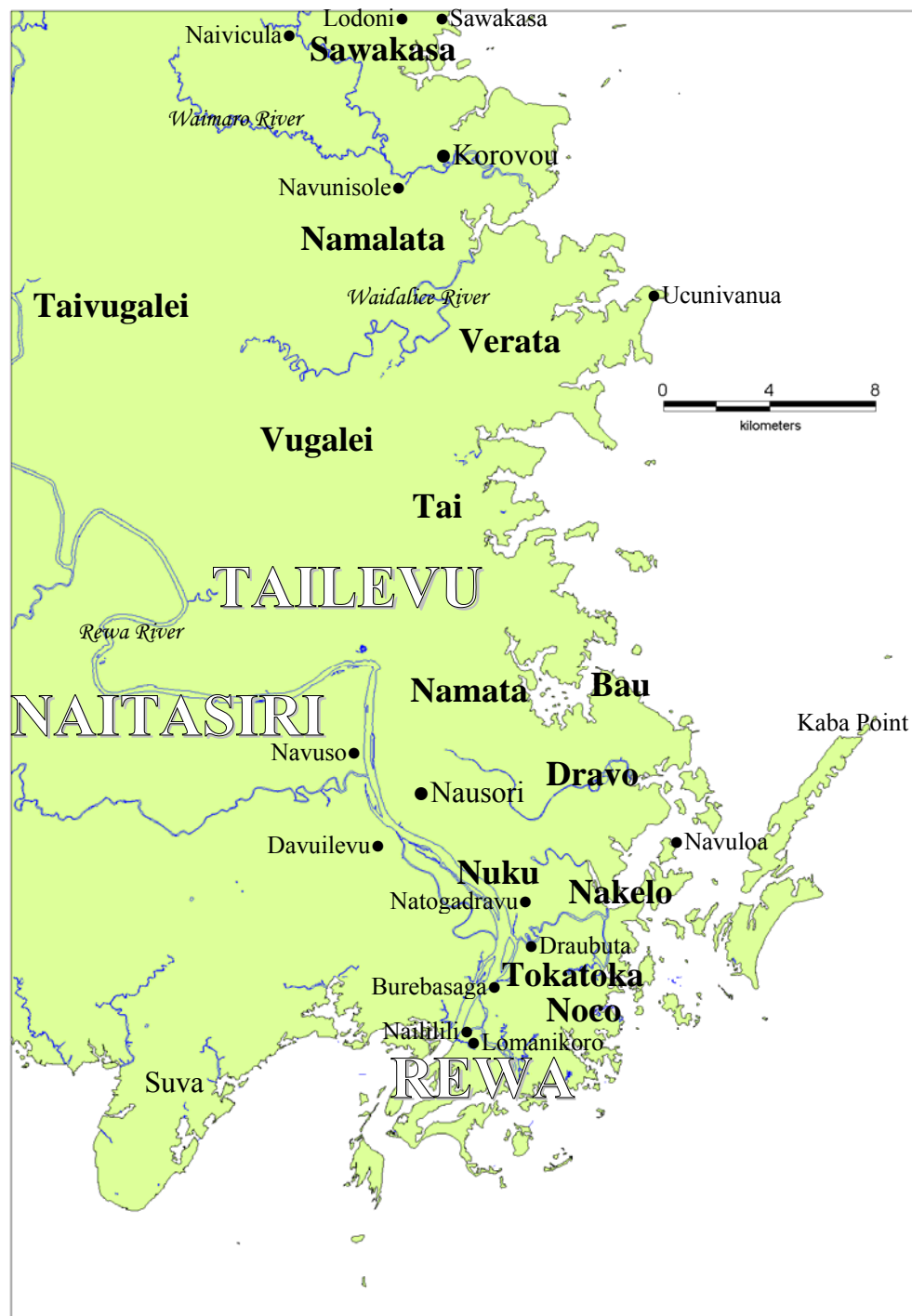
¹⁰⁰ This example is by no means isolated. See for instance, the attempted acquisition by the CSR of 6,800 acres of land at Wainibokasi which was resisted and foiled by landowners. im Thurn Papers MS2/10.

¹⁰¹ Sawakasa district is located about twenty miles North of Nausori.

¹⁰² Correspondence between the Native Commissioner (Sutherland) and W. A. Scott regarding Sawakasa lands in CSO 11/4274. W. A. Scott was involved in several other such visits around Fiji. In the Beimana district of Navosa for instance, landowners reported to the Lomary parish priest that Scott had forced them to sell some of their land. He had also threatened villagers that the Government would soon take all unoccupied Fijian lands and sell them at one penny per acre. See unsigned letter of 16 October 1907 to Monseigneur Vidal. Roman Catholic Mission, Fiji: Correspondence with Government and Others re Native Affairs 1883-1924. Microfilm PMB 459. Canberra: The Australian National Library, 1972.

¹⁰³ W. A. Scott minute of 29 May 1912 in CSO 11/4274.

should hand the land over to Government “so that it might be leased for their benefit”.¹⁰⁴



Map 14: South Eastern Viti Levu, 1910.

¹⁰⁴ W. A. Scott minute of 29 May 1912 in CSO 11/4274.

In response, one of the villagers raised the collective concern of the people of Sawakasa, that the leasing of lands had not in fact yielded wealth, but rather the impoverishment of landowners. Their newly landless neighbours from Lodonu, for instance, were now frequent visitors to Sawakasa where they came to beg for food. The villagers decided to decline the offer of Government, fearing among other things that their lands would be leased to the CSR which was already notorious among landowners for offering the lowest rates in the colony of between two and three shillings per acre. They reconsidered however, after more pressure from Ratu Kadavulevu, and agreed to lease portions of their lands on the condition that they would earn one pound per acre, the going rate which Indian leasehold farmers were willing to pay.

The Government reneged on this verbal agreement and leased the land for five shillings per acre to three European planters (Hunt, Craig and Chapman) all known friends of Ratu Kadavulevu. By April 1910, the villagers had been forbidden access to their land including large quantities of banana ready for cutting and selling.¹⁰⁵ The villagers responded by pulling the new survey pegs off the ground,¹⁰⁶ by hiring a lawyer, procuring the support of another prominent Bauan chief Ratu Wainiu, (Ratu Kadavulevu's half-brother), and writing numerous letters and petitions to the Native Commissioner, the Acting Governor, the new Governor Henry May, and the Provincial Department, to complain about this breach of faith. They travelled as far as Bau to see Ratu Kadavulevu but were assaulted by men acting under his orders before they could get to the island. Their numerous efforts falling on deaf ears, one Sawakasa man exclaimed, "one thing is clear to us, that these lands of ours have been simply stolen".¹⁰⁷ For the next three years they refused to accept any of the rent money, accusing the Roko Tui Tailevu and the Government of trickery.¹⁰⁸

Even if they had chosen to take the money as some did in the district of Namalata, the potential for investment from rent monies was very limited. Once Ratu Kadavulevu and other local chiefs had taken their share of the income, individuals could do very little with the scraps that eventually trickled down to them, other than to purchase a

¹⁰⁵ Wainiu to Governor, 18 April 1912, CSO 12/3180.

¹⁰⁶ Fitzgibbon to CS, 21 August 1910, CSO 10/7297.

¹⁰⁷ Undated translation of unsigned "Paper B" in CSO 11/4274.

¹⁰⁸ See the statement of rentals in CSO 11/4274.

few goods from the local European stores. Hence, in the space of a few months, the villagers had gone from self-sufficient banana farmers to landless dependents, stripped of their main asset and of their capability to remain active agents in their own economic development. Or as Ratu Wainiu expressed it in his letter to the Governor, “their bread is snatched from their mouths”.¹⁰⁹ Ratu Wainiu was severely reprimanded for his support of the Sawakasa people and forced to write a letter of apology.¹¹⁰ Yet, his involvement is significant for it suggests that Bauans were never wholly in agreement on various Fijian affairs. In the wake of Ratu Savenaca Radomodomomo’s involvement in the Federation Movement, it also reminded the administration that not all Bauans could be counted on to toe the Government line.

In spite of the administration’s threat to dissolve the district of Sawakasa as “a lesson to others outside as well”,¹¹¹ disaffection against the administration and with Bauan hegemony was spreading in other areas of Tailevu. In the heartland of Tailevu the people of Verata showed signs of unrest which were caused, in the Native Commissioner Sutherland’s words, “by a long period of indifference to the welfare of the people by their Roko [Ratu Kadavulevu]”.¹¹² A deputation of Verata natives was assembled to approach the Government and formally ask that Verata be made into a separate province to reclaim their rightful pre-contact status. Two months later, Sutherland was warning of dissatisfaction and unrest in several other districts of Tailevu, all of it caused, in his opinion, by misgovernment from Bau.¹¹³ For instance in early March of 1912 in the southern district of Tokatoka, Ratu Manoa Suguta, the Tora Dreketi (or leading chief of Tokatoka) and eight others wrote a letter to inform the Native Commissioner that they had appointed a new Buli and a scribe, and that they were transferring their allegiance to Rewa.¹¹⁴ The letter was written and sent from the village of Draubuta which within three years was to become the unofficial headquarters of the Viti Kabani.

¹⁰⁹ Wainiu to Governor, 18 April 1912, CSO 12/3180.

¹¹⁰ For the reprimand, see Governor to Wainiu, 31 May 1912. For the apology, see Wainiu to W. A. Scott, 31 May 1912, both in CSO 12/3180. As it had been in Namosi ten years earlier, the Native Commissioner’s advice to the Governor on this matter was to deport Ratu Wainiu along with other leaders of the protest and to dissolve the district of Sawakasa altogether. See his minute of 29 July 1912, in CSO 12/4060.

¹¹¹ Sutherland minute to CS, 29 July 1912, in CSO 12/4060.

¹¹² Sutherland to CS, 16 February 1912, CSO 12/1136.

¹¹³ See Sutherland’s minute of 28 April 1912, in CSO 12/2592.

¹¹⁴ Ratu Manoa Suguta to Native Commissioner, 4 February 1912, CSO 12/2592.

This latest Tailevu revolt had also originated in resentment at the abuse of power that Bau and the unpopular Ratu Kadavulevu seemed to exercise with impunity. Ratu Manoa and his co-signatories argued that the time and resources involved in servicing Bauan demands were affecting their very livelihood. Most men in the district derived their income from the banana trade, as farmers or puntsmen. Yet, when the call came, they were expected to interrupt their labours to attend to Bauan needs. House-building on Bau was particularly irritating and exhausting.¹¹⁵

Among several of the grievances specifically raised against Ratu Kadavulevu, Ratu Manoa and his associates wrote that they had been ordered by him to cut the cane of an Indian farmer, which they did, filling in the process twenty-one punts or worth more than thirty pounds of work but for which they were never paid. On another occasion the Roko “lavakid” seventy-five pounds from Tokatoka for his passage to the colonies (Vavalagi) and after raising the money and giving it to him, they found that the Roko had cancelled his trip. Their money was never returned.¹¹⁶ They also resented that while Tokatoka and other surrounding districts of Nausori, Namata and Nakelo had all been urged to lease land, Bau had not leased any of its own.¹¹⁷ There was also some disquiet over the manner in which the lease money was distributed. In May of 1912, Ratu Manoa organised a successful boycott of the usually opulent gathering for the distribution of rents among villages where, to the presiding Roko’s great embarrassment, only three of the nine Tokatoka villages brought baskets of food

¹¹⁵ The example cited in CSO 12/2592 is particularly pertinent. Ratu Manoa and his co-signatories told of their struggle to bake fifty to sixty puddings in order to acquire the ten dozen or so tabua necessary to take to Colo districts to ask for permission to cut the timber. They would then have to take a week off their work and plantations to prepare the logs in Colo and then a further day and night to float them down the river before reaching their homes. Then they would have to prepare food and again raft the timber for a day and night to Bau where they would stay for another week or two. When their food ran out, the Bauans sent to Tokatoka villages with orders for women to prepare more food. Once the work on Bau was complete, the men then returned in search of casual work to pay for the hire of the boats, leaves, reeds, and sinnet which had been used for the transport of the logs. The hiring of a boat alone cost the equivalent of one hundred yams or dalo thus putting immense pressure on limited village resources and on their communal life. As they wrote, “we have to forsake our wives and children, neglect our plantations ... This we have suffered all the years that have gone by up to the present day. We have watched and observed that this is a cause of our decrease.” Indeed, most of those who signed a petition to complain against these excesses were women, for it was on their shoulders that fell the extra burden of weeding, planting, and attending to other communal work. Ratu Manoa Suguta to Native Commissioner, 4 February 1912, CSO 12/2592.

¹¹⁶ Ratu Manoa Suguta to Native Commissioner, 4 February 1912 CSO 12/2592.

¹¹⁷ Crompton and Muspratt to CS, 13 May 1912, CSO 12/2939.

to the ceremony.¹¹⁸ Ratu Manoa was again instrumental a month later, in organising a similar boycott of house-building at Bau where again only three villages accepted to go and cut the timber.¹¹⁹

In the end, although Ratu Kadavulevu was stood down (for an unrelated offence), the Government remained steadfast in its long standing partnership with Bauan chiefs and brought the Roko's more reputable cousin, Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, back from Ba to replace him. Like his predecessor, Ratu Joni opposed Tokatoka's proposed change of allegiance to Rewa, for the district was considered one of the richest and losing it would have further eroded Bau's prestige. For his part, Ratu Manoa was charged with *talaidredre* (disobeying orders).¹²⁰ His punishment only fuelled Tokatoka's disaffection towards the government and created in the area a climate conducive to a more extensive resistance movement.

The spirit of unrest among Fijians is captured in a letter written by Savenaca Seniloli in March 1912, in which he warned the Native Commissioner that "revolt seems to be of very common occurrence at the present time".¹²¹ Examples of this climate of discontent are discussed in more detail in Chapter Five. The significance of these various expressions of fear, suspicion, discontent and hostility is that they linked previously disparate locations and peoples as the kai Colo, the Westerners of Nadi, Ba and Ra, the coastal dwellers of Tailevu and the island people of Moturiki, Ovalau, the Yasawas in a shared mood of rebelliousness. Apolosi Nawai and the Viti Kabani gave it an economic and political expression and effective organisational direction.

Little is known of Apolosi Nawai's movements between the time of the conflict over the Tui Nadi title in 1907 and his emergence in 1913 at the head of the Fiji Produce Agency, the forerunner of the Viti Kabani.¹²² What is apparent is that in his early twenties, Apolosi Nawai spent much time travelling the country first on Church

¹¹⁸ Sutherland minute to CS 16 May 1912, in CSO 12/2939.

¹¹⁹ Buli Tokatoka to Roko Tui Tailevu, 15 June 1912, CSO 12/3780.

¹²⁰ Sutherland minute to CS, 16 May 1912, in CSO 12/2939.

¹²¹ Ratu Savenaca Seniloli to Native Commissioner, 14 March 1912, enclosed in CSO 12/2592.

¹²² Both oral sources and Macnaught (who does not cite his source) speak of Apolosi's carpentry apprenticeship at the Davuilevu Technical College, and of his friendship with Lelean and Derrick both of whom were teachers at Davuilevu. The College itself did not come into existence until 1908. He may have been one of the first intakes that year.

affairs and then as a carpenter and resided in Nadi town only for short periods of time.¹²³ A few official letters suggest that he travelled extensively during this time and that his movements were monitored by Fijian officials.¹²⁴

Aside from the spirit of discontent that permeated many parts of the country, several other factors facilitated the formation of the Viti Kabani. Commenting on the rise of the company, Ratu Joseva Lalabalavu Sukuna,¹²⁵ suggested that the Viti Kabani was partly inspired and modelled on the Tongan Company which was owned and operated by Tongans between 1909 and 1912. The watchword of that company was *Tonga ma'a Tonga*, or “Tonga for the Tongans”, none of which was lost in translation in Fiji.¹²⁶ Like many other Fijians,¹²⁷ Apolosi Nawai must have been familiar with and learnt from the Tongan popular movement. The network of connections he had sown in the course of his extensive travels prior to 1912 would soon make his own name, company and vision resonate in all parts of Fiji. Hence, when he first announced his scheme for the establishment of a Fijian company in 1912 while building a church at Korovatu in Vunidawa (Naitasiri),¹²⁸ the philosophy and planning for the venture had long been in the making.

Nawai calculated that when trading banana, European middlemen made approximately £10,000 on an investment of £2,000.¹²⁹ Under his scheme, Fijians would pool their capital together, cut out the middlemen, control their own enterprise, and reinvest the profits in a company.¹³⁰ Banana was a particularly suitable choice because it was farmed up and down the country by a large number of Fijians. The trade had begun to flourish in the West of Viti Levu in the mid 1890s under the

¹²³ See Ratu Jope Naucabalavu's minute of 25 November 1909, in CSO 07/4889. Apolosi's eldest brother Kiniviliame, appears to have been a regular companion on his extensive journeys and later became one of his most trusted associates. Apolosi also formed an important friendship with Patemo Vainitoma and TikikoTuwai, the two well educated sons of the former Roko Tui Ba, Ratu Nemani Driu.

¹²⁴ See CSO 07/4889 in particular. This file contains several letters that are principally about a dispute involving his brother Josevata Kunagado Nawai. However, they allude to Apolosi's movements.

¹²⁵ Ratu Sukuna was the son of Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi and had been educated at Wanganui, Auckland, and Oxford. He was to become one of Apolosi Nawai's fiercest adversaries.

¹²⁶ See Ratu Sukuna's Memo to the Secretary for Native Affairs of 12 March 1917, in CSO 17/2286. For studies of other indigenous trading companies in the Pacific Region that later evolved into protest movements, see Couper, 1968; and Hempenstall and Rutherford, 1984.

¹²⁷ See report of Tongan Company activities in the *Fiji Times*, 5 October 1910.

¹²⁸ Macnaught, 1979: 174.

¹²⁹ Scarr, 1984: 136.

¹³⁰ Macnaught, 1982: 78.

initiative of the Fiji Banana and Produce Company.¹³¹ Banana farming quickly spread to other regions including Nadroga, Navosa, Colo, Navua, Waidina, Naitasiri, and Tailevu. By the turn of the century it had become Fiji's second largest export earner (behind sugar) with New Zealand as its main overseas market.¹³²

Typically, European traders would seek the support of district chiefs or resident magistrates¹³³ to enter into contracts with local landowners and secure a steady supply of bananas. The going rate for landowners was around five to six pence per bunch but by 1900, competition between middlemen was so fierce that the price rose to around nine pence per bunch with Fijian growers playing one trader against another to maximise their income.¹³⁴ An irate Managing Director of the Fiji Banana and Produce Agency complained to the Government that even when he contracted trees instead of bunches, "unprincipled traders" would approach individual farmers and offer them a better price for the contracted trees.¹³⁵ The early 1900s saw a steady increase in the performance of the industry culminating in a veritable boom in 1913 and 1914. In his address to the Legislative Council in 1915, Governor Sweet-Escott proudly reported:

The banana industry shows remarkable vitality, and the export of bananas in 1914 not only exceeded in quantity the export of any previous year, but the declared value amounted to £201,938, or £33,689 more than the declared value of bananas exported in 1913, when the value was higher than in any other previous year.¹³⁶

No mention was made however, of the probable cause of this upsurge, the success of the Viti Kabani.

¹³¹ When Apolosi Nawai was ten years old, his Nadi hometown had become a major centre for the cultivation and trade of banana. See CSO 95/4050.

¹³² Official papers relating to the banana trade confirm that Fiji bananas captured the bulk of the Australian market and threatened the existence of the Queensland banana industry. Fiji bananas were considered better than Queensland bananas and were produced more cheaply. See the im Thurn Papers MS2/42.

¹³³ Some of these magistrates like Joske were also involved in the export of bananas.

¹³⁴ See Assistant Commissioner Colo West to Acting CS, 16 March 1900, CSO 00/1148.

¹³⁵ Lazarus to CS, 11 September 1906, CSO 06/4344.

¹³⁶ Paper 1: "Governor's Address to the Fiji Legislative Council." in *JFLC*, June 1915. 12.

Apolosi Nawai and his associates had been particularly active in 1913, moving from village to village in many parts of the country. They solicited people and chiefs to buy shares in the company. At stake was control of the selling and shipping of banana and the general marketing of Fijian produce.¹³⁷ *Taro cake* became the *modus operandi*: a demand for progress, improvement, and more tangible returns for the ordinary person's labour and resources. The membership drive met with immediate success and representatives of the company were received with great enthusiasm by villagers around the country.¹³⁸ In the province of Bua in Vanua Levu, villagers saw the arrival of Kabani agents as an opportunity to reclaim the large tracts of land that had been leased during Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi's term as Roko Tui Bua. On the island of Nayau in the Lau Group the company was given copra.¹³⁹ Some villages in Colo East gave their bananas for free while villages in Ra gifted them with their entire tax money.¹⁴⁰

The support in Colo and Ra was partly inspired by the suggestion never denied by Apolosi Nawai, that the twin gods of Nakauvadra, Nacirikaumoli and Nakausabaria, were the spiritual force behind the company. Apolosi himself possessed mana which one colonial official described as "an unusual gift of speech, even for a Fijian, great persuasive powers, and thorough knowledge of native character and instinct for playing upon the credulity of his audience".¹⁴¹ Apolosi certainly beamed with invulnerability and as someone later testified, "once Apolosi opened his mouth your mind was no longer your own".¹⁴² In the eyes of many inhabitants in Ra and Colo, this was reminiscent of Navosavakadua and Tuka.¹⁴³ Not surprisingly, the rebuilt Tuka village of Drauniivi became the Ra centre of the Viti Kabani and Taivesi Mamaqarua, the village's *turaga ni koro*, its local manager.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁷ Acting Attorney-General to SS, 16 April 1917, CO 83/136. PRO.

¹³⁸ See for instance, details of Kabani activities and meetings in Wainimala in Joni Kuruduadua to CS, 10 February 1914, CSO 14/1974.

¹³⁹ Finau to CS, 18 February 1914, CSO 14/2413.

¹⁴⁰ Macnaught, 1978: 176.

¹⁴¹ Islay McOwan to SS, 28 June 1930, CO 83/190/13. PRO.

¹⁴² Cited in Macnaught, 1982: 87.

¹⁴³ Joni Kuruduadua to CS, 10 February 1914, CSO 14/1974.

¹⁴⁴ District Commissioner Ra to CS, 9 October 1914, CSO 14/8968. See also District Commissioner Ra to CS, 10 December 1914, CSO 14/10837.

Alongside the commercial aims and spiritual aura of the company, and the confidence and daring of its leader, was the rallying call “Fiji for the Fijians”.¹⁴⁵ The Government became aware of this political dimension when it received in January 1914 a letter from the retired Native Stipendiary Magistrate for Colo East, Jone Koroduadua. The message contained a warning that the company intended to return all lands alienated to Europeans before Cession to their original owners, that the Kabani’s stores would remain open and all others would be closed, the government taxes would be abolished, and that Europeans would be driven out of Fiji.¹⁴⁶ As several colonial officials conceded, it was impossible to verify with any certitude whether Apolosi Nawai himself was at the source of these ideas.¹⁴⁷ They were resigned in January 1914, to the issuing of a warning against the company through its Fijian language publication *Na Mata*.¹⁴⁸ The significance of these preliminary reports about the movement, is that no single agenda or meaning defined the Kabani, and Nawai had very little control over the manner in which disparate Fijian communities appropriated his vision.

In this respect it is significant that Nawai chose Draubuta for the inaugural meeting of the Kabani in April 1914. Not only had he received a blessing from the Tora Dreketi, Ratu Manoa Suguta mentioned above in relation to the Tailevu rising, to operate in the locality, but the Kabani also benefited from Draubuta’s ideal geographical location on the banks of the Rewa River. This river carried all traffic of bananas from the upper reaches of the Wainibuka and Wainimala rivers, through the interior of Colo East and Naitasiri, and parts of Tailevu and Rewa. The tributary that ran past the village led North to Kaba Point and formed an entry and exit point for traffic from the Lau and Lomaiviti Groups and provided access to Beqa and Kadavu in the South (see Map 13).

Sandwiched between such powerful neighbours as Bau and Rewa, Tokatoka was well versed in self-preservation. In the wake of recent discontent in Tokatoka villages

¹⁴⁵ See Corrie’s report, dated 14 April 1930, CO 83/190/13 on the legal status of Apolosi Nawai. See also CSO 14/6755 for a statement by Ratu Vakatotovo, chief of Bau and supporter of the company, which claims that the Kabani was “of Fijians only and for Fijians only”.

¹⁴⁶ Joni Kuruduadua to CS, 10 February 1914, CSO 14/1974.

¹⁴⁷ See the Attorney General’s minute of 28 May 1914 in CSO 14/4758; a similar remark was made by Corrie in his 14 April 1930 report, on the legal status of Apolosi Nawai. CO 83/190/13. PRO.

¹⁴⁸ Macnaught, 1978: 176.

about government policy and Bauan governance, Nawai also stood to gain from the district's subsequent attempts to reassert its independence. Decisively, Nawai could also count on the support of Ro Lutunauga Tuisawau, the recently dismissed Roko Tui Rewa, but still the most powerful chief of Rewa province.

Surrounded by several of these significant chiefs (none were employed by Government), Nawai had acquired enough credibility to hold the meeting at Draubuta, to request the attendance of all the Bulis in the area, and to repudiate the circular letter sent out by the new Native Commissioner, K. J. Allardyce, forbidding the Bulis from attending.¹⁴⁹ Nawai and Tabaiwalu countered the Commissioner's order by stating that the meeting was "none of his business", that there was no law in Fiji against the collection of money or the formation of companies, and that Allardyce's letter was therefore "a very foolish one".¹⁵⁰ The open defiance of such a high-ranking colonial official was almost unheard of. Allardyce responded by calling for Apolosi Nawai's deportation under Ordinance XX of 1887.¹⁵¹ On this occasion, the Attorney General's ruling was that none of the evidence provided by Allardyce proved that Nawai was inciting the people to resist duly constituted authority or that he was using undue threats of violence towards others to coerce them into complying with his demands.¹⁵²

Nawai had exposed a fundamental contradiction in the Government's Fijian policy. He seized on the schism created on the one hand by the Government's strict enforcement of indirect rule through the oppressive rule of commoners by their chiefs, and its belated support for individual Fijian enterprise on the other. For instance, Governor Sweet-Escott shared the view of his immediate predecessors, im Thurn and May, that the communal system had a paralysing influence on individual effort and ambition, and that it should be broken down.¹⁵³ Like several prominent colonists, he thought that the Company was a positive development for the colony, and one that would integrate Fijians in the market economy. He thus allowed the meeting to take place. Those in Government circles who wanted Nawai's immediate arrest and

¹⁴⁹ See K. J. Allardyce minute, 19 May 1914, CSO 14/4505. K. J. Allardyce was the younger brother of W. L. Allardyce who had since been appointed Governor of the Falkland Islands. See the *Cyclopedia of Fiji 1907* for more biographical details.

¹⁵⁰ Letter from Tabaiwalu and Nawai to Buli Noco, 21 May 1914, CSO 14/4758. Official Translation.

¹⁵¹ Allardyce to CS, 25 May 1914, CSO 14/4758.

¹⁵² Attorney General's minute, 28 May 1914 in CSO 14/4758.

¹⁵³ See Despatch 73, May to SS, 3 May 1911. MS2/10/viii im Thurn Papers. NAF.

deportation¹⁵⁴ had to be satisfied with another circular issued after the meeting of the *Bose Vakaturaga* “warning natives against Avolosi, Tabaiwalu and others”.¹⁵⁵

The opinion among the powerful European business community was also divided. As mentioned above, some among them had lobbied government for years seeking an end to the numerous restrictions on the employment of Fijians as labourers, and on the sale of native lands. Such powerful men as the merchant J. M. Hedstrom, the lawyer R. Crompton, and the financier J. B. Turner, regarded the Viti Kabani (or the Fiji Produce Agency as it was also known) as an awakening which could lead to the much sought after deregulation of the labour and land markets.¹⁵⁶ Others, including the prominent traders A. J. Mackay, H. Taylor, H. MacIntosh, W. H. Cuthbert, and Brough, joined Nawai as directors of the Company hoping to cash in on a substantial increase of cash crop supply throughout the country.

However, other colonists like the Serua trader George Barrow, wrote to the Colonial Secretary to express contempt for the views of his peers and dismay for the Government’s lack of decisiveness and foresight in the matter of the growing influence of the Viti Kabani among Fijians. He feared that if nothing was done, a racial war could be imminent.¹⁵⁷ In his words, the Fiji Produce Agency was, “a malignant cancer in the native body politic, which is daily and hourly eating deeper and deeper into the vitals of native loyalty and orderliness”.¹⁵⁸

Barrow also attacked the position of the superintendent of the Methodist Church, Reverend Arthur J. Small for welcoming the Kabani because of its supposedly “social and progressive evolutionary character”.¹⁵⁹ Rev. Small’s view is interesting considering that the Methodist Church experienced many defections from 1913 onwards, attributed by Thornley to the activities of the Viti Kabani and to widespread disaffection with mission rituals such as the ‘vakamisioneri’ (the annual collection of

¹⁵⁴ Allardyce, Baker, and W. A. Scott among others. See CSO 14/4505 for officials who considered Nawai “dangerous to the peace and good order of the colony”.

¹⁵⁵ See the Attorney General’s minute, 28 May 1914 in CSO 14/4758.

¹⁵⁶ Barrow to SS, 12 April 1916, CO 83/151. PRO.

¹⁵⁷ Barrow to SS, 12 April 1916, CO 83/151.

¹⁵⁸ Barrow to SS, 12 April 1916, CO 83/151.

¹⁵⁹ Barrow to SS, 12 April 1916, CO 83/151.

money for the Church).¹⁶⁰ For Barrow however, the movement did not represent evolutionary development but a return to “dark and pagan customs of the past”. It meant “disaster for the Church, and, on account of the animosity fomented against whites and white government, it means disaster to the State”.¹⁶¹ Hence, if the Kabani improved the prospects of some colonists, it helped project the fears of others.

Among Fijians themselves, Nawai also made adroit use of the internally divisive nature of the chiefly system. The “system”, now firmly in place, had rewarded some chiefs and punished, alienated, neglected or otherwise excluded others. In the latter, Apolosi Nawai found powerful allies. The support of collaborator chiefs was always likely to be more convoluted, even if the Kabani aimed at indigenous advancement. The few chiefs who sympathised with Nawai’s objectives risked losing their job and with it, their administrative power. When the *Bose* met on 20 May 1914, the gravity with which the administration regarded the Viti Kabani was immediately apparent. Apolosi and the activities of the company formed the first two items on the meeting’s agenda. The chiefs were highly critical of the Roko Tui Tailevu, Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, for allowing the Draubuta meeting to go ahead. He replied that there was nothing much he could do because people desisted from obeying his instructions. The meeting resolved to prohibit the collection of money for the company.¹⁶²

By then however, the Kabani has collected sufficient funds to recruit skilled personnel overseas and to secure the services of persons committed to the company’s aims and ready to assist in its management. Albert and Stella Spencer, a well-travelled young couple from Melbourne, arrived in September 1914 to assist with the work of the company.¹⁶³ Oral testimony also recalls the appointment by the Kabani of Mr Dalton, an African-American teacher for its school at Draubuta.¹⁶⁴ Nawai’s long friendship with the Suva merchant Kanaiya Lal Tillak also suggests that there was no ethnic

¹⁶⁰ Thornley, 1979: 319-20. Dissent among Fijian Wesleyan ministers had already surfaced in May 1913, when students at Davuilevu went on strike over the inadequate provision in the curriculum for the teaching of English. The police had been brought in to resolve the impasse and six students were subsequently expelled. See Thornley, 1979: 319. A year later, Rev. Small issued a plea through the Methodist mission newspaper *Ai Tukutuku Vaka Lotu* urging Fijians not to boycott the mission. This article is located in file CSO 15/2488.

¹⁶¹ Barrow to SS, 12 April 1916, CO 83/151. PRO

¹⁶² “Proceedings of a Native Council,” Suva, 1914. 15.

¹⁶³ Heartfield, 2003: 70.

¹⁶⁴ Talanoa with Rupeni Kolinio, Draubuta village, 9 August 2003.

monopoly on those who supported the company or conversely, those who stood against it.

For much of 1914, the Kabani defied the government and continued to build its network, raising its profile and collecting funds. Money was levied from each district and one pound was gathered from each individual wishing to join the company.¹⁶⁵ Within a year of its inaugural meeting, the Kabani had raised £1050 through the issue of close to 6,500 shares.¹⁶⁶ The commitment to the aims of the company in some districts was such that some villagers preferred burying their bananas rather than sell their produce to Europeans offering cash on the spot. Many of village and leading district chiefs were suspected of secretly supporting this undeclared boycott.¹⁶⁷

In January 1915 another *bose* of the Viti Company was held over two weeks at Draubuta. It was attended by three to four thousand people¹⁶⁸ thereby dispelling any lingering doubts as to the magnitude of the movement. What followed was a period during which as the local saying goes, ‘the grass could never grow green in Draubuta’.¹⁶⁹ People from all over Fiji converged on the village for business and meetings of all sorts. A flagpole was erected in the middle of the village on the end of which the Kabani’s flag was hoisted. The pole could be seen from as far as the Naitasiri hills and was said to act as a beacon to pedestrians at any time of the day or night.¹⁷⁰

Apolosi used this meeting to challenge the authority of European directors who had within the last year tried to exclude him from the board of directors and to expose the discriminatory Articles of Association that prevented all Fijians from being company directors. Resolution 11 proposed that Apolosi be the chairman of the company and resolution 12 resolved to buy out existing directors.¹⁷¹ The *bose* also recommended

¹⁶⁵ Akuila Tuivuna ‘clerk of the Viti Company’ to Buli Kavula (Ra), 21 August 1914, CSO 14/9385.

¹⁶⁶ *Fiji Times*, 13 March 1915.

¹⁶⁷ Acting District Commissioner Colo East to CS, 1 December 1914, CSO 14/10313.

¹⁶⁸ Couper, 1968: 270.

¹⁶⁹ Talanoa with Rupeni Kolinio, Draubuta, 9 August 2003. Although the Kabani’s registered office was 23 Thompson Street in Suva (see CSO 15/8), Draubuta village became the company’s headquarters, particularly after a rift opened between the European directors and Nawai early in 1915. For details of this rift see Taylor (Company Secretary) to Governor, 18 March 1915, CSO 15/2560.

¹⁷⁰ Talanoa with Rupeni Kolinio, 9 August 2003.

¹⁷¹ Native Commissioner to CS, 2 March 1915, CSO 15/1946.

that “we natives should make our own contracts” with “the idea of keeping our lands in our own hands and all the produce therefrom”. It was also agreed that the Kabani should aim to open a store “in every locality”, and that “there should be no more dealings with Europeans”.¹⁷² A native shipbuilding yard was to be built in each province and the company was to have its own Police and Church.¹⁷³ In the meantime, all money collected for the Church, should be administered by the company. It was also proposed that European preachers should be done away with entirely. Yet, the institution of the Church remained central to the fortunes of the Kabani and many village churches served as the communal focal point for Kabani persuasion and organisation.¹⁷⁴

As the meeting progressed, the company rhetoric took on a more explicitly political character. It was proposed that *lala* (obligation to serve the chief and participate in unpaid communal work) and church levies be abolished to free ordinary Fijians from their excessive communal obligations. The meeting also resolved that Government directed work in towns and villages should be abolished. Ratu Bola was appointed “head of police” and it was decided to pension Ratu Lutunauga Tuisawau and Ratu Jone Tabaiwalu.¹⁷⁵ The Kabani was clearly moving from commercial enterprise to political organisation and acquiring the characteristics of a separate and rival Fijian administration.

The deliberations of the meeting were widely reported in the local press though often with great scorn and sarcasm. The pressure on Sweet-Escott was mounting not just because of heightened anxieties amongst the European population but mainly because of the Kabani’s challenge to the authority of the official Native Administration.¹⁷⁶ For instance, a month after the meeting, the Buli for Colo North reported that one of the Kabani’s men in the area, Asesela Delai, ordered that all work resembling *lala* be stopped. This represented a direct attack on government-appointed officials. Delai declared further that no member of the Viti Kabani was allowed to participate in house building. “If anyone is not in the company”, he announced, “let him go and

¹⁷² Resolutions 4 and 5, Native Commissioner to CS, 2 March 1915, CSO 15/1946.

¹⁷³ Resolution 21, Native Commissioner to CS, 2 March 1915, CSO 15/1946.

¹⁷⁴ John Kelly and Martha Kaplan, *Represented Communities: Fiji and World Decolonization*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001: 214.

¹⁷⁵ Resolutions 10 and 20, Native Commissioner to CS, 2 March 1915, CSO 15/1946.

¹⁷⁶ Heartfield, 2003: 73.

build houses”. Road upkeep, payment of provincial rates and other such work for government, chiefs, or church was re-channelled into production for the Kabani. As the dismayed Buli reported, “now there is not one left, all are members of the company, I only am outside the Company”.¹⁷⁷ In several of these inland areas (Wainimala and Navosa in particular), *meke* said to be seditious were also composed and rumours began to circulate that Great Britain was losing the war to Germany.¹⁷⁸

From about this point, a change occurred and the government went on the offensive against Nawai and the Kabani. March 1915 saw the arrest and sensational trial of Stella Spencer, accused of slapping a Fijian. This trial is well documented by Heartfield (2003) and need not be retold in detail. Essentially, Nawai and the Spencers had gone up to the Suva suburb of Toorak to persuade one of Viliame Ralali’s tenants, Naibuka, to join the Viti Kabani. Ralali was a native medical practitioner and a loyal government employee. After an argument, he accused Mrs Spencer of having ulterior motives in calling on Naibuka and of being romantically involved with him. He called her a bad woman and she reacted by slapping him.

The prosecution of Stella Spencer was therefore motivated less by a desire to protect Fijians than by one to protect whites from other whites and punish those Europeans who failed to observe the policy of separation from natives.¹⁷⁹ As Heartfield remarks, that Spencer was tried at all for assaulting a Fijian was remarkable for numerous gruesome assaults on non-whites by whites were an everyday occurrence and only a minute proportion of them were ever prosecuted.¹⁸⁰ As the prosecuting lawyer Robert Crompton argued in his closing submission:

¹⁷⁷ Buli Nasau to Commissioner Colo North, 12 February 1915, CSO 15/1587.

¹⁷⁸ Rev. Brown to Acting CS, 9 March 1916, CO83/130. PRO. Other reports began to circulate that Fijian land was soon to be sold in large quantities to capitalists from England. See Ratu Tevita Makutu (Roko Tui Nadroga) letter to CS, 22 February 1915, in CSO 15/1935.

¹⁷⁹ Spencer had been under surveillance for some time and it was her status as a European woman which was thought to be most damaging to the state. Commenting on the presence of Stella Spencer and Apolosi Nawai in Beqa on Kabani business the Acting District Commissioner of Navua wrote, “I beg to draw attention to the behaviour of a certain European woman, whose name I believe is Mrs Spencer, I understand that this woman follows Avalosi about and is known as the daughter of the King of Russia. I am informed that she is on Beqa by herself and although she may be nothing but a silly and hysterical woman yet her conduct is not what one expects from European women in this country. Of course women who behave in this manner among natives create an impression very different to anything that they perhaps contemplate, and at the present time it is particularly unfortunate...” Minute to the CS, 8 March 1915, CSO 15/2131.

¹⁸⁰ Heartfield, 2003: 78.

I admit that it is not a part of my duty to show that this woman is what I think she is. But in this Colony it is the Duty of every white man and every white woman to be very, very careful of this manner in which they associate with the natives. A woman who goes about with natives, making love to them – a woman like that is an absolute danger to the community ... she is ... acting in a way that is a disgrace to her colour.¹⁸¹

The Government also targeted ordinary members of the Kabani. There was a sudden increase in the number of reported cases of *talaidredre* (disobedience to chiefs). A number of these cases involved individuals' refusal to answer summonses to weed the Buli's garden.¹⁸² As Heartfield explains, enforcing weeding was not a symbolic punishment, but an important part of the organisation of communal production by fiat, alongside house-building, collective food preparation, and the entertainment and accommodation of village guests.¹⁸³ Kabani members' refusal to obey summonses was however symptomatic of the spread of disobedience among the rank and file. The government's attempts to quell this growing insubordination reflected its own determination to attack the movement at the grassroots and its attempt at restoring and tightening discipline and respect for government-appointed chiefs in the villages.

The offensive continued with the arrest of Apolosi Nawai on 19 May 1915. Earlier in the month, Nawai had travelled to the Yasawa Islands to gather support for the company and collect copra. The company flag was hoisted as an emblem of his power and authority in the area. Before he could leave Yaqeta Island, a police detachment arrived with a warrant for his arrest. Following a tense stand-off, the police retreated only to return with reinforcements and intercept Nawai's fleet of cutters near the mouth of the Ba River.¹⁸⁴ Nawai was charged with resisting arrest and embezzling Viti Kabani funds and sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment with hard labour. Twenty-four others in Nawai's entourage were also arrested. His brother Kiniviliame and six others received lighter sentences.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Cited in Heartfield, 2003: 79.

¹⁸² *Fiji Times*, 16 April 1915.

¹⁸³ James Heartfield, "Fijians paramount?" in *Revolution*. 16, November 2001 and February 2002. 29.

¹⁸⁴ Nawai made his escape from the Yasawas in the hope of finding shelter in the mountainous districts behind Ba where he planned a more fortified defence. Islay McOwan to SS, 28 June 1930, CO 83/190/13. For details of Nawai's arrest see W. A. Scott to CS, 26 May 1915, CSO 15/4652.

¹⁸⁵ Sweet-Escott to CO, 7 December 1917, CO 83/130. PRO.

During his time in gaol, the Kabani continued to operate under the leadership of Joeli Cava of Vuci in Tokatoka, Tikiko Tuwai, and several of his chiefly allies. At a meeting in the Nadi district of Sabeto on 6 December 1915, a group of these chiefs with Tuwai attending as clerk, discussed the Government's latest plans to acquire native lands and expressed surprise that the administration allowed some chiefs to "give or sell some of our lands which do not personally belong to them".¹⁸⁶ In a letter to the Governor, they expressed the wish to retain land in native hands for the purpose of their own development "to help ourselves" through the planting of banana, yaqona, and for pasturage. The letter was signed by leading chiefs from provinces and districts as diverse as Rewa, Nadroga, Verata, Moturiki, Sabeto, Nawaka, Namataku, Tokatoka, Noco, Nayau, Dama and Nayavu.¹⁸⁷

Ordinary people too continued to voice their objections to Government policy, particularly on land issues. Rijiate and 129 others from the Rewa, Tailevu and Naitasiri provinces wrote to the Acting Governor on 18 December 1915 with a list of grievances containing twenty-seven points. They mainly expressed concern about the way land was appropriated by third parties and the manner in which Government seemed to collude in the forced acquisition of land from unwilling landowners. They were also critical of the Rokos in the Council of Chiefs for not consulting the people about important decisions pertaining to the lease and sale of land, and asked that the Government honour its obligations enshrined in the Deed of Cession.¹⁸⁸ Thus in spite of reports from the Mission House in Suva, claiming that "the great majority of the Fijians are extremely loyal to Great Britain",¹⁸⁹ the evidence indicates that a substantial part of the population remained disaffected and supportive of the Viti Kabani. Weeks suggests that far from damaging his reputation, Nawai's internment enhanced his standing as a popular hero especially among Fijian commoners.¹⁹⁰

Nawai was released on 30 September 1916 after serving the full term of his sentence. A month later he was in Draubuta where he inspected the guard of honour of 120

¹⁸⁶ Tikiko Tuwai to Sweet-Escott, 6 December 1915, CO 83/130. PRO.

¹⁸⁷ Tuwai to Sweet-Escott, 6 December 1915, CO 83/130.

¹⁸⁸ Tuwai to Sweet-Escott, 6 December 1915. CO 83/130.

¹⁸⁹ Tuwai to Sweet-Escott, 6 December 1915. CO 83/130.

¹⁹⁰ Weeks: 32.

schoolchildren all neatly dressed in the European uniform prescribed by the Kabani. This inspection challenged official colonial rituals which were accorded only to the highest officials in the land. Macnaught suggests that the adoption of the school uniform was meant as an outward sign of internal progress towards a modern way of life.¹⁹¹ Nawai himself generally dressed in “European” clothes and encouraged his supporters to do the same. Sameness and difference as instruments in the contest for power, were therefore invoked in different situations for different outcomes.

Although Nawai was keen to affirm certain particularities of “Fijianness” in terms of indigeneity and therefore difference, he was also determined to nullify the particularities of racial difference through the imposition of ‘native dress’. When he turned up at the Suva Town Hall for the Kabani’s 1915 AGM in a black car, and attired in a well-fitting tussore silk suit made for him by Peapes of Sydney¹⁹² he was not merely playing on Fijians’ acute sense of decorum. Nawai was subverting notions of racial hierarchies and segregation that clothed the native body. In doing so, he was simultaneously and publicly displaying his parity with his powerful European opponents. Indeed, as conveyed by the chief police magistrate of the time, Fijians in the audience received Nawai as if he had been the governor himself.¹⁹³

The Viti Kabani’s school in Draubuta was the first to be founded for the secondary education of ordinary Fijian boys and girls which was not run by the Church or the Government. The pupils had a uniform, the girls wearing high-heeled shoes and long white stockings. The children were taught in English by Tikiko Tuwai and Mr Dalton. There was also school song.¹⁹⁴ Nawai sought to collaborate with the Wesleyan mission in his endeavour to establish a Kabani school in every village of the colony. But his overtures to the mission were rejected.¹⁹⁵ The Wesleyan Church had suffered “a huge financial loss” as a consequence of Fijians transferring to the Kabani the contributions which they would ordinarily have given to the mission.¹⁹⁶ Lelean

¹⁹¹ Macnaught, 1979: 182. The elders of Draubuta village recall singing a school song with lyrics emphasising discipline, hard work and individualism. Talanoa with Rupeni Kolinio, 9 August 2003.

¹⁹² Gilchrist Alexander, *From the Middle Temple to the South Seas*. London: John Murray, 1927. 72.

¹⁹³ Alexander: 72. Details of this meeting are contained in CSO 15/2473.

¹⁹⁴ Talanoa with Rupeni Kolinio, 9 August, 2003.

¹⁹⁵ Lelean to Small, 16 November 1916. See also Small to Lelean, 17 November 1916. Both letters in F/1/1916. Chairman’s Office Inwards and Outwards Correspondence. Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia, Fiji District. NAF.

¹⁹⁶ Alexander: 72.

himself felt that the activities of the company had “dulled [the people’s] spirituality and blunted their affection for the lotu”.¹⁹⁷

Little is known of Mr Dalton and several questions remain unanswered about his recruitment. The appointment of this African-American teacher coincides with the currency in Fiji of the model of education used by Booker T. Washington at the Tuskegee Institute for the advancement of African-Americans.¹⁹⁸ It is unclear whether Mr Dalton was recruited from Tuskegee, whether he shared Washington’s vision, whether Nawai was advised of the wisdom of such an appointment, or whether the Kabani thought African-Americans best placed to understand the predicament of ordinary Fijians.

There is little doubt however, that education played a central role in the Kabani’s vision for the advancement of ordinary Fijians. The Kabani’s intended to create its own education system and to extend it throughout the colony.¹⁹⁹ This proposition was put to the next public meeting of the Viti Kabani²⁰⁰ which took place on 7 December 1916 in the large Colo East village of Lutu. An estimated 5449 people from all over Fiji descended on the village to attend the Kabani’s *Bose ko Viti* (Council of Fiji). Here, Nawai was accorded a traditional ceremony of welcome including the presentation of numerous tabua normally reserved for the highest ranking chiefs.²⁰¹

Little is known about the resolutions of this meeting other than that company officers, managers, town chiefs and clerks were appointed for almost every province in Fiji. Men with typewriters took the minutes of the meeting like the Hansard reporters in the Legislative Council²⁰² In the words of a Fijian constable who testified later, “it was exactly like a government meeting. There were Chief Constables, Magistrates, Doctors, just as if Apolosi was founding a government that might become something

¹⁹⁷ Lelean to McDonald, 31 March 1930. F/1/1930. Chairman’s Office Inwards and Outwards Correspondence. Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia, Fiji District.

¹⁹⁸ See *Report of the Education Commission*. Suva: Fiji Government, 1909. 116 and 121.

¹⁹⁹ The role of education in contesting power is examined in more detail in Chapters Five and Six.

²⁰⁰ Most of the Kabani’s other meetings were conducted in secrecy and in places where there was little fear of reports being detected by government or church sources. Islay McOwan to SS, 28 June 1930, CO 83/190/13. PRO.

²⁰¹ Macnaught, 1979: 183.

²⁰² Macnaught, 1979: 183.

terrible ... one question I wish to ask about Apolosi, if everybody salutes him as they do what is the use of the Government?”²⁰³

The Kabani was assuming proportions far more threatening to the state and its institutions than its commercial complexion had first suggested. Hence, though the Lutu meeting closed on 20 December in an atmosphere of celebration and hope,²⁰⁴ the Government was determined not to let the euphoria last. In the first months of 1917, the administration sought advice from the Attorney-General about how it might successfully wind up the Kabani’s operations. Because the law in Fiji was the same as in England, the reply was that unless the Company got into difficulties, it would not be possible to get it wound up compulsorily. The government was encouraged to “put up” a creditor and encourage him to take legal action against the company. In the present climate however, the attorney-general counselled that the likelihood of finding such a person was improbable.²⁰⁵

The Government decided to change the law instead, and drafted the Native Companies Bill, modelled on Nigeria’s criminal code and its chapter on “Unlawful Societies”. This gave the government wide powers to deregister indigenous companies as well as to intervene in their affairs and wind up their operations.²⁰⁶ This it did purportedly “to protect the natives from being exploited by an unscrupulous native syndicate”,²⁰⁷ though there is little doubt that the primary intention was to place a permanent check on the Kabani’s growing political and economic power. An accountant was appointed to look through the company books but he concluded that there was no way of knowing the extent of the company’s operations or what happened to the proceeds. He reported however, that between January and April 1917, Apolosi had received in his own name over three thousand pounds in banana and copra.²⁰⁸ He found no evidence of fraud through which Nawai could be successfully prosecuted and it was therefore to Nawai’s political speeches that the government turned in the hope of securing a conviction.

²⁰³ Cited in Macnaught, 1979: 184.

²⁰⁴ Macnaught, 1979: 184.

²⁰⁵ Despatch 110, Sweet-Escott to SS, 19 April 1917, CO 83/136. PRO.

²⁰⁶ Despatch 110, Sweet-Escott to SS, 19 April 1917, CO 83/136.

²⁰⁷ Despatch 110, Sweet-Escott to SS, 19 April 1917, CO 83/136.

²⁰⁸ Macnaught, 1979: 184.

In March 1917, Nawai was summoned to a meeting with Ratu Sukuna and other government officials to answer questions about his activities and about his loyalty to the government. Nawai had already pledged his loyalty to the governor whom he urged not to believe the “evil stories” that were being spread about the Kabani.²⁰⁹ In a diplomatic offensive, the Kabani donated thirty pounds to Lady Escott’s Fund for war wounded soldiers²¹⁰ and Nawai visited Reverend Lelean, the influential head of the Davuilevu Training College to inform him of his vision for the betterment of ordinary Fijians.²¹¹

Ratu Sukuna had little respect for Nawai and his work. After all Nawai was regarded as a commoner (in spite of his birth in the chiefly mataqali of Navatulevu), and he hailed from the West, a region that Ratu Sukuna regarded with contempt.²¹² Referring to the popularity of the Kabani in the West and interior of Viti Levu, his report stated unequivocally that “the more backward the people the more pronounced is the hold of the Viti Company”.²¹³ Besides, Ratu Sukuna’s philosophy was that the Fijian ethos was built around obedience and respect for authority. The people needed little more than strong and enlightened leadership from their chiefs.²¹⁴ As Scarr put it, while Apolosi thought in companies and shares, Ratu Sukuna talked of tradition and communal work.²¹⁵ The cleavage between commoner and chief, West and East, commercial enterprise and chiefly autocracy, individual self-advancement and communal obligation, modernism and traditionalism, was dramatised in this meeting of two different Fijian worlds. Both claimed to act in the best interests of the people, and yet both were principally preoccupied with protecting their own. Ratu Sukuna however, could count on the coercive arm of the colonial state, and soon after the meeting, he called for Nawai’s deportation under Ordinance III of 1887.²¹⁶

²⁰⁹ Minute by Sweet-Escott to CS, 5 November 1916, in Despatch 110, Sweet-Escott to SS, 19 April 1917, CO 83/136. PRO.

²¹⁰ Minute by Sweet-Escott to CS, 5 November 1916, in Despatch 110, Sweet-Escott to SS, 19 April 1917, CO 83/136.

²¹¹ Lelean to Small, 16 November 1916. F/1/1916. Chairman’s Office Inwards and Outwards Correspondence. Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia, Fiji District.

²¹² Ratu Sukuna to Secretary for Native Affairs, 12 March 1917, CSO 17/2286.

²¹³ Ratu Sukuna to Secretary for Native Affairs, 12 March 1917, CSO 17/2286.

²¹⁴ Ratu Sukuna to Secretary for Native Affairs, 12 March 1917, CSO 17/2286.

²¹⁵ Scarr, 1984: 134.

²¹⁶ Ratu Sukuna to Secretary for Native Affairs, 12 March 1917, CSO 17/2286. This ordinance was first used to deport Navosavakadua. See Chapter Two.

Ratu Sukuna was supported by all government-appointed Rokos and Bulis. Tired of the widespread dissension that reigned in their districts and provinces, and of the gradual erosion of their authority by Kabani officers, Fijian officials began to complain to headquarters about the lack of executive support.²¹⁷ Nawai had accused them of leasing land too cheaply and of doing so only for their own personal benefit. He also criticised them for forcing their people to work for the benefit of the church, chiefs and state rather than for their own comfort.²¹⁸ Such attacks on chiefs' privileges undermined their authority in every corner of the colony. At the *Bose Vakaturaga* of 30 May 1917, chiefs from each of the provinces took turn to protest about the disruptive effect that the Kabani was having on the day-to-day running of their affairs. The Roko Tui Macuata reported,

I have visited every village. The people are well and prosperous, and well-off for food. The heavy rains have interfered with road work. The only trouble is the Viti Company but there are no members. They have overseers and a manager, but no officer. They have interfered with collection of taxes in Namuka by ordering all copra to be shipped to the Company. They also levy money in some of the villages. *It is as though there were two Governments.*²¹⁹ (Emphasis added)

Reports from the other provinces followed in quick succession. The Roko Tui Tailevu remarked that

The only thing that is disturbing my province is the Viti Company. It has many members who go all over the place, and they have a turaga-ni-koro in nearly every village, and an officer. This interferes with the work of the authorised officials.²²⁰

The Roko Tui Lau expressed concern about the spread of the Company in his usually quiet backwaters of the archipelago:

²¹⁷ Ratu Sukuna to Secretary for Native Affairs, 12 March 1917, CSO 17/2286.

²¹⁸ Scarr, 1984: 135.

²¹⁹ "Proceedings of a Native Council," Suva, 1917. 17.

²²⁰ "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1917. 16.

The Company has people at Cicia and Nayau. The only people at Cicia who are not members are Buli Cicia and the turaga-ni-koro of Tarukua. At Nayau all except the Buli's son are members. They are a trouble because they have three turaga-ni-koro, three ovisa-ni-tikina and three ovisa-ni-koro. They impede local administration. I ask that something be decided about them in this Council.²²¹

The central island group of Lomaiviti was not spared either. The despairing Buli revealed to his embarrassment that the district had agreed to collect £500 for a motor ambulance for the War, but that very little money had been collected owing to the Kabani preventing anyone from subscribing.²²²

While the company was not so influential in Bua, the Roko Tui reported that anyone found to be trading with stores without the consent of the company was fined. Saolo Village in Nadi district collected money to send to Apolosi who, they said, had promised to get back the land leased to the Government under Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi's term. In Ra, the Roko Tui reported that:

In 1915, a flag-staff of the Viti Company was erected at Drauniivi. I went to cut it down. A Mrs Spencer came with Kini, Apolosi's brother, to hold a meeting at Nanukuloa and I sent them away. I have since received instructions to go slow and watch them. They are now doing a great deal of surreptitious work in the province. I beg for some strong measures against them.²²³

But it was in the relatively more independent western and interior parts of the group that the Kabani was most popular. The Commissioner's representative in Colo East warned that the company was exceptionally strong in the area, that it had an administrative structure with a manager, overseers, turaga-ni-koro and ovisa-ni-koro and clerks in almost all villages. Apolosi was a frequent visitor, and the people

²²¹ "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1917. 18. Cicia's support for the Kabani can be attributed to its people's long history of conflict with and resentment for the Mago Island Company which owned large tracts of Cicia land. See CSO 08/3835 and Chapter Four of this thesis.

²²² "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1917. 28.

²²³ "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1917. 21.

seemed to devote all their time and money to the Kabani.²²⁴ And while disorder was rife in Colo North too, everything seemed altogether out of hand in Colo West where in the words of Buli Magodro, Ratu Tevita Lewaravu:

The Viti Company is stronger, I fancy in our province than in any other. It gives immense trouble to native administration and communal work. Our young men leave their villages for this Company and prosecutions fail to deter them.²²⁵

This emphatic and unanimous call from Fijian chiefs for the winding down of the Kabani and the removal of its leader Apolosi Nawai, is indicative of the considerable threat to the chiefs and the system of indirect rule that the movement posed. His removal became necessary if as Weeks contends, the collaborative arrangements between the crown and the chiefly hierarchy of Fiji was to survive.²²⁶

The opportunity to exile Nawai came on 31 August 1917 at a meeting in Tavua where Nawai was reported to have spoken the words: “koi au na meca ni matanitu, au na tamata kaukauwa”: “I am the enemy of the government, I am the strong man.”²²⁷ This was adjudged by two government officials in the crowd to have been seditious and was reported as thus to the Governor. Macnaught argues that it is highly unlikely that Nawai would have dropped his guard and uttered such words in the presence of the officials, and that he was probably framed.²²⁸ Nawai again pleaded his innocence with the Governor but to no avail,²²⁹ and in November 1917, Sweet-Escott on executive authority, exiled Nawai without trial to the district of Itutiu in Rotuma for a term of seven years. With his elimination, the movement was also effectively terminated. This was not the end of Apolosi Nawai’s colourful life as a rebel²³⁰ but the next phase of his long battle with the authorities falls outside the scope of this study.

²²⁴ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1917. 25.

²²⁵ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1917. 27.

²²⁶ Weeks: 27.

²²⁷ Cited in Macnaught, 1979: 185.

²²⁸ Macnaught, 1979: 185.

²²⁹ Nawai to Governor, 27 November 1917, enclosed in Sweet-Escott to CO, 7 December 1917, CO 83/139. Cited in Macnaught, 1979: 185.

²³⁰ Nawai spent twenty-four years of his life in confinement. Apolosi Nawai died from the disease filariasis on Yanuca island (off Taveuni) on 15 April 1946. See his death certificate “A Vola ni Mate” No. 5163. He was still in exile at the time of his death.

Reflections

The Viti Kabani was an expression of long standing grievances and disaffection. While there are no direct links between the Seaqaqa War, the Movement for Federation, and the Viti Kabani, they all reveal a history of multiple and widespread dissatisfaction with local and colonial authority. Some of the discontent had its roots in ill-advised colonial territorial demarcations, disappointment with the bypassing of important local chiefs in the appointment of government officials, excessive tax burdens and chiefly exactions, the increasing regimentation of village life, and fear of land alienation. Various combinations of these factors had found expression in Seaqaqa and were later manifested in the Movement for Federation and the insubordination of Sawakasa and Tokatoka. These earlier forms of organised resistance cast the Fijian social, political, and economic landscape as a fractured and disparate ensemble which local and colonial authorities had difficulties in managing. They were important precursors to the Viti Kabani and indicate a continuum which makes the emergence and popularity of the Kabani less surprising. They reveal the Kabani movement to have been more than a random explosion of discontent. By 1913, the conditions on the ground had ripened sufficiently for Apolosi Nawai and his charisma to shape the Viti Kabani into the largest resistance movement of Fiji's colonial era.

While Apolosi Nawai provided an avenue for the expression of the powerless in a world that suffocated innovation or initiative from below, he was no Robin Hood. It can be argued that Nawai spent too much on himself too early in the campaign thereby allowing his detractors to call for his exclusion on behalf of the ordinary "dupes" he had mislead.²³¹ This is the position taken by most commentators. Macnaught in particular, suggests that Apolosi Nawai exercised his power as Managing Director in a way that was "far more autocratic, overbearing and selfish than were the chiefs he professed to despise". He adds that "the Viti Company and its managing director became in the end a decadent parody of the Administration and the

²³¹ Islay McOwan to SS, 28 June 1930, CO 83/190/13. PRO.

Supreme Chief, and equally impotent as a vehicle of economic progress”.²³²

Macnaught provides no evidence to support these conclusions but, conversely, there exists little evidence to prove that the Kabani did in fact achieve its goal of redistributing power and income more equitably among Fijians who had invested in the company.²³³ This can be attributed partly to his premature exit from the commercial life of the colony. Nawai was in effective control of the Kabani for two years, the first of which was spent largely raising the necessary funds for it to operate effectively. It is unreasonable to expect that significant dividends could be paid so soon after the formation of the company. Since the Kabani did not keep regular books, it is unwise to speculate about how the money was received or spent.

It is telling however that in Fiji’s official narratives and rituals of remembrance, there is no room for Apolosi Nawai or the Kabani. Little if any allusion to Apolosi Nawai or the Viti Kabani is ever made in school textbooks or media outlets. By contrast, Fiji’s greatest collaborator chief, Ratu Sukuna, continues to feature prominently on numerous landmarks such as parks, schools, statues, buildings, street names, and a public holiday. One is more likely to find Nawai’s name etched in the popular consciousness referred to by James Scott as the “hidden transcript”.²³⁴ Among the masses he is regarded as an underworld hero. He continues to inspire awe and wonderment though more for the occult powers he claimed in the mid to late 1920s than for the political and commercial activities of the 1910s.

Whether he was a brave social bandit, divinely ordained, or corrupt entrepreneur, may not have mattered to disenfranchised Fijians who supported the movement. Perhaps more important than these considerations, was the simple promise of hope, opportunity, and empowerment that the Kabani offered. Whether this took a concrete material form, or an abstract sense of liberation, or a combination of both, is to speculate on the essence of the subaltern psyche and warrants a different approach than is possible here.

²³² Macnaught, 1979: 190.

²³³ For instance, complaints were received from Nailaga in Ba, about company officials helping themselves to the food that was intended to feed local communities, further stressing villagers in the process. Resolution VI of Nailaga District Council Meeting, 10 November 1915, CSO 15/10290. See also CSO 14/3370 and 14/3571 about intimidating tactics used by the Kabani to collect funds.

²³⁴ Scott, 1990: 227.

Finally, although Nawai was on friendly terms with a number of Indian migrants in Fiji, he failed to capitalise on the possibilities of making common cause with them.²³⁵ The presence in the colony of thousands of overworked, ill-treated, and disaffected labourers who shared a parallel though distinctive experience of disenfranchisement and alienation did not, it would seem, occur to Nawai as a potentially decisive ally. In articulating his rhetoric too strictly in racial terms, Nawai rather uncritically adopted colonial constructs and failed to see the potential that lay in more horizontal class based collaboration. Admittedly, the opportunities for forming such an alliance were very limited as shall be apparent now that we turn our attention to the struggles of Fiji's plantation labourers.

²³⁵ Apolosi Nawai also failed to seek the support of women other than in a token or gratuitous way. Such broad-based movements as the Viti Kabani seldom address other kinds of power imbalances within subordinate groups. No Fijian woman emerged from the movement with any prominence. Women's participation in resistance is discussed in Chapter Seven.

Chapter Four

Organised Plantation Protest

This chapter examines the forms of organised protest used by labourers on Fiji's plantations. After briefly setting the context within which Fiji's labour relations emerged after 1874, a number of organised plantation based strikes, riots, marches, petitions, and other formal manifestations of resistance are examined. The emphasis on "organised resistance" is needed to differentiate between the relatively rare but often spectacular moments of plantation protest, and the myriad other kinds of "everyday" forms of resistance which are the subject of Chapter Six. The following survey is intended to shed light on the complex web of factors that caused labourers to protest formally against plantation and colonial authorities, the frequency with which they did so, the form that these demonstrations took, and the outcomes that they produced. They are also intended to test the theory that labourers in Fiji pursued non-resistance as a strategy of survival.¹ The key organising principle of the chapter is chronological rather than thematic or typological. This strategy is used for the purpose of accounting for the evolution and recession of patterns across time. References to similarities and uniqueness, causes and motivations, types and themes, places and outcomes, continuities and discontinuities, are made where appropriate.

Historical Context

Aside from dealing with the insurgency that brewed in the hills, Arthur Gordon faced another daunting task when he took control of government in 1875. Like any governor, Gordon was expected to render his colony profitable to the British Empire and to run it at minimal cost to the British Government and its metropolitan taxpayers. To make the economy viable, Gordon needed to raise revenue locally to fund his own administration, attract offshore investment for capital growth, and find a steady

¹ See in particular Brij Lal, "'Nonresistance' on Fiji Plantations: The Fiji Indian Experience, 1879-1920." in *Plantation Workers: Resistance and Accommodation*. Brij Lal, Doug Munto, and Edward Beechert (eds.) Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993. 187-218.

supply of cheap labour. However, aside from a £100,000 loan from the Colonial Office which Gordon had secured,² the government was “terribly poor”³ and his task was complicated by a massive fall in cotton prices⁴ which had seen almost half of Fiji’s 3000 Europeans repatriate to Australia and New Zealand between 1872 and 1875.⁵ The exodus is significant for it indicated a profound disillusionment among European migrants for the prospect of making a living in Fiji and it deprived the new administration of their cash and entrepreneurial spirit. Yet, if issues of investment and public revenue are important, it is with the question of labour that this chapter is ultimately concerned.

Considerable historiographical discussion has already taken place about Gordon’s reasons for confining Fijian labourers to their villages to produce tax in food, and for seeking Indian indentured labourers to make up for the shortfall in plantation labour.⁶ It must be noted however, that Fijians were not sheltered or marginalized from economic participation as is often assumed⁷ They continued to constitute a vital part of the economic mainstream.⁸ Their communal confinement also buttressed the power of their chiefs who, in containing this potentially dangerous political mass, ensured the cheap, orderly, and separate administration of the Fijian people.

² Gordon to Carnarvon, 21 June 1876. *Records of Private and Public Life*, II: 46.

³ Lady Gordon to Lady Ryan, 4 August 1876. *Records of Private and Public Life*, II: 129.

⁴ This was mainly sparked by the recovery of the American South and the collapse of the French market during and after the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871).

⁵ Ken Gillion, *Fiji’s Indian Migrants: A History to the End of Indenture in 1920*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1962. 3.

⁶ See among others Ken Gillion, *Fiji’s Indian Migrants: A History to the End of Indenture in 1920*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1962; Shiu Prasad, *Indian Indentured Workers in Fiji*. Suva: South Pacific Social Sciences Association and UNDP, 1975; Ahmed Ali, *Girmit: The Indenture Experience in Fiji*. Bulletin of the Fiji Museum 5, 1979; Vijay Mishra, (ed.) *Rama’s Banishment: A Centenary Tribute to the Fiji Indians 1879-1979*. Auckland: Heinemann, 1979; Ahmed Ali, *Plantation to Politics: Studies on Fiji Indians*. Suva: University of the South Pacific and Fiji Times, 1980; Vijay Naidu, *The Violence of Indenture*. Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1980; Michael Moynagh, *Brown or White? A History of the Fiji Sugar Industry, 1873- 1973*. Canberra: The Australian National University, 1981; Brij Lal, *Girmitiyas: The Origins of the Fiji Indians*. Canberra: Journal of Pacific History, 1983; Bruce Knapman, *Fiji’s Economic History, 1874-1939: Studies of Capitalist Colonial Development*. Canberra: ANU, 1987; William Sutherland, *Beyond the Politics of Race: An Alternative History of Fiji to 1992*. Canberra: ANU, 1992. Brij Lal, (ed.) *Crossing the Kala Pani: A Documentary History of Indian Indenture in Fiji*. Canberra and Suva: ANU and Fiji Museum, 1998; and Brij Lal, *Chalo Jahaji: On a Journey Through Indenture in Fiji*. Canberra and Suva: ANU and Fiji Museum, 2000.

⁷ Gillion 1962 and Ali 1980. A certain popular view which is currently circulating in Fiji, suggests that it was the exploitation and hard work of Indian labourers which allowed Fijians to live a relatively peaceful, unobtrusive, uncomplicated life during colonial rule. I seek to demonstrate in the next chapter that Fijians worked very hard in the villages and their life was anything but restful or peaceful.

⁸ This will be demonstrated in greater detail in the next chapter.

In resisting the hiring of Fijians as plantation labourers, Gordon was also keen to put a halt to the excesses of the system which had seen the depopulation of villages, districts, some islands (as in the Yasawas), in the large provinces of Ba and Ra.⁹ This exodus placed great pressure on those villagers who stayed behind, accentuating social dislocation and increasing the potential for unrest. As Rev. F. Langham of the Wesleyan Mission decried in a letter to Gordon:

If the able-bodied men are absent from the district, the dissatisfaction said to exist already among those who have to meet the tax assessed upon the province will doubtless be increased, as they will, I presume, be called upon to make up the difference between the 1 pound paid by those who go from the province and the tax at which they are assessed.¹⁰

Further, as Langham explained, the absence of men from the villages forced children to be used as cover for the shortage and to miss school. The lack of marriageable men from affected provinces also caused a decline in the population of the districts.¹¹

Gordon hardly needed convincing. He wanted these men in their villages, working under the leadership of their chiefs in communal tax gardens. Legislation was duly passed requiring the permission of Bulis before Fijians could be engaged as labourers. Even if many continued to evade the laws to find work on plantations, Gordon's new policy put a severe check on Fijians' capability to leave and planters' ability to recruit them. His decision to prohibit the sale of any native land only aggravated the labour shortage. With their land secure, Fijians had less reason to seek the meagre wages and ill-treatment that prevailed on many European estates,¹² except to escape the drudgery of communal life. By the end of the 1870s therefore, Fijians had generally become unemployable as plantation labour.

⁹ Gordon remarked that as things stood, "the services of the entire male population of whole districts had been in effect sold to European planters in other and distant islands." Gordon, *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 201. See also Eastgate to Gordon, 25 August 1876. *Records of Private and Public Life*, II: 141-2, 144.

¹⁰ Langham to Gordon, 11 December 1876. *Records of Private and Public Life*, II: 237.

¹¹ Langham to Gordon, 11 December 1876. *Records of Private and Public Life*, II: 237.

¹² CSO 78/1748. Thurston to Gordon, 25 November 1878.

To supplement Fijian labour, Fiji had long benefited from Melanesian labourers. They came mainly from Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, although it was those from Kiribati and Tokelau that gave them a generic “Polynesian” tag.¹³ Most came for three-year contracts and were employed principally on the cotton and coconut plantations. This “Polynesian” traffic however was tainted with “abuse and atrocities”,¹⁴ and Gordon was expected to curb such excesses for they had been used as a major justification for the British takeover at Cession.

Pressure on the Governor also came from the Wesleyan Church for whom the scheme lacked sufficient legal safeguard for the protection of labourers. In a letter to Gordon, the Reverend Lorimer Fison pointed out that plantation inspections were almost farcical. Whenever such visits occurred, “plantations put on their holiday garb”, and inspectors fraternised openly with planters. A labourer who had cause to complain against his employer was, as Fison put it, “not likely to expect impartial justice from the man whom he sees eating at his master’s table”.¹⁵ Fiji’s poor reputation was also exacerbated by the better wages that Melanesian workers were now offered in Queensland, New Caledonia and Samoa.¹⁶

Hence, by mid 1877, the all-absorbing question which seemed “to supersede every other consideration”, as the *Fiji Times* described it, was “that of the labour supply”.¹⁷ As it often did, the *Fiji Times* claimed to speak for Europeans or “the producing class” of the colony, and while they were by no means a homogenous group, Europeans generally regarded themselves as the key to Fiji’s economic progress. The planters owned all of Fiji’s 600 odd plantations¹⁸ but would not work the land themselves. Yet they would not offer working conditions that were acceptable either to the government or to prospective Fijian or Melanesian labourers. They regarded it the

¹³ For more detailed discussions of labour in the Pacific, see among others *Labour in the South Pacific*. Clive Moore, Jackie Leckie and Doug Munro (eds.). Townsville, Qld.: James Cook University of Northern Queensland, 1990.

¹⁴ R. A. Derrick identifies such atrocities as the main cause for the intervention of the British Government and the annexation of Fiji by Great Britain. See also Gillion, 1962: 2, and Brij Lal, *Girmitiyas: The Origins of the Fiji Indians*. Canberra: Journal of Pacific History, 1983. 36.

¹⁵ Fison to Gordon, 16 September 1875. *Records of Private and Public Life*, I: 508-9. This lack of judicial protection was to remain a recurring source of grief for labourers of all origin until the end of the indenture system in 1919.

¹⁶ Gillion, 1962: 12.

¹⁷ *Fiji Times*, 19 May 1877.

¹⁸ Chandra Jayawardena, “Social Contours of an Indian Labour Force during the Indenture Period in Fiji.” in *Rama’s Banishment*. Vijay Mishra (ed.) London: Heinemann, 1979. 42.

government's duty to find them a source of cheap, "coloured" manual labour on which to build their prosperity.

The merits of importing labour from India had been discussed in Government circles for some time and Gordon was known to favour the idea following his experience with such schemes in Mauritius and Trinidad. In 1877 therefore, Gordon announced his plan to bring in East Indian labour under a system of indenture.¹⁹ Although his plan was initially opposed by planters who preferred a revitalisation of the "Polynesian" labour trade, Gordon persisted and on 15 May 1879, the *Leonidas* arrived in Levuka from Calcutta with the first 463 indentured labourers.²⁰ Owing to the planter boycott of Indian labour, the government was forced to hire the labourers and for some time it looked like the scheme would end prematurely. Certainly no further shipments arrived for another three years.²¹

However, the government had been active on another front and in May 1880, Thurston secured the long-term commitment of the Colonial Sugar Refining (CSR) Company of Sydney to mill sugar in Fiji.²² This agreement guaranteed a substantial infusion of capital in sugar production and the survival of Gordon's new labour scheme. When it commenced operation in Fiji, the CSR immediately hired the bulk of the *Leonidas* labourers. They worked on the CSR's first sugar mill which was built on the Rewa River and prepared the land for cultivation in time for the 1882 crushing season. Buoyed by the prospect of selling their cane to such a large enterprise and impressed by the work output of the immigrants, the planters broke their boycott and in June 1882, the *Berar* arrived with the second group of Indian indentured labourers.²³

The CSR quickly established itself as the biggest employer of indentured labour. In 1883 the company expanded its operations on the Western side of the island by

¹⁹ Despatch 120, Gordon to Carnarvon, 14 November 1877. CSO Despatches. See also *Royal Fiji Gazette*, July 1877.

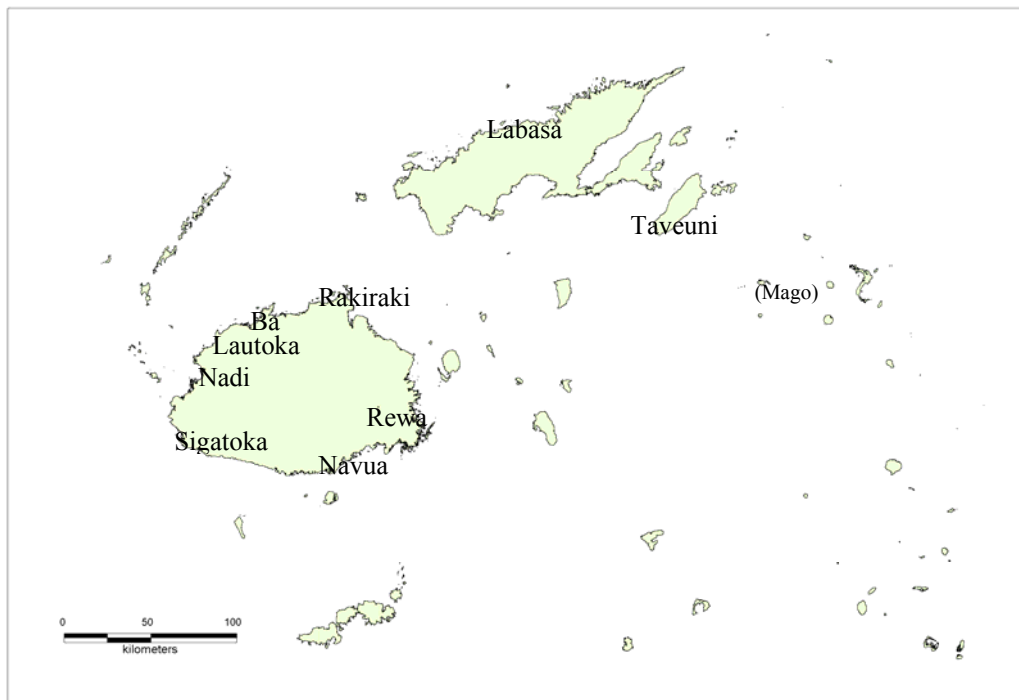
²⁰ "List of Passengers: *Leonidas* 15 May 1879." NAF.

²¹ "List of Ships: Indian Immigrants." NAF.

²² Sugar cane had been grown for commercial purposes since the early 1860s and several small mills were already operating in various parts of Fiji.

²³ See Appendix G in Gillion, 1962 for the "List of Ships, Dates of Arrival and Registered Numbers of Immigrants" from 1879 to 1916. 212-4.

building a mill at Ba. By 1884 when Fiji began to feel the effects of the worldwide depression, the CSR was not only buying out bankrupt farmers, it was also hiring almost half of the colony's 3995 Indian immigrant labourers.²⁴ By 1885 the CSR Company had invested more than £500,000 and the government began to conceive of its own survival in terms of this single company's success. MacGregor²⁵ wrote to Gordon that "were the affairs of the Colonial Sugar Company to become crooked, the Colony would utterly collapse".²⁶ Only four companies survived the depression²⁷ of which the CSR came through as the most powerful. In 1890, it was decided to relocate one of the CSR's Australian mills to Labasa (on the Northern side of Vanua Levu)²⁸ and by 1900 the company produced eighty-two percent of Fiji's sugar.²⁹



Map 15: Main Sugar Plantation Centres: 1879-1920.

²⁴ "Indian Immigration Report for 1884." Cited in a footnote in Gillion: 74.

²⁵ William MacGregor came to Fiji with Gordon in 1875 and served in the colonial administration first as the chief medical officer and then in several other senior administrative positions until 1888 when he was appointed Governor of British New Guinea. For more biographical details see R. B. Joyce, *Sir William MacGregor*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1971.

²⁶ MacGregor to Gordon, 21 January 1886 in Stanmore Papers, B. M. 49203. Cited in Gillion, 1962: 78. Lal (1993) has also demonstrated how the dominance of the CSR in Fiji accentuated the affinity of interests that already existed between planters and the colonial state.

²⁷ These four companies were the CSR, the Fiji Sugar Company operating in Navua, The Chalmers Brothers company in Penang in Ra, and the Holmhurst Estate in Taveuni owned by the Bank of New Zealand Estates Company.

²⁸ This had become necessary because of Queensland's new laws prohibiting the employment of coloured labour.

²⁹ Gillion, 1962: 79.

Under the agreement or *girmit*, as this contract was popularly known, indentured labourers (*girmityas*) were provided with an optional free return passage to India after the completion of two five-year terms of indenture or a return at their own expense after the first five years. They were paid a wage of one shilling a day. They were to work for nine hours each weekday and five hours on Saturday. The regulations further stipulated that each labourer was to perform task work and that one task was the equivalent of six hours of steady work for men and four and a half hours of work for women. Most were expected to complete one task per day. Each adult immigrant received rations according to a scale provided by the Government at a cost of four pence. Children under twelve years of age received half portions for free. Immigrants were also given free accommodation and free medical care in case of illness.³⁰ Forty women were to be hired for every hundred men, ostensibly to encourage permanent familial settlement in Fiji. Most were recruited from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh³¹ although a significant number were recruited from South India and the Punjab from 1903 onward.³²

Migrants had many reasons for registering as indentured labourers and embarking on the long passage across the *Kala Pani* (Black Water),³³ but few were prepared for the reality that awaited them in Fiji. On arrival they were immediately subjected to a host of penal sanctions and employment conditions which earned Fiji and the indentured experience the label “*narak*” or hell. The Immigration Ordinance provided for the prosecution of anyone charged with desertion, unlawful absence from work, refusal to complete a task, using insulting language, inciting another immigrant to desist from work, causing damage to property, selling or buying rations from another immigrant, unlawfully harbouring an immigrant, and disobedience.³⁴ These were so meticulously enforced on the plantations, that from 1884 onwards more than a third of all labourers could expect to be prosecuted during their period of indenture³⁵ and more than four

³⁰ See Appendix F, “Conditions of Service and Terms of Agreement” provided for intending Emigrants in Gillion, 1962: 210-2.

³¹ Lal, 2004a: 79.

³² Paper 25: “Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1903.” in *JFLC*, 1904.

³³ These reasons are well documented in Lal, 1983 and 2004a.

³⁴ Paper 25: “Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1885.” in *JFLC*, 1887. 16.

³⁵ These figures are derived from the Annual Reports on Indian Immigration from 1884 to 1919.

fifths charged with offences could expect to be summarily convicted.³⁶ In some years (such as 1886) and in some locations (such as Labasa) the number of prosecutions exceeded the number of immigrants. These prosecutions were profitable to plantation owners for apart from intimidating workers, they also resulted in the extension of the term of indenture to make up for the labourer's absence from work.

When they arrived on their respective plantations, labourers entered an isolated insular space with a distinctive way of life where violence, the threat of punishment and control were a way of life.³⁷ A strict hierarchy of power was enforced, employers ruling with near impunity³⁸ and using their power to extract maximum work (often with brutal efficiency), and to suppress any resistance. For the duration of the term of indenture, the migrant occupied the lowest layer of the plantation hierarchy. This he/she did not only in terms of his/her class as a labourer but also as a racial type. While they came from varying origins, castes, religions, language groups and ethnic backgrounds, their common bondage on the plantation turned these girmitiyas into one racial underclass: the Indian coolie. This class and racial categorisation and the animal imagery that emanated from it further blunted, as Kelley shows, any sensitivity to violence on the plantation.³⁹

Drawing on Goffman's work, Beckford has described the plantation as a "total institution", "omnipotent and omnipresent in the lives of those living within its confines".⁴⁰ Claudia Knapman writes of Fiji plantations that they became cultural institutions "with a distinctive way of life, producing even 'a state of mind' but where ultimate control rested upon physical force."⁴¹ Although the plantation in Fiji was no panopticon, everything in its organisational structure, division of labour, physical boundaries, regulation about movement, housing arrangements, and timetabling, was

³⁶ The latter figures are taken from Norman Etherington's article "The Gendering of Indirect Rule: Criminal Law and Colonial Fiji, 1875-1900." in *Journal of Pacific History*. 31: 1, 1996. 49.

³⁷ For a discussion of the world of indenture see among others Totaram Sanadhya, *My twenty-one years in the Fiji Islands*. John Kelly and Uttra Kumari Singh (trans. and eds.). Suva: Fiji Museum, 1991b; Gillion, 1962; Shiu Prasad's *Indian Indentured Workers in Fiji*. Suva: South Pacific Social Sciences Association and UNDP, 1975; Ali, 1979; Naidu, 1980; Kelly, 1991a; and Lal, 2000.

³⁸ Knapman: 154.

³⁹ Kelly, 1991b: 17, 27, 179.

⁴⁰ George Beckford, *Persistent Poverty*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972. 55. See also Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1961.

⁴¹ Knapman: 154.

designed to maximise discipline, control and production. These structural, spatial and temporal arrangements added an institutional element to the physical violence wielded by plantation authorities. For instance, the plantations were usually laid out in such a way that the most powerful individual, the owner or manager, lived on a hill overlooking the rest of the estate for supervision and surveillance.⁴² His immediate subordinates occupied less spacious houses lower on the hills while the labourers were housed in quarters at the lowest level reflecting their social status and production function.

While Gillion describes labourers' lodgings as better than what they could expect in India,⁴³ the "coolie lines" or barracks which became their 'home' for five to ten years were too small, too congested, and too unhygienic for the kind of work they were expected to perform. Typically, the lines contained eight rooms on each side,⁴⁴ each lodging three single men or a family of four. There was no floor nor windows and as Gillion describes, with "firewood, field tools, cooking utensils and wet clothes cluttered about, smoke, soot, spilt food, flies and mosquitoes, perhaps fowls ... and ... a fire-place as well, living conditions were neither comfortable nor sanitary". There was no privacy for family life and in sum "the lines were crowded, dirty and ugly".⁴⁵ The labourers were woken up at three or four o'clock in the morning and by six they were at work on the plantations.

Out on the fields, the labourers usually worked in 'gangs' under a sardar.⁴⁶ Sardars reported to an overseer who allotted tasks for the day which on a sugar plantation consisted mainly of digging or clearing drains, planting, weeding and trashing, cutting, carrying and loading cane, shovel ploughing, holing and relieving.⁴⁷ What constituted a fair task was often the most contentious issue for labourers and

⁴² See the old CSR living quarters situated on various hills in Nadi, Lautoka, Ba, and Labasa. One of Naidu's informants recounted how the Kulambar or overseer would "spy on us from his house on the hill through his binoculars." Naidu: 45.

⁴³ Gillion, 1962: 106.

⁴⁴ The size of these rooms was ten feet by seven feet until 1908 when the statutory size was increased to ten feet by twelve feet. See Gillion, 1962: 104.

⁴⁵ Gillion, 1962: 105. C. F. Andrews and W. W. Pearson reported in 1915 that the lines were "more like stables than human dwellings", that they acted as "an apprenticeship for vice" where the "morals of the poultry yard" were fostered. C. F. Andrews and W. W. Pearson, "Report on Indentured Labour in Fiji: An Independent Enquiry." Calcutta: February 1916. 27, 31. Naidu's informants remember the lines variously as brothels, horse stables, pigs' sties, and dog kennels. See Naidu: 32.

⁴⁶ Urdu word meaning immediate supervisor and usually spelt "sirdar" in colonial records.

⁴⁷ Foster to Agent General, 28 November 1887, CSO 87/1377.

employers alike. Overseers and managers were given considerable latitude in deciding the amount of work that could be expected of an immigrant in six hours of steady work. Because there existed no clear guidelines, tasking was left open to abuse and overtasking became one of the most enduring sources of complaint of the indenture era.

Labourers who were overtasked could seldom complete their day's work. This allowed managers to withhold wages. This practice was common in the Rewa region from 1885 onwards as Walter Carew reported:

Unless a man completes a whole task a day he receives no pay whatever and is moreover summoned to Court and prosecuted for doing no work. Thus a man earning /9 a day and /4 ½ for Saturday would be charged with 5 ½ days absence ... when he had actually performed more than four full days work. The 4 / 1 ½ would be confiscated by the employer, the labourer would be liable to a fine of 18/ or 3 months with hard labour and the magistrate would be compelled to order an extension of indenture for 5 ½ days. ... For the past three years, or ever since Indians were placed there and during this period a great deal of money must have fallen into the pockets of the Rewa Sugar Co Lt by these illegal and most cruel iniquitous proceedings.⁴⁸

Withholding wages accentuated a vicious cycle of poverty. With less money to buy rations, labourers' diet deteriorated, prompting illness and further absenteeism, which led to further loss of wages, more fines and extra extensions of indenture. In this environment, the threat of disease and death always lurked and often preyed on the labourer. This was graphically described by the girmitiya Totaram Sanadhya in his account of his twenty-one years as an immigrant in Fiji (1893-1914).⁴⁹ Sanadhya's narrative also hints at a sense of helplessness and hopelessness that formed in the labourers' psyche in the face of the overwhelming power and control of plantation authorities:

⁴⁸ Carew to CS, 25 January 1887, CSO 87/202.

⁴⁹ Totaram Sanadhya, *My Twenty-One Years in the Fiji Islands*. John Kelly and Uttra Kumari Singh (trans. and eds. Suva: Fiji Museum, 1991).

The company does not give leave, and remember that to run away and complain without taking leave is to send yourself to jail. ... How can we make a complaint? What kind of complaint can be made about those at whose place one certainly has to work for five years? Today we complain, tomorrow they will kick us with shoes, and give us more difficult work, write a shilling in the register and give us six pence. This is the consequence of our complaints.⁵⁰

If a labourer dared take the matter to court by making a formal complaint, he/she would have to induce witnesses to appear on his/her behalf, lose a couple of days' pay, arouse the overseer's resentment and expose his/her companions (not to mention him/herself) to victimization from the *sardar* and the overseer.⁵¹ When action against sardars was successful, some overseers publicly refunded them their fines to undermine attempts at prosecuting any plantation authority.⁵² Charges against employers thus rarely resulted in punishment severe enough to deter further abuse. Such disappointments were disillusioning and discouraged labourers from reporting abuses.⁵³

There are other reasons why labourers concluded that protest did not pay. Because protest was usually channelled through the courts, immigrants' capacity to use the justice system effectively was a major consideration in the decision to lodge complaints or lay charges. As Kelly points out, many immigrants could not speak English and therefore relied on interpreters who played a key role in misleading and misrepresenting matters to and from them.⁵⁴ Employers on the other hand enjoyed an extraordinary advantage in delivering effective testimony. They possessed a thorough understanding of the legal process, how to work it to their advantage and how to trap unsuspecting labourers in the subtleties of legal semantics.⁵⁵ This is reflected in the statistical data provided by the Indian Immigration Reports. It indicates for instance that while employers secured eighty-two percent of the charges they laid, the courts upheld only thirty-five percent of labourers' complaints against their employers for

⁵⁰ Sanadhya: 77.

⁵¹ Prasad: 23.

⁵² Sergeant Lynch to Agent-General for Immigration, 9 September 1899, CSO 99/4215.

⁵³ Jane Harvey, "Naraini's Story," in Lal, 2000: 344.

⁵⁴ Kelly, 1991b: 188. We shall see in the Chapter Six that not all interpreters supported employers and that some used their positions to assist the cause of labourers.

⁵⁵ Kelly, 1991b: 199.

breaches of the labour regulations. Employers laid almost 10,000 complaints before the courts between 1890 and 1897, while labourers lodged only 311 during the same period. This disparity helps to explain the labourer's reluctance to use judicial channels in claiming redress.⁵⁶ Not until Manilal Doctor⁵⁷ arrived in Fiji in 1912, were Indian immigrants represented by someone who could match their adversaries in the command and use of legal language and process. With such overwhelming odds, it is not surprising that overt action against plantation authorities appeared futile.

There is general agreement among historians that in this suppressive environment, labourers mounted few organised protests.⁵⁸ The rarity of large organised labour strikes is not confined to Fiji and shares similarities with Queensland plantations.⁵⁹ While Moore has described this lack of resistance in Queensland as a pragmatic "counterculture of survival",⁶⁰ Lal explains it in Fiji in terms of "non-resistance".⁶¹ Lal's principal argument is that for many immigrants, the key to an untroublesome future lay in complying with the wishes of the overseers and sardars, not in creating trouble for them.⁶² Immigrants' responses to the violence of indenture were thus informed by practical considerations. When they had worked out that the legal apparatus of the state was used to buttress the power of employers rather than defend labourers against the abuses of the system, immigrants lost faith in the law, and personal survival and individual achievement became more pragmatic goals for surviving plantation life.⁶³

Lal attributes the paucity of protest to other factors as well, which militated against the organising of labourers and reduced the possibilities among them for the emergence of strong leaders or effective collective action. Among these are the

⁵⁶ Doug Munro, "Introduction." in Munro, Lal and Beechert (eds.), 1993: 16.

⁵⁷ Manilal Doctor was the first non-European lawyer to be admitted to the Fiji bar. Until his arrival, all judges, lawyers, and assessors involved in courts of justice were "whites", most of whom felt that European law and order would be diminished, if an individual European, as representative of their civilization, was punished publicly for transgressing against it. See Kelly, 1991b: 180-1.

⁵⁸ See Naidu, 1980; Munro, 1993; Lal, 2000: 167; and Matthew Ryan, "The Labasa Strike, 1907." in Lal, 2000: 350.

⁵⁹ See Adrian Graves, *Cane and Labour: The Political Economy of the Queensland Sugar Industry, 1862-1906*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993. 210-1.

⁶⁰ See Clive Moore, "The Counterculture of Survival: Melanesians in the Mackay district 1865-1906." in Munro, Lal and Beechert (eds.), 1993: 69-100.

⁶¹ See Lal, 1993: 187-216.

⁶² Lal, 2000: 178.

⁶³ Lal, 2000: 169.

diverse social and cultural backgrounds from which labourers came and which tended to divide rather than unite them. They spoke different tongues, worshipped a multitude of different gods, and occupied different positions in the social structure. Labourers had different reasons, motivations and aspirations for coming to Fiji (or in the case of Fijian labourers, for leaving their provinces), and encountered different experiences on their plantations.⁶⁴ For example, many among the labourers were sojourners who calculated that saving money and abiding by the rules would be the most effective way of getting through their period of indenture.⁶⁵

Lal's research also shows that most migrants were young men under the age of twenty-six, untutored and unskilled in deeper political and cultural matters. This made them unsuited for leadership roles. They had little formal education which placed them at a considerable disadvantage when articulating their grievances. Furthermore, the few labourers who showed signs of leadership were either co-opted into the management structure of the plantation as sardars, or were moved to other estates to prevent them from becoming too influential among their peers. Immigration officials were often asked by planters to split up immigrants from the same districts of origin to prevent the possibility of 'ganging'. As Lal points out, breaking up old connections rendered labourers more amenable to plantation control.⁶⁶

Their dispersal on plantations separated by rugged terrain made communication very difficult and further complicated attempts at collective action. As Kelley points out, their resources were fragmentary, complex, and incoherent, and colonial authorities were constantly depriving them of any political space.⁶⁷ As one ex-indentured man conceded: "we were in a hopeless and a helpless state in this place hence I could do nothing."⁶⁸

One further reason for the lack of collective action was the failure of labourers to unite across ethnic groups and to coordinate their struggle in terms of their class. Fijian and Melanesian labourers suffered from similar exploitation as Indians did,

⁶⁴ Lal, 2000: 168.

⁶⁵ Lal, 2000: 169.

⁶⁶ Lal, 2000: 171.

⁶⁷ Kelly, 1991a: xii.

⁶⁸ Abdul Aziz in Ahmed Ali, 1979: 16.

even if they lived in different ‘lines’ and worked in different parts of the production process. This racial division of labour encouraged suspicion and rivalry and intra-labour inter-ethnic conflict. Hence, as we shall see, the first labour riots were not aimed at the employers but at other ethnic groups of workers.

These are all compelling reasons for non-resistance. But Lal acknowledges that even if seeking redress was fraught with difficulties, labourers did not simply accept their treatment without question or retaliation. He cites the 1886 march on Suva by Koronivia labourers, the violent strike by Punjabis in Labasa in 1907, and the twin general strikes of 1920 and 1921 as particularly prominent moments of labour protest in Fiji’s early colonial history.⁶⁹ Kelly agrees when he points out that the critical factor in the experience of indenture is that while *girmitiyas* were made into “coolies” and “labour units”, they did not become what their owners imagined them to be.⁷⁰ This chapter now proceeds to examine overt plantation protest in Fiji.

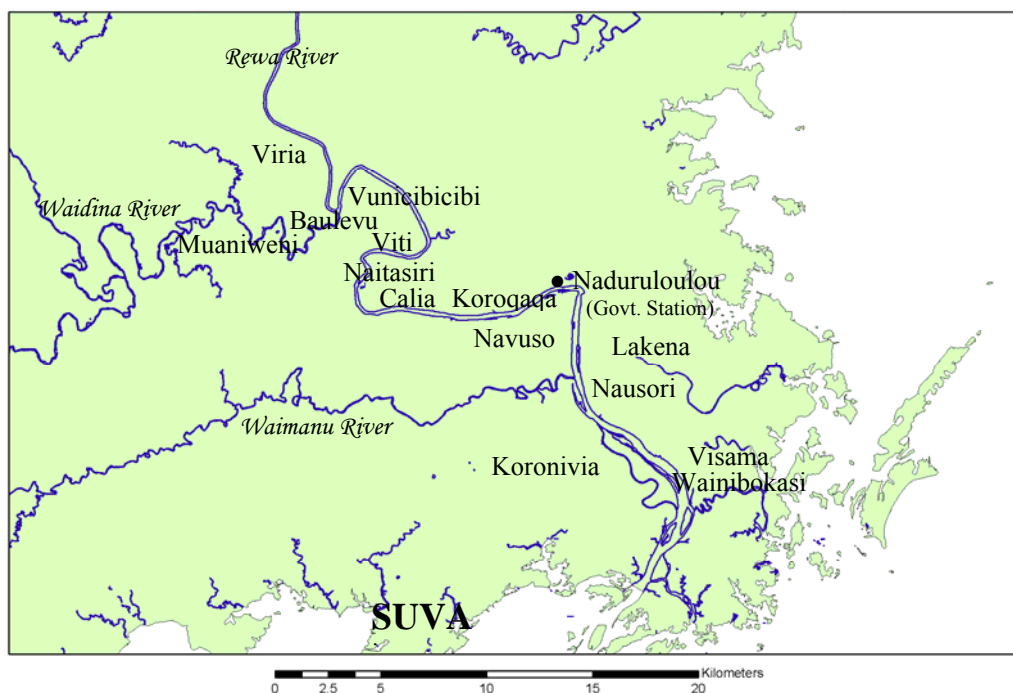
The First Strikes and Riots: 1881-1884

The influx of Indian labourers caused a major transformation of labour relations on Fiji’s plantations. In the beginning, there were few remarkable instances of labour unrest involving Indian immigrants. After all, only 450 labourers were employed and they were well dispersed. One incident at Vunicibicibi (C. L. Sahl plantation) in 1881 required the removal of Indian immigrants until the manager was dismissed. The incident caused the government to instruct stipendiary magistrates to visit each plantation once every six months.⁷¹ The arrival of more Indian migrants in 1882 increased pressure on the immigration department’s lone inspector and the government was soon forced to create new positions.

⁶⁹ Lal: 1992: 80-3; Lal, 1993: 197-199, Lal, 2000: 189.

⁷⁰ Kelly, 1991a: 42.

⁷¹ The details regarding this case can be found in CSO files 81/1300 and 81/1354.



Map 16: Plantations on the Rewa River: 1882-1920.

In November 1882, Baulevu and Muaniweni Indian immigrants went on strike to complain about working conditions on their respective plantations. They were dissatisfied with existing rules about rations, and complained about excessive work and insufficient wages. The dispute was resolved amicably and the labourers returned to work without being charged.⁷² This strike is important because it suggests that it did not take long for immigrants to organise after arriving in the colony. It also indicates that some strikes ended peacefully. Such strikes are less spectacular and consequently do not feature prominently in Fiji's colonial records or its history of labour protest.

More spectacular were the 'race' riots which erupted in Rewa, the region with the heaviest concentration of labourers. These confrontations between labourers of different ethnic groups were more likely to occur than direct attacks on plantation authorities. For instance, in November of 1882 Fijians and Polynesians got severely manhandled by Indian labourers following an insult to an Indian by a Polynesian.

⁷² Taylor to CS, 4 December 1882, CSO 82/2839.

Groups of labourers sought out their weapons and an indiscriminate attack ensued.⁷³ On 24 July 1883, an affray between Indian and Fijian men erupted after an Indian woman was heard screaming in the barracks of Fijian labourers. Newly landed immigrants of the *Poonah* at Nausori Plantation, having heard the cry, burst in and beat several of the Fijians. The latter painted their faces black and retaliated early the next morning seriously injuring at least twenty-five of the Indian workers in their lines.⁷⁴ This story and several others about the conditions of Indian immigrants in Fiji found their way into Indian papers causing much consternation.⁷⁵

These ethnic riots highlight two substantial points about labour protest in Fiji. The first is that immigrants' letters to India were an effective instrument with which to raise awareness about their plight. Some of these stories raised public ire and put pressure on the Indian Government to ask questions of its Fiji counterpart. In response to the increased potential for volatility that existed in Rewa as a result of the increased concentration of labour, the Government appointed one of its most experienced men, Walter Carew, to be the new stipendiary magistrate in the province.⁷⁶ He immediately warned that reports such as those reaching the Indian press, if multiplied indefinitely, would prove prejudicial to recruiting for this colony.⁷⁷ His prediction was not entirely misplaced. It may have taken almost forty years for the Indian Government to ban the recruitment of indentured labourers for work in Fiji, but when it did, it was due at least partly to the pressure created by numerous stories and years of abuse suffered by *girmityas*, and the outraged Indian public's demands for it to be stopped. This is discussed further in Chapter Six.

⁷³ Taylor to CS, 4 December 1882, CSO 82/2839.

⁷⁴ Carew to CS, 1 August 1883, CSO 83/2141.

⁷⁵ This story was published in the *India Daily News*, 27 October 1883. The report read: "A Madras contemporary has received the following information in a private letter from Fiji, dated 8th September. The Fijians are very warlike: on the least provocation, they turn out with their war-clubs and axes ... The other day there was a row between coolies and the Fijians, when the latter came down with their war-clubs and axes; and they went through their war dance for about ten minutes, and then made for the coolies. The coolies were running here and there for their lives, and the Fijians after them. All the Europeans, 200 in number, turned out to quell the disturbance, but in vain; the Fijians would obey nobody. Fortunately, none of the coolies were killed, but fifty were severely hurt." This text can be found in Carew to CS, 19 January 1884, CSO 84/150.

⁷⁶ Carew took up his appointment on 1 January 1883, in addition to his other responsibilities as a member of the Legislative Council and the Native Lands Commission, and the commissionership of Colo East. MS 105 – 8: Letters, 1880-1882. Carew Papers. Hocken Library, Dunedin.

⁷⁷ Carew to CS, 19 January 1884, CSO 84/150.

In June 1884 Government troops had to be brought in the neighbourhood of a Rewa plantation where Fijian and Indian men had attacked each other over the rape of an Indian woman.⁷⁸ Fights often took place as the result of challenges based on the infringement of perceived vested rights with regard to women.⁷⁹ Commenting on these rivalries, Carew wrote “Fijians and Indians regard each other with unconcealed contempt and disgust. The Indians never by any chance speak of the Fijians other than as “Jangalis” the meaning of which is understood and deeply resented by them all to a man.” He described Fijians as “proud and arrogant” regarding all others as “vulagis”. For their part, Solomon Islanders never seemed “to be so happy as when fighting and are chiefly distinguishable by their personal insolence to all around including Europeans”.⁸⁰ Ethnicity became the defining characteristic of labourers’ identity, shrouding in the process important intra-ethnic differences and inter-ethnic similarities.

Placing large concentrations of different ethnic groups alongside each other but keeping them apart in all other matters of plantation life, proved a hindrance to the emergence of class consciousness and facilitated the propagation of ethnic consciousness. Ethnic riots therefore tended to deflect attention away from class antagonism and shielded employers from a cross-ethnic anti-capital alliance. As Graves has remarked in relation to Queensland plantations, the division of labourers along ethnic lines “promoted ethnic cohesion in the interests of production, but it also facilitated the exploitation of inter-ethnic tensions to the same end. ... Stratification on the plantation, therefore, was not simply a reflection of the production relations found in it, it was a functional reflection of the production process.”⁸¹ While ethnic tension was useful to capital because it inhibited the formation of a broad cross-ethnic labour opposition, managers in Fiji did not overtly fuel ethnic conflicts. When they occurred, such riots caused considerable irritation for employers because of the time and production that was lost to injuries and court proceedings.

⁷⁸ Carew to CS, 1 July 1884, CSO 84/1405.

⁷⁹ Paper 23: “Annual Report on Polynesian Immigration for 1884.” in *JFLC*, 1886. 25. Women’s agency in these situations is the subject of Chapter Seven.

⁸⁰ Carew to CS, 1 October 1884, CSO 84/2140.

⁸¹ Graves: 119.

Rewa and the Spirit of Insubordination: 1884-1887.

From 1884, labour relations entered a critical period. Gillion has noted that there was a marked deterioration in the treatment of indentured labourers after 1884.⁸² But worsening relations on the plantations had already begun in 1884. In September 1884 for instance, Vuda and Nalotawa labourers working at Nausori wrote to the Native Commissioner to complain among other things that they were ill-fed. Sixty Vuda men were being fed one bag of Kumala (sweet potato) for a day's meal.⁸³ Figures indicate that in 1884, thirty-nine percent of all girmitiyas could expect to be prosecuted for breaches of the labour laws. The worsening global recession aggravated matters quite dramatically. In 1885, the total number of charges and convictions against Indian immigrants, was between three and four times as great as the previous year, and between six and seven times as great as in 1883.⁸⁴ By 1886 there were 8853 charges for a population of 5237 indentured immigrants. According to the Agent-General of Immigrants, Henry Anson, this situation was so bad, it was without parallel in any other British colony.⁸⁵ Three quarters of these cases were from plantations in the Rewa region, the largest and most important labour district of the colony.⁸⁶

After returning from Colo in January 1886, where he had been busy trying to contain the outbreak of Tuka, Carew was faced with more reports of labour unrest in the Rewa plantations. This was a setting different from Colo where the conflict had been about precedence, autonomy, land, religion, and intra-Fijian rivalries. In Rewa, the struggle was over food, wages, living conditions in the coolie lines, task work, and the violence of overseers in the fields. The tension was particularly acute in Navuso and Koronivia. In February 1886, 300 labourers went on strike for overtasking. Overtasking was a consequence of the Depression. As Durutalo points out, the fall in commodity prices between 1883 and 1887 threatened the profitability of the CSR and

⁸² Gillion, 1962: 79. This tendency for planters to exert strong-handed authority during times of economic recession is also alluded to by Munro, 1993: 17.

⁸³ Letter of complaint by Nalotawa and Vuda labourers to Native Commissioner, 14 September 1884, CSO 84/2198.

⁸⁴ Paper 25: "Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1885." in *JFLC*, 1887. 17.

⁸⁵ Paper 38: "Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1886." in *JFLC*, 1887. 16.

⁸⁶ Carew's workload in Rewa swelled to such an extent that Thurston was forced to split the magisterial district into two with Mr Ross assuming the second division. See Despatch 114, Thurston to SS, 18 December 1888. CSO Despatches. NAF.

other planters, and they sought to transfer the burden of costs to the immigrants.⁸⁷

Work expected per task was gradually increased on all plantations and the withholding of wages became more common. Overseers began competing to see who could get “the maximum amount of work done for minimum amount of pay”.⁸⁸ “My own conviction” reported Carew, “is that employers systematically ignore that portion of the law which fixes a task as that amount of work “that can be performed by any ordinary able bodied adult immigrant in six hours working steadily at such work”.⁸⁹

After unsuccessfully attempting to attack the manager in the fields, the Navuso strikers crossed the Rewa River to Naduruloulou, the government station, armed with heavy hoes and attempted to see Carew about their grievances. They came back the following day in boats and again attempted to land in Naduruloulou where two of their leaders had been incarcerated. They tried to persuade Carew to accept a payment in fines for their release. But the Fijian police prevented them from landing and the strikers were forced down stream to Nausori. Unable to land, they returned to Navuso and were back at work the next day. Carew’s refusal to fine the two leaders and to incarcerate them instead, signals an important departure from normal practice and indicates the government’s hardening position against labour protest.

Prior to 1886, magistrates had been happy to accept payment in fines for labour infractions. In response, labourers had organised a special fund out of which were paid the fines inflicted for desertion, absence from work, non-completion of task, and such like offences against the Immigration laws. Acting Agent-General of Immigration Bolton Corney complained to the Colonial Secretary that this fund appeared to give immigrants the confidence to be contemptuous of the punishment of labour laws and to cultivate “a spirit of antagonism towards, not only their employers, but towards the official authorities of the districts in which they reside”.⁹⁰ The existence of the fund gave offending labourers some influence over the nature of their punishment. For instance, it gave them the power if they so wished to go back to work

⁸⁷ Durutalo, 1985a: 193. Between 1883 and 1884, the world price of sugar fell by one third, from nineteen shillings per hundredweight to thirteen shilling three pennies per hundredweight. See A. G. Lowndes (ed.) *South Pacific Enterprise: The Colonial Sugar Refinery Company Limited*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1956. 443.

⁸⁸ Hamilton Hunter to CS, 28 July 1888, CSO 88/2315.

⁸⁹ Carew to CS, 6 March 1886, CSO 86/551.

⁹⁰ Acting Agent General Immigration Corney to CS, 19 March 1886, CSO 86/1107.

immediately on the payment of a fine instead of spending days in gaol. Gaol time was resented by many immigrants because the period of indenture was automatically extended by the number of days spent away from the plantation. The fund also reflects their organisational capability and attests to the spirit of solidarity which existed among them. This spirit of comradeship and the fund that symbolised it led Bolton Corney to suspect “the presence of a socialist element among the immigrants ... which threatens to set at nought the legally constituted authority and thwart the ends of justice”.⁹¹ To neutralise labourers’ communal monetary capability, the administration advised magistrates to withdraw the option of fines and to impose mandatory gaol terms.

Three months after the Navuso “emeute”,⁹² matters got out of hand at Koronivia. Carew was expecting trouble and wrote, “for a long time past it has been my opinion and I believe that of many others in this district that the only law known at Koronivia is the law of the “stick” and the “boots” aided by the free use of much coarse profanity”.⁹³ Such lawlessness on the plantation had already resulted on 6 December 1885 in an attack on the overseer Gaspard.⁹⁴ The attack was led by Debi, the former sardar and supported by the labourers who wanted him reinstated. Labour relations on the estate had deteriorated steadily since the arrival of two Creole overseers, Tarbe and Gaspard from Mauritius in 1885. They both spoke Hindustani fluently although as the labourers complained, they used it to abuse them.⁹⁵ Like overseers on other plantations, they had steadily increased the quantity of work done in one task. Labourers found themselves increasingly incapable of completing these revised tasks and as a consequence were losing substantial portions of their earnings. It became to the “pecuniary advantage of the plantation” as Carew reported, “that the men should never finish a task of work and I attribute their low rate of earning and the many serious disturbances at Koronivia to this system”.⁹⁶

In February, labourers from the Ra coast protested to Carew that Mr Mune, the manager of the Rewa Sugar Company at Koronivia, had not paid them their wages

⁹¹ Acting Agent General Immigration Corney to CS, 19 March 1886, CSO 86/1107.

⁹² This was the word used by Carew to describe the Navuso protest.

⁹³ Carew to CS, 6 March 1886, CSO 86/551.

⁹⁴ *Fiji Times*, 30 January 1886.

⁹⁵ Report by Carruthers on the Koronivia Strike, 13 May 1886, CSO 86/987.

⁹⁶ Carew to CS, 25 January 1887, CSO 87/202.

and that his son had been ill-treating them.⁹⁷ Carew wrote in his monthly report that Mune was in the habit of flouting the law in the face of magistrates, and boasting of the thrashings he administered to his labourers.⁹⁸ His son was abusive and constantly kicked and beat the men.⁹⁹ In the end, they were forced to return to their villages because being so badly fed and paid, they would have starved had they waited for their court case against the management to be heard. Being hungry, ill-treated, overworked, and having wages withheld was a shared experience that permeated life on the plantations across gender and ethnic lines. But where Fijian labourers could refuse to continue working under such conditions and retreat or escape back to their villages, other immigrant labourers were confined to the plantation for the length of their contract period. Initially the labourers responded by trying to sabotage the Koronivia mill.¹⁰⁰ However, by the end of April the situation was such that the labourers adopted an organised and confrontational approach.

On Monday 3 May 1886, Koronivia's gang of shovel men marched around to other gangs in the various parts of the estate notifying them of their decision to stop work. The other gangs responded with surprising unanimity. From Koronivia, the labourers walked ten miles and converged on Suva at the Immigration Office. Reports differ as to the exact number of labourers involved. Acting Agent-General Bolton Corney reported that forty of them turned up at the office carrying spades, hoes, knives and other implements. They complained that they were not getting enough to eat and that they were overworked. Corney replied that it was against the rules to come and complain with these instruments in their hands, and that complaints should be made to the magistrate. The labourers protested that they could not lay their complains with an inspector because they had never seen one and that the magistrate would not listen to them.¹⁰¹ After being promised that their grievances would be addressed and that an inspector would be despatched to the plantation, the labourers were escorted by police back to Koronivia.

⁹⁷ Carew to CS, 6 March 1886, CSO 86/551.

⁹⁸ Carew to CS, 6 March 1886, CSO 86/551.

⁹⁹ Terms such as "bloody vuakas" and "bokolas" were highly offensive to these proud Nalawa men.

¹⁰⁰ *Fiji Times*, 3 March 1886.

¹⁰¹ Corney to CS, 14 May 1886, CSO 86/1107.

The next day however, they refused to turn out when called out by Mune and the overseers. On Wednesday 5 May, Mune brought 133 labourers from Koronivia plantation to Carew's station at Naduruloulou in a punt. The labourers had refused to work for the third consecutive day and were in a state of open mutiny. Carew agreed to see eleven of their representatives. They complained about being overtasked and repeated the grievances presented to the Agent-General. Carew advised them to return to Koronivia and wait for the arrival of an inspector. But the labourers refused to leave and Carew had four of the men arrested and locked up. The others were ordered back under guard on board their punt. The arrest nearly produced a violent riot with the labourers remaining on the boats shaking sticks and their fists at the police. They had hoped to secure the release of Debi and now appeared ready to rush the gaol to rescue their other companions. The altercation lasted about ten minutes before the police could restore control. Six labourers succeeded in jumping overboard and swam ashore but were immediately arrested. The rest returned to Koronivia under police escort.¹⁰²

Back in Koronivia, the labourers at once started back to Suva but were intercepted by Mune and several were locked up in the plantation hospital. The others were sent back to their lines but by evening a group of seventy of them got away and headed to Suva. Many carried with them summonses signed by Carew and delivered to them by Tarbe for failing to complete their tasks in the month of April. The labourers again sought relief from the Agent-General who again promised to send an inspector to look into the matter. Subagent Carruthers arrived on the plantation on 13 May and instructed labourers to select three spokespersons to meet with him. Among other things, Carruthers was informed that two "drivers",¹⁰³ Mahadeo and Bucha, were at the source of much of the trouble. The two sardars had joined the Creole overseers to beat labourers and prevent the older and more likeable Debi from being reinstated. Carruthers then visited the plantation where he found the workers "sullen and unwilling" and their living quarters in "filthy and unhealthy condition". He noted that

¹⁰² See several reports in file CSO 86/987 for the official version of these disturbances.

¹⁰³ A driver's main task was to regulate the work rhythm of the workers to a level which met the production goals of the plantation. Graves: 122.

many of the labourers on the estate were so poor that they could not earn enough to buy rations.¹⁰⁴

Lal writes that in Fiji, the colonial government rarely took its role as trustee of indentured labourers' rights seriously.¹⁰⁵ In spite of being witness to these disturbing scenes and of representing a government agency charged with the welfare of the immigrants, Carruthers' report admonished the manager and urged that discipline and punishment should be stepped up to prevent a recurrence of the disorder. Under no circumstances should groups of a hundred men ever march off their estate in such an unceremonious fashion.¹⁰⁶ He saw the strike as the most serious disturbance to have occurred with Indian immigrants and a symptom of the growth of "a very unpleasant state of matter".¹⁰⁷ Nor was this feeling confined to Koronivia: "I fear that there will be before long similar trouble at the Nausori mill unless a sudden check be applied."¹⁰⁸ This view was endorsed by Bolton Corney who agreed that such "unruly assemblies" were becoming too common and that "a law must be drawn up to punish those who engage in such activities".¹⁰⁹ The Chief Police Magistrate agreed. He warned that the whole commotion had caused great excitement on the river and that unless it was promptly and severely dealt with, it would spread to other plantations.¹¹⁰ Reflecting on the strike with gravity and unease, Carew observed that with the number of Indian immigrants on the Rewa River now so great, "if this spirit of insubordination becomes general among them serious consequences may follow".¹¹¹ "Spirit of insubordination" was used with increasing frequency by officials when referring to the spread of discontent on the Rewa plantations.¹¹²

To quell this spirit, Ordinance XIV of 1886¹¹³ was drafted by Acting-Governor, J. B. Thurston and passed into law in July 1886. He insisted that the law had become necessary for a number of reasons. It was meant to meet the not infrequent violent

¹⁰⁴ Carruthers to Agent General, 13 May 1886, CSO 86/987.

¹⁰⁵ Lal, 2000: 174.

¹⁰⁶ Carruthers to Agent General, 13 May 1886, CSO 86/987.

¹⁰⁷ Carruthers to Agent General, 13 May 1886, CSO 86/987.

¹⁰⁸ Carruthers to Agent General, 13 May 1886, CSO 86/987.

¹⁰⁹ Corney to CS, 14 May 1886, CSO 86/1107.

¹¹⁰ Hunter to Acting CS, 5 May 1886, CSO 86/987.

¹¹¹ Carew to CS, 5 May 1886, CSO 86/987.

¹¹² See minutes and draft reports in CSO 86/987 and in CSO 86/1107.

¹¹³ Ordinance XIV is described in detail in the Agent General's Draft of the Indian Immigration Report for 1886 in CSO 87/3061.

assaults with knives and other tools, upon overseers; the intimidating visits made by labourers to managers' houses; and to prevent visits made to the Agent General's office in Suva by large numbers of men carrying weapons.¹¹⁴ The ordinance was described as "Draconian" by an official of the Colonial Office in London¹¹⁵ and would probably have been fiercely contested by Henry Anson, the Agent-General, had he been in Fiji at the time of its enactment. The ordinance increased the penalty for absence from work or non-completion of work without lawful excuse, with an extension of one day for each day's absence and each day for which a committal to prison was ordered. The punishment for desertion was also increased and a provision for extension of indenture for the period of desertion. Provisions for imprisonment without the option of fines were also integrated. But the most important clause was the prohibition for a body of more than five immigrants to absent themselves without leave for the purpose of making a complaint.¹¹⁶ This was a major victory for employers for it rendered organized mass collective action by labourers virtually impossible. It also underlines the point that mass protest was occurring.

A further point of satisfaction among officials was the performance of the Fijian police in protecting the authorities and subduing the protesters. This is a pattern that was to repeat itself for most of Fiji's colonial history. In Chapter One, we saw that Gordon had refrained from using European soldiers to fight in Colo for fear that the conflict would become a war between 'whites' and blacks'. By 1886, the great majority of policemen were indigenous Fijians although a few Indians had also been recruited. The effect of sending Fijian policemen and special constables to suppress Indian strikers was twofold. First, it gave these conflicts a racial complexion in which Europeans appeared to be disinterested, composed, and mature observers. Secondly, because the basic antagonistic relationship between capital and labour took on a 'racial' form, Fijian and Polynesian labourers were effectively dissuaded from supporting the strikes. It can be inferred from Thurston's timing in requesting rifles for the Rewa Rifle Association from the Secretary of State¹¹⁷ that, had the labour

¹¹⁴ Despatch 62, Thurston to SS, 31 July 1888. CSO Despatches.

¹¹⁵ Cited in Gillion, 1962: 83.

¹¹⁶ The terms of this Ordinance are taken from the Agent-General's draft report on Indian Immigration for 1886 in CSO 87/3061.

¹¹⁷ Despatch 43, Thurston to SS, 15 April 1886. CSO Despatches.

unrest spun out of control, a force of armed European auxiliaries would have been mobilised to quash the rebellion.

While Ordinance XIV of 1886 may have reduced open protest, it did not remove any of the underlying causes. Chapter Six will discuss how plantation resistance after 1886 was driven mainly underground, into the realm of everyday resistance. Yet, the ordinance could not prevent several further open protests from breaking out. Within a few months of its promulgation, the new ordinance was to be severely tested. This time however, the labourers found an ally in the form of Henry Anson, the Agent-General for Immigration. Gillion described Anson as “extremely zealous in the protection of immigrants” and “highly unpopular with employers”.¹¹⁸ He had also antagonised some government officials by criticising the tendency for magistrates in the sugar districts to hold court at planters’ houses.¹¹⁹ His most serious concern was the task system which calculated a fair task on the performance of the most able labourers rather than on a reasonable amount of work expected of an average worker.¹²⁰ In a letter to the colonial secretary, he expressed his despair: “There are perhaps 300 or 400 or more immigrants in the colony who while willing to do 5 ½ tasks are yet physically incapable of doing more than 2 ½ or 3 or 4 tasks. Are these men to starve?”¹²¹ One of his subagents reported that by November 1886, almost fifty percent of the tasks in Koronivia could not be completed and that Mune refused to pay those labourers who could not finish them.¹²² The more able-bodied workers were afraid to finish their tasks for fear that they would get more the next day. This was contributing to a severe impoverishment of labourers, increased absenteeism, and infinite complaints which he received from everyone he chose to speak to.¹²³ Another subagent reported in 1887 that only eight percent of the men who worked at Koronivia were either willing or able to earn the minimum statutory wage. Such figures, he concluded, warranted the continual employment of an inspector whose whole attention should be given to tasking.¹²⁴ Instead, it was the Immigration

¹¹⁸ Gillion, 1962: 82.

¹¹⁹ Minute by Henry Anson, 1 May 1885 in CSO 85/1084 containing a monthly report by W. L. Allardyce SM Navua to CS, 18 April 1885.

¹²⁰ Draft Report on Indian Immigration for 1886, enclosed in CSO 87/3061.

¹²¹ Anson to CS, 28 February 1887, CSO 87/443.

¹²² Curruthers to Agent General, 26 February 1887, CSO 87/443.

¹²³ Curruthers to Agent General, 26 February 1887, CSO 87/443.

¹²⁴ Forster to CS, 19 October 1887, CSO 87/2481.

Department which suffered cuts in staffing rendering the policing of tasking and detection of other plantation abuses even more difficult.

If some plantations were notorious for their poor management, as Koronivia was, other plantations enjoyed better relations with their employees. The level of discontent tended to vary from plantation to plantation depending on management style, terrain, origin of labourers, and general industrial relations. For instance, when CSR mill-hands at Viria went on strike in October 1886 for increased wages for night work, the management entered in talks with the strikers and the dispute was resolved without further consequences.¹²⁵

This strike does not feature prominently in the history of labour protest in Fiji mainly because it did not boil over into a mass protest. It is less noticeable because a successful compromise was reached between workers and management. Such peaceful resolutions generate less publicity, fewer reports and less documentation, and are therefore less conspicuous in the archives. But they point to the occasional success that workers had with management in negotiating improvements to their working and living conditions.

However, if the CSR compromised in Viria, it was not as conciliatory on its Nausori plantation where its labourers were overworked, underpaid, and frightened by a gun-wielding, trigger happy overseer.¹²⁶ On the evening of 6 April 1887, about 130 labourers from the plantation appeared at the Agent-General's Suva residence.¹²⁷ The whole body of immigrants was "quiet and respectful" and five of them were selected to see Anson the next day. The manager of the plantation was called in to discuss the grievances with the labourers' representatives but he protested angrily at Anson's willingness to indulge the strikers. He took down the names of the representatives, stormed out, and returned to Nausori. Keen to establish the grounds for the labourers' complaints before the case was tried, Anson instructed Forster, his trusted subordinate, to attend the court sitting involving the marchers and not to stay with any

¹²⁵ Curruthers to Agent General, 11 November 1886, CSO 87/443.

¹²⁶ Anson to CS, 4 May 1887, CSO 87/921. See also *Fiji Times*, 9 April 1887.

¹²⁷ Henry Anson had returned from leave on 17 March 1887. See *Fiji Blue Book* for 1887.

of the employers as was commonly the case.¹²⁸ However, the Immigration Department did not have a boat and on the day of the hearing,¹²⁹ Forster was stuck on the wrong side of the river, unable to attend court. Six representatives of the marchers were duly convicted under Ordinance XIV of 1886 and sentenced to two months hard labour without the option of a fine by Joske standing in for Carew as stipendiary magistrate in Rewa. The CSR had won another important victory. Anson was appalled for he had promised the men a fair hearing.¹³⁰

The rift between Anson and Thurston attests to the division in official ranks about the most effective ways of managing resistance. Their relationship quickly deteriorated into a major conflict about the appropriate role of the Agent-General and the extent to which he should be supporting the cause of immigrant labourers. Thurston thought that these sorts of tumults could degenerate into disturbances that would have made a major disturbance in Trinidad in 1885 appear trifling in comparison.¹³¹ He also accused Anson of providing avenues and even encouraging immigrants to lay complaints against employers while abstaining to provide employers with similar assistance.¹³² After all, in Thurston's view, Indians were in Fiji to be "a working population and nothing more".¹³³ Anson on the other hand, described the whole affair as "a travesty of justice",¹³⁴ and published the most damning report of Indian Immigration of his or any other term. The report highlighted excessive mortality rates among immigrants, exceedingly high prosecutions, overtasking, and non-payment of wages as particularly worrying. However, neither the Indian Government nor the Colonial Office responded to the report with any concern and Anson found himself further isolated by the colonial establishment. By the end of 1887, Thurston had managed to squeeze him out of Fiji by restructuring the Immigration Department and merging the positions of Agent-General and Receiver-General.¹³⁵ Anson was replaced by H. G. C. Emberson and within the space of six months, Thurston had effectively purged his administration of two formidable opponents: Navosavakadua and Anson.

¹²⁸ Anson to CS, 4 May 1887, CSO 87/921.

¹²⁹ The case was heard on 21 April 1887.

¹³⁰ Agent-General Immigration to CS, 4 May 1887, CSO 87/921.

¹³¹ Despatch 114, Thurston to SS, 18 December 1888. CSO Despatches.

¹³² Despatch 114, Thurston to SS, 18 December 1888.

¹³³ Minute by Thurston to CS, 18 December 1893 in CSO 93/1380.

¹³⁴ Anson to CS, 4 May 1887, CSO 87/921.

¹³⁵ See *Fiji Blue Book* for 1888 and Despatch 114, Thurston to SS, 18 December 1888.

The removal of Anson, however, did not end organised protest and labourers continued to fight their own battles in the immediate vicinity of their plantations. There were several more strikes although most were sporadic and easily contained. On 28 October 1887 for instance, all but a few labourers from the New Zealand Sugar Refining Company's branch plantation of Varoko in Ba, turned out armed with gun barrels, Fijian clubs, and hoe handles and refused work. The main grievance was over-tasking although there also appears to have been some quarrel over the appointment of a new sardar.¹³⁶ Like the first Koronivia strike, it seems that the labourers tried to get their man into the key position of sardar against the management's choice. This was important for the sardar determined to a large extent the kind of work rhythm and ethic that prevailed in the fields.¹³⁷ In this case, the ringleaders were arrested within an hour of the disturbance and the protest petered out without any success for its initiators. In that same month a similar strike broke out on the island of Taveuni where ten Indian immigrant labourers with a grievance regarding a task went in a body to the house of the manager, carrying their tools with them. The manager listened to their complaints and on examination reduced the task they objected to and a peaceful resolution appeared to have been reached. However, some labourers refused to return to work and tried to induce others to continue the strike. As in Ba, the ringleaders were arrested and prosecuted and the rest returned to work.¹³⁸

“The Governor and Native Commissioner Don't Hold Here”: Mago Island, 1887-1889.

The late 1880s also produced a number of strikes by Fijian labourers. Because they did not usually work alongside Indian labourers, their actions appear to have an ethnic character. However, their grievances were essentially the same as those of their Indian counterparts and their methods of protesting reflect occupational rather than ethnic characteristics. Strikes by Fijian labourers were largely, though not solely, confined to plantation islands such as Mago. Plantation islands generated a peculiar dynamic

¹³⁶ SM Ba to CS, 3 November 1887, CSO 87/3057.

¹³⁷ The pivotal position of *sardar* is discussed in more detail at the end of the chapter.

¹³⁸ SM Taveuni to CS, 13 November 1887, CSO 87/3296.

because labourers were cut off from the rest of the world. The smallness, isolation and insular nature of the islands, and the absence of other non-labour communities, often gave managers exceptional power. Labourers could not run away or seek the protection of nearby village communities, nor could they appeal to their chiefs, sympathetic magistrates, inspectors, or missionaries as they might have on the larger islands. In such a setting, labourers were largely susceptible to the vagaries of managers. In this regard, the Mago Island Estate Company had acquired notable notoriety.

Organised protest erupted on Mago in October 1887 where some 200 Fijian labourers from Macuata, Tailevu, Kadavu, and Lau (Cicia and Totoya) stopped work after hearing that their rations would be halved. Earlier in the year on 18th June 1887, the same men had written to the Native Commissioner to complain about insufficient and bad food, unpaid work, work on Sundays, broken promises, and being forbidden to raise any grievance with the manager, Mr Borron.¹³⁹ If the government acted on their official complaint, the labourers did not feel its reparatory effects. The October strike was caused by an overflow of maltreatment which pushed these labourers beyond their maximum threshold of tolerance. They produced the same list of grievances which had been raised in June and refused to return to work even after the management reversed its decision.¹⁴⁰ However, the strikers appeared to operate on provincial lines rather than as a homogenous ethnic block, and when the Kadavu and Macuata men agreed to return to work, those from Tailevu (about fifty of them) were soon compelled to do likewise.¹⁴¹

More trouble erupted on the island in January of the following year, because a group of Kadavu labourers who were due passage back to their home island were forcibly detained by Borron and refused any wages.¹⁴² The government's attention to the row

¹³⁹ Petition by Fijian labourers to Native Commissioner, to the Native Commissioner, 18 June 1887, CSO 87/3265. Borron had come to the colony in 1872 and settled at the neighbouring island of Cicia. He purchased half of Kanacea island and in 1882 was appointed Manager of the Mago Island Estate Company. By 1898 he owned all of Mago Island and in 1903 he had acquired ownership of the company. *Cyclopedia of Fiji 1907*. 1907 and 1984: 297. Reflecting the work culture that reigned on the island, Borron's predecessor had assured J. B. Thurston that the Fijian "is a slave Sir!" Thurston to Gordon, 20 June 1881. Cited in Scarr, 1980: 87.

¹⁴⁰ SM Lau to CS, 5 November 1887, CSO 87/3422.

¹⁴¹ SM Lau to CS, 5 November 1887, CSO 87/3422.

¹⁴² Undated memo from the Kadavu Provincial Council to Thurston, CSO 88/783.

was drawn when Borron wrote to the Colonial Secretary to complain that the strike was spreading among other Fijian labourers.¹⁴³ Upon investigation, Borron was found at fault and instructed to pay the men their full wages and to provide them with transport home as required by law.¹⁴⁴ Any salutary effect that the ruling had on employment relations on the island were short-lived. In August 1888, another strike took place, this time over the dismissal of one of the gang leaders. The man, Eremasi, was supported by forty-two of his fellow Cakaudrove labourers who refused to work until his reinstatement. The strike lasted for two weeks and on this occasion, the workers' demands were met by the management.¹⁴⁵

Letters of complaint by labourers indentured to the Estate continued to flow to Suva with some regularity.¹⁴⁶ Some, such as the following, were addressed directly to the paramount chief of the province from where the labourers originated:

Sir we write to you the Chief about our work at Mago, because we your men are overcome by our work; there are many places in which there is work but there is no place like this. We are in a very pitiable state. ... Since Mr Reid has been in charge we have been wretched, we are dismissed from work at 10 o'clock at night, we are caused much pain, we sleep badly and feed badly and also live in discomfort. ... When we are dismissed at night we all sleep we cannot eat and this has caused much sickness amongst us. Another thing. When it rains we work all day and this causes sickness. ... Another thing we feel injured about. The whip, we are constantly beaten, we are overcome by it. We are beaten till night. ... We report to you the chief that we are overcome by flogging. Flogging goes on from morn till night and we have all suffered. ... Eight of us were taken to the office and they shut the doors and they then flogged them, there were tremendous wales [sic] from this flogging, the whole

¹⁴³ Borron to CS, 4 February 1888, CSO 88/783.

¹⁴⁴ Attorney General's minute of 2 August 1888, in CSO 88/783.

¹⁴⁵ SM Lau to CS, 22 August 1888, CSO 88/2578.

¹⁴⁶ See in particular Fijian labourers' petition to Native Commissioner, 18 June 1887, CSO 87/3265; SM Lau to CS, 20 July 1888, CSO 88/2248; and the letter of complaint by Fijian labourers, dated 28 December 1888, and forwarded by Roko Tui Tailevu (Ratu Epeli Nailatikau) to CS, 6 February 1889, CSO 89/344. Occasionally, labourers became so unruly that Borron himself was forced to seek their removal from the Island. See Borron to CS, 6 December 1888, CSO 88/3567.

of their bodies were injured by it. ... We are flogged for nothing. Another thing for which we are to be pitied is that we are fed upon China bananas.¹⁴⁷

In 1895, a whole group of labourers escaped from Mago and sailed to Totoya following further abuse. The two men who carried their letter of complaint to Suva were arrested on arrival in the capital. The order was signed by the stipendiary magistrate for Lau, Mr Swayne, whose collusion with Borron on all previous occasions had convinced the workers of the futility of seeking justice through the courts. The pointless act of following official channels was made known to them in the most unambiguous language. Borron was reported to have dismissed their claims by exclaiming, “the Governor and Native Commissioner don’t hold here”.¹⁴⁸

The letter of complaint against the company was signed by eighty-seven labourers and was addressed to the Governor himself. It described how the men were woken by the lali (Fijian drum) at four am and returned from work at eight pm and how the sick were neglected and forced to work. It continued:

We have not seen any rations for which we signed. No yams, dalo, Tavioca, Tivoli and “we are in want of food”. The meat supplied to us makes us ill and when we eat it we are sick and have pains in our stomachs. Nothing is good here. ... On the 5th of August, the S.M. Lau visited Mago; we went to report this matter to him and he said to us “you go outside”; he said he didn’t want to hear our reports and we then came outside. There is no other place to go to seek aid and it is our wish that we should have rest from Government house. This is our report.¹⁴⁹

Aside from the trouble on Mago, Fijian labourers were also involved in industrial action in Rewa where, between 1886 and 1889, the tension between the management and labourers (of both ethnic groups) of the Koronivia plantation showed little signs of abating. Another short-lived strike by indentured immigrants in February 1888

¹⁴⁷ CSO 89/344. The letter also alleges that an overseer who had refused to use a whip on his charges was discharged by the company.

¹⁴⁸ Petition by eighty-seven labourers to the Governor, 7 August 1895, CSO 95/3256.

¹⁴⁹ Petition by eighty-seven labourers to the Governor, 7 August 1895, CSO 95/3256.

again prompted by overtasking¹⁵⁰ was followed by another sit-in, this time by Cakaudrove labourers in May 1889 after they were repeatedly “kicked, struck and sworn at” by Mune’s son. They refused to turn up at work and stayed in their lines where they smoked tobacco instead.¹⁵¹ A few months later it was the turn of Kadavu labourers to complain of ill-treatment at Koronivia. They wrote that they were “treated like pigs”, overtasked, ill fed, ill housed, without even mats or blankets to sleep on.¹⁵² Complaining against Mr Mune in February of 1895, Nalawa labourers at Koronivia revealed that nothing much had changed in the ten years since trouble had first arisen. The basis of their grievance was the same as the first Indian labourers. It was about overtasking, insufficient recovery time between periods of intense work, work on Saturday afternoons and Sundays, foul language, beatings, insufficient food, insufficient time to prepare food, and the coercion of the sick into work. In summing up the state of affairs on the plantation, a despondent Neori Navenatu, leader of the gang, uttered “working here is as bad as being in hell”.¹⁵³

The Lull Before the Storm: 1890-1895.

Other than the resurgence of Tuka in the interior of Ra in 1890 and 1891, the only disturbances of note in the early to mid 1890s were two strikes in 1890. The first was the strike, referred to in Chapter Three, of Fijian dockworkers at Suva’s Queen’s Wharf, and masterminded by the Tui Suva, Ratu Avorosa.¹⁵⁴ The second was also led by a chief and involved labourers from Sabeto (Nadi) and Cakaudrove on Baulevu Estate in Rewa in December 1890. The Sabeto chief had been dismissed of the leadership of his gang of workers after going to Suva to lay a complaint against the estate management. His was the fourth such visit to Suva in the previous few months by deputations of Fijian labourers from various Rewa plantations to lay complaints with the Native Office.¹⁵⁵ The nature of complaints, like most others, related to basic

¹⁵⁰ See SM Rewa to CS, 1 March 1888, CSO 88/744. On this occasion, fifty-four immigrants carried their tools to the manager of Koronivia plantation’s residence to protest his decision to pay them monthly (rather than weekly as was the standard practice). The charge against them was withdrawn by the management when, to a man the labourers expressed their collective determination to go to gaol and not pay their fine.

¹⁵¹ Details of the complaints can be found in Baxendale to CS, 30 May 1889, CSO 89/1239.

¹⁵² Unsigned letter by Kadavu labourers to the Native Commissioner, 13 March 1890, CSO 90/894.

¹⁵³ Neori Navenatu to Carew, 9 February 1895, CSO 96/664.

¹⁵⁴ For more details of the strike, see CSO 90/3088.

¹⁵⁵ Minute by the CS, 22 November 1890 in CSO 90/3563.

practical issues such as the lack of or insufficient number of mats provided for workers to sleep on, insufficient and occasionally rotten food rations, excessive cold in the lines, overtasking, being forced to work in the rain, being sent to work when ill, and the constant striking and kicking of labourers by Mr Storck the overseer.¹⁵⁶ The complaint was corroborated by a letter from the Cakaudrove labourers also complaining about the treatment they received from Mr Storck. The dispute was resolved when, in accordance with common practice, the overseer was transferred to another plantation.¹⁵⁷

The steady stream of labour turbulence on Fiji's plantations between 1886 and the early 1890s suggests therefore that the "most salutary effect" of Ordinance XIV of 1886 that Bolton Corney wished for, had only been partially realised. The assertion by employers and administrators that tougher laws would improve industrial relations,¹⁵⁸ is therefore disputable. The period between 1886, and 1888 was certainly one of the most turbulent on Fiji's plantations.

From the early 1890s to the mid 1890s, organised protest went into decline. There are several reasons for this decline. Ordinance XIV may have, as Corney and Thurston claimed, eventually had a deterrent effect. The imprisonment or transfer of leaders to other plantations also weakened labourers' organisational capability.¹⁵⁹ The fund that may have otherwise bailed them out became obsolete with the increased propensity of magistrates to deny convicted labourers the option of paying a fine. Demoralisation may have set in after the relative failure of open protests. Such protest depended on numbers and a show of force and the authorities usually countered with greater coercive force and more effective manipulation of legal instruments. The gradual phasing out of Fijian labour on plantations¹⁶⁰ also caused the frequency of protest to decrease. In such conditions, indentured labourers may have calculated that covert

¹⁵⁶ Unsigned letter by Koronivia labourers to Allardyce, 9 December 1890, enclosed in CSO 90/3563.

¹⁵⁷ Minute by Carew, 22 December 1890 in CSO 90/3563.

¹⁵⁸ Paper 38: "Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1886." in *JFLC*, 1887. 14. See also Despatch 114, Thurston to SS, 18 December 1888.

¹⁵⁹ See among others a request from the Manager of the CSR in Ba to transfer to other plantations, several indentured immigrants suspected of creating disturbances, 15 April 1893, CSO 93/1766. See also CSO 00/4758 for the transfer of labourers who had testified against a European police sergeant in Labasa.

¹⁶⁰ Gillion has estimated that by 1894, Fijians were no longer a factor in the plantation labour market. 1962: 77.

everyday forms of resistance were more effective in achieving their goals.¹⁶¹ This aspect of resistance is examined in Chapter Six.

It is tempting to speculate that the lack of organised protest between the early and mid-1890s was due to the improvement of relations between labourers and their employers. The evidence however, suggests to the contrary, that conditions on Fiji's plantations deteriorated markedly during this period. Gillion observed that between 1891 and 1894, more than one quarter of the Indian immigrants died or were repatriated as incapable within their five-year term of service.¹⁶² The Government claimed that these excessive mortality rates were caused by a deterioration in the quality of Indian recruits.¹⁶³ In reality the high death rate in the 1890s can be attributed to the deterioration of conditions on Fiji plantations. Poor drinking water, cramped conditions, shared latrines, flies, insufficient food (especially protein), humid living quarters, and inadequate medical care all contributed to excessive deaths. Anaemia, diarrhoea and dysentery, all diseases related to living conditions, were consistently the chief causes of death among immigrants.¹⁶⁴ This was compounded by the retrenchment of the Immigration Department and the paucity of plantation inspections which rendered labourers even more isolated and vulnerable.¹⁶⁵ As will be discussed in Chapter Six, in this climate, organised resistance gave way among many immigrants to despair and death. It also encouraged others to turn to each other for comfort and support, and to their religion for inspiration and hope.

¹⁶¹ The early 1890s is characterised by the paucity of open protests. Grievances were usually expressed through the form of letters of complaint. See for instance CSO 92/1916 being a complaint from Ra and Tailevu labourers about being overworked, overtasked, kicked and punched, and the bad treatment given to the sick. See also CSO 93/985 containing a similar letter of complaint by Fijian labourers at Matei in Taveuni. One notable exception was a visit to Carew in February 1893, by twenty Muaniweni labourers, who moved as a body to complain against insufficient pay, overtasking, extortion and bad treatment by their sardar. Carew to CS, 28 February 1893, CSO 93/830.

¹⁶² Gillion, 1962: 91.

¹⁶³ Paper 24: "Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1894." in *JFLC*, 1895.

¹⁶⁴ See Papers 24 and 20, being the Annual Reports on Indian Immigration for 1894 and 1895 in *JFLC*, 1895 and 1896 respectively.

¹⁶⁵ See complaints by Immigration officials about lack of personnel to inspect plantations and planters purposely desisting from entering details about wages, tasking, etc. in Indian Immigration Reports 1887, 1888, and 1889.

A Virtual Civil War: Labasa 1895-1907

However, the opening by the CSR of a new sugar estate in Labasa in 1892 introduced a new front in industrial relations in Fiji. Its location on Northern Vanua Levu made it more isolated than most other plantations. This remoteness made the Macuata plantation community more insular than its counterparts in Viti Levu. Much like the labourers on Mago and other plantation islands, labourers in Labasa became particularly vulnerable to the whims of plantation authorities. Inspections were rare and so was the likelihood of drawing attention to abuse.

The first indication of looming trouble surfaced in 1895 when Labasa eclipsed all other estates in the number of penal sanctions recorded against immigrants. Where the rest of the colony averaged one charge for every two adult immigrants, Labasa recorded almost one charge per adult.¹⁶⁶ By comparison, all charges laid by Labasa immigrants against the management for non-payment of wages were dismissed, further underscoring the futility of using the justice system to obtain redress. In this setting, relations quickly deteriorated so that, as Gillion described it, the area was in a state of virtual “civil war” until 1903.¹⁶⁷

In challenging plantation authorities, Labasa labourers used the same methods that their Viti Levu counterparts had previously employed. For instance, on 18 December 1895, a sardar named Chotey Khan led his gang of some forty labourers to stop work and complain that their tasks were too great. They turned up at the station with their knives and hoes and refused to leave when ordered to return to work or to send their representatives. Fijian constables and prisoners were sent for and the immigrants were gradually forced down the road and back to their lines. The Buli Labasa was instructed by the stipendiary magistrate to recruit thirty extra men to act as reinforcements if the matter got out of hand.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Paper 20: “Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1895.” in *JFLC*, 1896. 27.

¹⁶⁷ Gillion, 1962: 115.

¹⁶⁸ SM Macuata to CS, 19 December 1895, CSO 95/4836.

The tension was somewhat defused by an increase of personnel attached to the Agent-General's office.¹⁶⁹ Inspectors were able to travel to Labasa to hear labourers' grievances and to successfully prosecute a number of sardars and overseers.¹⁷⁰ In 1896, the number of charges against adult immigrants in the district dropped by about twenty percent to seventy-seven percent of the indentured population.¹⁷¹ However, these measures had come too late. By 1896, a deep-seated antagonism had taken root prompting one nervous government official to minute that, in his opinion, serious trouble was brewing among Labasa's immigrant labourers. He advised that all cases involving Labasa immigrants should receive the maximum penalty.¹⁷² The community braced itself and the attitudes hardened. Some sardars were so afraid of Mr Hughes, the plantation manager, that they drove their labourers to the limit, often suffering tragic consequences themselves.¹⁷³ On 13 July 1896, fourteen labourers who were serving time in the local gaol, stopped work to protest against the quality and quantity of food given to them. They were led by a man accused of conspiring to kill an overseer. That evening the sergeant in charge of the gaol (a modest grass hut) was attacked by two men with hoes. Others broke the wall of the gaol but could not escape from the compound and were arrested.¹⁷⁴

The following year, resident inspectors were posted to Ba and Labasa in an attempt to tighten supervision. But many of these inspectors were former CSR overseers. Agent-General Coates was of the opinion that:

in Fiji the only persons competent to fill the post of an Inspector are those who have had experience as Overseers or Managers on cane plantations and of these undoubtedly the best men are those who have served for a number of years in the employment of the CSR Coy Ltd.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁹ Paper 20: "Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1895." in *JFLC*, 1896. 28.

¹⁷⁰ SM Macuata to CS, 25 June 1896, CSO 96/2269.

¹⁷¹ Paper 23: "Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1897." in *JFLC*, 1898. 20.

¹⁷² SM Macuata to CS, 25 June 1896, CSO 96/2269.

¹⁷³ SM Macuata to CS, 25 June 1896, CSO 96/2269.

¹⁷⁴ SM Macuata to CS, 15 July 1896, CSO 96/2495.

¹⁷⁵ Undated memorandum in Paper 44. MS 2, im Thurn Papers. NAF.

Labourers had no confidence in them,¹⁷⁶ and relations did not improve. By 1898, the number of charges per indentured immigrant in the Labasa district was back above the ninety percent mark. Pitched battles between labourers, sardars and overseers were fought in the fields¹⁷⁷ and the incidence of assaults of overseers on immigrants and vice-versa continued to be a source of concern for the Department of Immigration.¹⁷⁸ In 1900, immigrant labourers brought thirty-two cases of assault against sardars and overseers, or more than half of the total number of such cases against employers for the entire colony.¹⁷⁹ The culture of violence continued to reign in the district with accusations and counter-accusations between plantation managers and inspectors about who was to blame for it.¹⁸⁰ On their part, the labourers created a fund (similar to the Rewa fund) to which they contributed six pence per week to help those who were fined or sent to gaol. As one immigrant recalled:

We took the view that if Europeans oppressed us we could combine and hit them and from this fund we paid the fines. We also agreed that if we were sent to jail for this type of things we should serve our sentence. From the money collected we paid the wages of the person who hit a European and was sent to jail.¹⁸¹

The transfer of overseers to other plantations (or their departure from the country altogether), and the imprisonment of immigrant leaders or their transfer to other plantations merely suppressed the symptoms without removing the causes. Even court interpreters and constables who testified against employers were sent to other parts of the colony.¹⁸²

The climate of fear, intimidation, hostility, and brutality that pervaded the Labasa plantation community produced a strike in 1907 described by Matthew Ryan as “an

¹⁷⁶ Gillion, 1962: 111.

¹⁷⁷ See for instance inspector of immigrants Russell’s report on the riot at Naleba estate in Labasa. 16 March 1898, in CSO 98/1448.

¹⁷⁸ Statistics taken from the Annual Reports on Indian Immigration from 1899 to 1903 indicate that Macuata consistently ranked highest in the number of assaults committed by overseers on immigrants and vice-versa.

¹⁷⁹ Paper 28: “Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1900.” in *JFLC*, 1901. 25.

¹⁸⁰ See CSO files 02/4411 and 05/3029 in particular.

¹⁸¹ Rahim Buksh in *Girmit: A Centenary Anthology 1879-1979*. Suva: Ministry of Information, 1979. 45.

¹⁸² See SM Macuata to Acting CS, 8 December 1900, CSO 00/4758.

unprecedented occurrence in the history of Indian indenture in Fiji”.¹⁸³ Ryan’s is the only detailed study of any plantation strike during Fiji’s indenture period. He refers to the 1907 Labasa strike as constituting “the most significant and sustained challenge to the indentured labor system by Indian immigrants”.¹⁸⁴ Ryan attributes substantial significance to the Punjab origin of most of the strikers. Punjabis began arriving in Fiji in greater numbers in the later 1890s and peaking in 1903.¹⁸⁵ They had a reputation for being strong and hard working but by 1901 that reputation had turned to notoriety, with employers and administrators regarding them as “intractable and prone to violence and conspiracy” and less amenable to discipline than others.¹⁸⁶ A common place of origin and a spirit of brotherhood forged in the Indian depots and on the ocean journey to Fiji, fostered among Punjabis “an unusual degree of solidarity and determination” which caught both plantation and colonial authorities off their guard.¹⁸⁷ Their “inner strength and social cohesiveness”, Ryan argues, gave Punjabis an edge over their fellow South Indian and Uttar Pradesh labourers which the government and plantation management struggled to contain.¹⁸⁸ Another group of strikers were Pathans, also noted in India for their long history of resistance to British invasion. Plantation management considered them to be “notoriously treacherous”,¹⁸⁹ while the local magistrate regarded them as “naturally turbulent and troublesome”.¹⁹⁰

If cultural factors are important elements of resistance, so are the specific historical, geographical factors and the plantation culture that prevailed in Labasa. Like previous strikes, workers’ grievances in Labasa had been manifest long before they threw down their spades and walked across to the courthouse. They had raised objections about the nature of their work at least two months prior to the strike, complaining that they had been misled by recruiters who had promised them Government work. They had also complained that they received too little or no money, lacked proper food, and that they worked for long hours under undue violence.¹⁹¹ They reiterated these

¹⁸³ Ryan: 360.

¹⁸⁴ Ryan: 350.

¹⁸⁵ Lal, 2004: 83.

¹⁸⁶ Paper 20: “Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1901.” in *JFLC*, 1902. 10.

¹⁸⁷ Ryan: 351.

¹⁸⁸ Ryan: 361.

¹⁸⁹ Duncan to CSR General Manager (Sydney), 19 April 1907, Paper 44, MS 2, im Thurn Papers.

¹⁹⁰ SM Macuata to CS, 15 April 1907, CSO 07/2161.

¹⁹¹ Memorandum of complaints made by Punjabis and Pathans, 15 April 1907, enclosed in CSO 07/2161.

grievances to Russell on 6 April 1907 and again a week later, adding that their rations contained no flour and that they would rather suffer punishment than work for the company.¹⁹² On Monday 15 April, they turned up at the courthouse in a group of about sixty and respectfully demanded to see Dr. Brough, the stipendiary magistrate. They were warned that they were breaking the law and advised to select five representatives to discuss the matter.¹⁹³

The labourers returned to their lines but the dispute remained unresolved and the strike continued. The strikers remained in the lines where they ate sugar cane and collected money from other sympathetic labourers and members of the 'free' Indian community.¹⁹⁴ With pressure mounting, overseers asked for police protection, and Russell advised Brough to call for extra police. Owing to escalating tensions and a strike by twenty-five South Indians a few weeks prior, police patrols were armed with rifles and side arms.¹⁹⁵ The Buli Labasa was asked to supply extra manpower to cover police shortage and his men turned up with blackened faces, knives and axes. As this was contravening the law, they were told to wash their faces and return with spears and clubs instead.¹⁹⁶ On Friday 19th, they were deployed with nine armed policemen to the lines to arrest ten of the strikers who were accused of assaulting two labourers who had gone back to work.¹⁹⁷ The police, their Fijian escort, and the arrested men were followed all the way back to the courthouse by all remaining strikers (about forty of them), who upon arrival demanded the release of their companions. Brough promised a fair trial the next day, and urged the rest to return to their lines. Led by the inexperienced inspector Boldero, the constabulary escorted the men back but on arrival at the lines, tensions boiled over and the police fired into the crowd of strikers. Three labourers were wounded.¹⁹⁸

The situation was brought under control with the arrival of the mill Manager, Mr Duncan, but Brough decided that evening to have all strikers, their leaders and the wounded sent to Suva aboard the *Clyde*. He thought there were too many of them in

¹⁹² Memorandum by Punjabis and Pathans, 15 April 1907, enclosed in CSO 07/2161.

¹⁹³ SM Macuata to CS, 15 April 1907, CSO 07/2161.

¹⁹⁴ Duncan to CSR GM, 19 April 1907, Paper 44, MS 2. in Thurn Papers.

¹⁹⁵ Duncan to CSR GM, 19 April 1907, Paper 44, MS 2. in Thurn Papers.

¹⁹⁶ Brough to CS, 23 May 1907, CSO 07/441.

¹⁹⁷ Report by Russell to Agent-General of Immigration, 18 April 1907, Enclosure C, in CSO 07/2161.

¹⁹⁸ Report by Russell, 18 April 1907, enclosed in CSO 07/2161.

the province, that they communicated too freely and acted too easily together, that they were “naturally turbulent and troublesome”, and that it would be best if they broken into small bodies and transferred out of Labasa to other districts.¹⁹⁹ This was strongly opposed by Duncan who stood to lose more time and manpower at a time when it was becoming increasingly difficult to find emigrants in India for indenture in Fiji.²⁰⁰ He argued in vain that if the unrest continued, the local rifle club could be called upon to contain it.²⁰¹ Eventually, the strikers refused to be separated and Duncan conceded defeat.

The strikers were brought to the island of Nukulau, off the Suva coast, which functioned as the quarantine station for arriving Indian labourers. The government renewed its attempts to convince the strikers to accept a deal which would see charges dropped if the strikers agreed to be dispersed to separate plantations. However, the strikers stuck to their original demands for government employment and insisted on staying together. On 12 May, the government decided to use force and twenty policemen armed with truncheons were sent on board the *Ranadi* to Nukulau to break up the strike. While they were having lunch, those eating inside the barracks were locked up and those who had stayed outside were rounded up and forced onto the ship. Eventually, amid much protest and several altercations, the strikers were effectively separated. They were dispersed to Rewa, Ba, Lautoka and a few more were returned to Labasa.²⁰² The strike was broken and the collective power of the Punjabis was effectively neutralised.

The pattern of violence and brutality which followed the development of the Macuata plantations in the 1890s was repeated in Lautoka where in 1900, the CSR decided to build the largest sugar mill in the Southern Hemisphere.²⁰³ Lautoka soon overtook Macuata as the most turbulent labour district in Fiji with frequent attacks on immigrants by employers and vice-versa. Governor im Thurn was forced to allocate extra funds to boost judicial and police resources in the area in an effort to combat

¹⁹⁹ SM Macuata to CS, 15 April 1907, CSO 07/2161.

²⁰⁰ Paper 21: “Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1904.” in *JFLC*, 1905. 6.

²⁰¹ The usefulness of rifle clubs in suppressing internal disturbances had already been underlined by Governor im Thurn in his 1905 address to the Fiji Legislative Council. See Paper 14 in *JFLC*, 1905. 8.

²⁰² McOwen minute, 13 May 1907 in CSO 07/2161. See also CSO 07/2234, *Fiji Times* 27 April 1907 and 11 May 1907, for brief reports of the events.

²⁰³ Gillion, 1962: 97.

these crimes and the widespread anxiety they caused.²⁰⁴ Many of the new immigrants to Lautoka and subsidiary plantations in Nadi came from South India but the nature of their complaints were similar to that of the Punjabis in Labasa. In 1903, a group of them gave the Lautoka stipendiary magistrate “infinite trouble” for refusing to perform task work for the CSR Company:

One man produced the Agreement signed by the coolie in India and stated that there was nothing in the Tamil translation about task work. He also stated that the work which would be required of them was not properly explained to them before leaving. I had subsequently to somewhat severely punish some of these people for absolutely refusing to work.²⁰⁵

It appears therefore, that the ‘clustering’ of labourers from similar regions, or from the same ships, produced a particular kind of solidarity which was used to mount coherent challenges. It also suggests that the development of new sugar centres created a particularly harsh working environment which invariably led to antagonism and violence between employers and labourers. This pattern was repeated in the Sigatoka area in the 1910s with the development of the Olosara and other plantations.

However, no other strike of the Labasa magnitude was to take place during the remainder of Fiji’s indenture period. This can be attributed to several factors. The Fiji Census Reports indicate that the CSR and other surviving companies raised the number of overseers on Fiji’s plantations from forty-nine in 1901 to 133 in 1911.²⁰⁶ It can be inferred from these figures that, aside from extending their operations in Fiji, these companies sought to strengthen the coercive arm of their plantations and further minimize the potential for labour protest. This attempt to fortify employer ascendancy was offset on the one hand, by the continual use by labourers of alternative means of protesting, and on the other by a general mobilization of anti-indenture forces both in Fiji and India discussed in Chapter Six.

²⁰⁴ Paper 25: “Governor’s Address to the Legislative Council.” in *JFLC*, 1908.

²⁰⁵ SM Lautoka to CS, 28 October 1903, CSO 03/4705.

²⁰⁶ *Fiji Census Reports* for 1901 and 1911. NAF. In 1911, there were as many overseers as there were civil servants.

Reflections

The evidence presented above allows a number of deductions to be made. The first is that, labourers of all backgrounds shared a common experience of exploitation. They endured violence and abuse up to a certain threshold, beyond which they refused to work. Labourers were constantly tested by their employers about the degree of physical and mental abuse that was tolerable before the delicate balance between suppression and submission became too traumatic to endure. Fiji's labourers protested against the conditions under which they worked. In contesting plantation power, they fought over very practical matters such as insufficient or rotten food rations, excessive work, physical violence and verbal abuse, and unfair remuneration. These are not revolutionary ideals and labourers' organised protests produced no revolutionary outcomes. As Ryan correctly points out about the 1907 strikers, labourers were neither protesting against the colonial government nor against the indenture system *per se*.²⁰⁷

Most labourers simply wanted to survive and get on with their lives without attracting trouble. As Bhikhari told a Ba court in a case to transfer troublesome labourers from Varoko: "I am a quiet man and wish to live at peace with my neighbours. I am willing to swear I know nothing more than I tell you."²⁰⁸ Because of the exploitative and violent conditions under which they were forced to live and work, and because legal justice was so readily denied to them, labourers had few practical choices: Submit, cooperate, resist by covert means, protest openly or, as happened most often, various combinations of all four.

When they protested openly, Fiji's plantation labourers moved in groups as small as ten, and as large as 300. Much depended on the specific characteristics of the plantation itself and much, though not all, was contingent on the exercise of power. These included factors such as the geographic and cultural origin of labourers, the kinship they formed in depots and during the ocean voyage, the leadership provided, their relationship with employers, the extent of coercive power wielded by planters, the kind of mediation provided by sardars, the proximity of plantations to Suva, the

²⁰⁷ Ryan: 361.

²⁰⁸ CSR Manager Ba to CSR Manager Nausori, 15 April 1893, CSO 93/1766.

frequency of visits by inspectors, the protection they received from the law, the employers and stipendiary magistrates' willingness to enforce it, the influence exerted by forces outside the confines of the plantation sphere, their own personal motives, their calculations about past success and failure, as well as an estimate of the consequences of their actions. These variables combine to produce an untidy and highly fractured terrain of power and resistance to which was added the complexities of everyday forms of resistance, discussed in Chapter Six. These fragmentations help to underline the argument presented in this thesis that while resistance is pervasive in all power systems, it is heterogenous rather than homogenous, variable rather than uniform and entirely context-specific.

Historians of labour in Fiji including Gillion, Lal, Ali, Naidu, and Ryan, generally accept that there were few organised protests on Fiji's plantations and that when they occurred they were comparatively minor and short-lived. The evidence presented in this chapter tends to support these views. The strikes of 1886 and 1907 are generally given more attention, perhaps because they were more spectacular. By focussing on shorter and smaller strikes, this study reveals however, that strikes were numerous and widespread both over time and space. Magnifying the lesser events may have a distorting effect, but then so may the frequent practice of ignoring them. Exploring the smaller and less spectacular strikes unveils a much more combative work force than Fiji is normally credited with. Labourers appear more enterprising, deliberate and motivated in contesting power and furthering their interests than has been previously assumed. It also reveals that while some plantations enjoyed good relations between employers and employees and produced only isolated incidents, others such as Koronivia, Mago, and Labasa were notoriously bad and produced sustained and recurring conflicts.

Much of the historiography has focussed on the specificities of Indian indentured protest. The evidence provided here suggests that ethnicity did not determine the form or incidence of resistance. Indians, Fijians, and Melanesians suffered from the same sorts of beatings, the same long hours in the fields, the same verbal abuse, the same foul and unhygienic housing, the same kinds of overtasking, and the same trouble in getting their wages paid. In the end, although they were often separated and rarely worked alongside each other, their response was remarkably similar. Thus, in the

same way that there was no ethnic monopoly on power, there was no ethnic monopoly on protest either.

However, because ethnicity was the dominant organising principle of plantations (as it was of the colony), labourers were placed on their plantation's racial grid and divided accordingly. They were accorded different treatment too. As Bolton Corney explained earlier in 1886:

It must be borne in mind that the studied and deliberate vice of the lead class of Indian immigrants is of a very different nature from the unsophisticated delinquencies of a child of nature such as a Fijian, or a Polynesian immigrant: and requires a different treatment.²⁰⁹

Many labourers internalised these divisions and, conceiving themselves as different from others, rarely made common cause against the same opponent. For instance, Fijians from Cakaudrove or other provinces forged an identity based on parochial understandings about their identity, and preferred their own collective bargaining to a wider Fijian or even multi-ethnic labour alliance against a common oppressor. The same applies to immigrant workers from India and Melanesia. This intra and inter-ethnic parochialism greatly inhibited the potential for broader class-based protest.

Another factor which played a hand in discouraging inter-ethnic collaboration was the terror brought to bear by the management and district officials in using Fijian villagers as a reserve army against labour unrest. The willingness of local Fijian chiefs to collude with magistrates and managers in providing extra coercive force for the suppression of labour protests further eroded the possibilities for ordinary Fijians and indentured Indian labourers to act with rather than against each other. The fact that the police were predominantly Fijian only served to reinforce suspicions.

The gradual phasing out of Fijian and then Melanesian labour did not help either.²¹⁰ Although a few chiefs benefited directly from the recruitment of villagers by planters,

²⁰⁹ Acting Agent General Immigration to CS, 14 May 1886, CSO 86/987.

²¹⁰ Melanesian labour was discontinued from 1910 following the opening in the Solomon Islands of large plantations in Guadalcanal.

most of them persistently protested against their men leaving the provinces to find work on plantations. They resented the hiring of villagers for it undermined their power, caused numerous social problems, and impeded efforts to collect the mandatory produce tax. Ultimately though, Fijian labourers possessed one major advantage over their Indian and Melanesian counterparts. They owned land. This was their capital and security and it allowed them to envisage their future after indenture with some degree of optimism. Most Indians and many Melanesians labourers elected to stay in Fiji after their period of indenture, but acquiring capital and finding security in their daily lives proved to be a long and arduous process.

Last in our discussion is the critical but often ambivalent role played by sardars in plantation resistance. They have been described by Ali as “the lynchpin of the system”.²¹¹ Lal refers to them as the “ultimate collaborators” who were chosen for their unquestioning loyalty and willingness to serve the plantation management.²¹² Lal adds that leadership was exercised by sardars but only to sustain the power of the plantation owners and they often turned out to be the labourers’ worst enemy.²¹³ Stop-works in Baulevu and Navuso in 1898 and the large strike in Lobau near Navua in 1909 were specifically organised to protest against particular sardars and the workers only agreed to return to work once their sardar had been removed by the company.²¹⁴ Again this suggests that European managers and overseers did not have a monopoly over the plantation’s terror mechanisms. Sardars worked in an environment where their capacity to obtain maximum production at minimum cost to the company was expected and occasionally rewarded with continuous employment. Those who failed to perform could expect to be cast back in the fields.²¹⁵ Hence, if the company needed extensions to labourers’ terms of indenture, sardars were under pressure to deliver. When excessive force was used and charges laid by labourers, sardar could often depend on a sympathetic hearing from magistrates, light penalties, and occasionally to have their fines publicly repaid by managers. It was therefore in the interests of sardars to serve their employers faithfully because their own position of relative power and influence over their subordinates depended on it.

²¹¹ Ali, 1979: xxiii.

²¹² Lal, 2000: 181.

²¹³ Lal, 2000: 170.

²¹⁴ See CSO files 98/3015, 09/446.

²¹⁵ See Manager CSR Nausori’s reply to Manager CSR Ba, 15 April 1893, CSO 93/1766.

Yet, as Chakrabarty has expressed in the context of the jute mill workers of Bengal, sardars occupied a “grey zone” between management and labour. Gillion points out that the sardar’s own safety often depended on “his skill in playing off factions against each other and in retaining the support of selected immigrants who, in return for preferential treatment acted as bodyguards and executors of punishment”.²¹⁶ Early in the chapter we saw that striking labourers were occasionally organised and supported by them.²¹⁷ These isolated instances continued throughout the period of indenture.²¹⁸ When they were not directly implicated in protests, sardars could be called on to use their influence to secure jobs in the mills, although payment of a bribe was usually expected for such favours.²¹⁹ Labourers could also call on court interpreters to assist them with court cases or to secure government jobs. These were important intermediaries who from time to time chose for their own reasons to fight alongside their wretched compatriots.

Hence, if resistance appeared fragmented and tentative, power systems were also fragmentary and subject to infiltration or manipulation by the subalterns. There is general agreement that plantations in Fiji were run on the cheap and that there was no extended apparatus to suppress plantation revolts. This gives added weight to the argument that power on Fiji’s plantations was susceptible to internal weakness and external challenge. The CSR and other companies never had sufficient manpower,

²¹⁶ Gillion, 1962: 126.

²¹⁷ See sardar Debi’s role in the Koronivia disturbances of 1886 in sub-agent Carruthers’ “Report on the Strike at Koronivia”, 13 May 1886, CSO 86/987.

²¹⁸ CSO 93/1766 contains details about the CSR’s Ba Manager seeking the transfer of several labourers suspected of creating disturbances and their sardar, Sahodar Singh. See also SM Rewa to CS, 16 October 1906, CSO 06/4850, about the deteriorating state of affairs at Navuso (October, 1906) and suspects the head *sardar* to be at the source of the trouble and siding with striking labourers. CSO 06/5196 contains more evidence of *sardar* leadership of labourers, this time on Lami River Estate (November 1906). In this instance, the manager (Powell) reported that the plantation *sardar* was one of the key leaders behind a near riot by labourers against overtasking, underpayment, and abusive language. He called on neighbouring Fijian villagers to subdue the strikers and produced a revolver to prevent a riot from breaking out. The Annual Report for Immigration of 1909 (for 1908) indicates the probable involvement of a *sardar* in the murder by several labourers of the overseer Hall at Esivo plantation in Lautoka.

²¹⁹ Oral testimony from former sardars Rahim Buksh and Bujawan suggests that they were sympathetic to labourers and assisted them. The former speaks of contributing to a fund in Labasa to help pay the wages of jailed labourers, while the other claims to have helped several labourers return to India before the end of their terms. See *Girmit: A Centenary Anthology 1879-1979*. Evidence from Carruthers’ report on the strike at Koronivia in May 1886, indicates that immigrants could use the influence of *sardars* to secure mill work which was generally regarded as relatively less demanding than field work. See Carruthers’ Report, 13 May 1886, CSO 86/987.

disciplinary capability, cohesive harmony or coercive potency, to have the measure of girmityas or to block out all their avenues of contestatory action. Plantations were not miniature panopticons nor were they an open terrain for unfettered physical and economic domination. Rather, they were sites of multiple contestations where the wretched of the earth who made it their temporary homes, consistently circumvented and undermined the colonial and capitalist principles and practices that sought to dehumanise them.

Chapter Five

Everyday Resistance in the Villages

Having dealt with organised resistance in previous chapters, I now turn to those covert, non-momentous, and unspectacular actions through which ordinary people sought to subvert authority in their day-to-day lives. Here again the objective is to interrupt the dominant story lines and plots that historically privileged the lives of the powerful, and to place in their midst the voices and stories of history's underground – those characters and utterances that have always been there but not immediately visible or audible. In this chapter therefore, the large conflagrations are replaced by “ordinary” forms of struggle. This requires the retrieval of disregarded stories, the recovery of non-canonical sources, and the rereading of official documents. This chapter is an exploration of the ways in which ordinary villagers engaged with various forms of authority at the village level. Among them are the consistent grumbling of villagers about their chiefs' abuse of power, the transformation of the ancient *luveniwai* ritual into a subversive pastime by village youths, tax evasion, village absenteeism, the boycott of the registration of land titles, the manipulation of religious rivalries by villagers to evade communal chores and obligations, and the attempts of people to use education as a means of breaking free of the cycle of chiefly exaction, tax work and agricultural labour. The evidence presented in this chapter is intended to test the plausibility of Ali's commonly held view that “Fijian loyalty to authority was generally unquestioning”,¹ and to ascertain what sorts of options were available to villagers who did not wish to conform or follow the fate reserved for them by their chiefs and administrators.

Everyday Resistance in the Villages

The common image of Fijians under colonial rule, wrote the Fijian historian Simone Durutalo, “as that of a people complacently if sluggishly following where the chiefs and administrators led them is a false one”.² Although Durutalo did not provide empirical data, the archive produces considerable evidence to substantiate his claim. In the early years of colonial rule, Gordon's administration devoted much of its time

¹ Ali, 1980: 137.

to consolidate the authority of Fijian chiefs and to the institutionalisation of a separate Fijian administration. When he convoked the first council of chiefs meeting at Draiba in Ovalau in September 1875, Gordon chose to rule Fijians through their chiefs. The annual *Bose Vakaturaga*, or meeting of the council of chiefs, became the platform for consultation and collaboration between government and chiefs, from which emerged a chiefly “system” which gave chiefs state recognised power to rule over their people. Among the first decisions that the chiefs took at the first *Bose Vakaturaga* in 1875 was to retain their existing privileges and to legislate against disobedience to chiefs.

By further empowering Fijian chiefs, Gordon hoped to gain the support of key powerbrokers, use them as a valuable source of intelligence to gauge the mood of the masses, and thus weaken the potential for race-based antagonism. Explaining his rationale to a group of planters in Taveuni, Gordon stated that the chiefs were to act as

a safety-valve to many a grievance that might otherwise rankle and swell to dangerous proportions; as a touchstone of feeling of the utmost value in gauging the tendencies of the native mind; and as a most powerful auxiliary in carrying out the wishes of the Government. With the aid of the Bose vaka Turaga the Governor can without effort do in native matters whatever he pleases. Without it the management of those affairs would be a matter of the extremest difficulty.³

The primary axis of conflict between Fijians and European settlers and officials was thus deflected to take the form of a localised conflict between chief and commoner. In becoming the visible face of the Government at the local level, the chief also became the primary enforcer of the new law and order. As the principal organiser and collector of taxes, the chief opened himself to confrontation with his people. This was a penalty most chiefs were willing to pay, for the benefits of cooperation outweighed the consequences of non-cooperation.

In return for their collaboration, chiefs received official recognition in the form of titles and an official salary, and they retained pre-Cession privileges such as *lala*. *Lala*

² Durutalo, 1985a: 243.

consisted of the appropriation by chiefs of the labour and material wealth of commoners such as house-building, gardening, work, supplying visitors with food, cutting and building canoes, supplying turtle, and making mats, *masi* cloth and other articles.⁴ The new colonial version of *lala* allowed chiefs to retain command of labour for their own or for colonial purposes but without the obligation to reciprocate in kind as was previously required in pre-Cession practice.⁵ As Chapelle explains, “these privileges were worth keeping and the way to keep them was to carry out orders from above and send in reports that as far as possible, the administration would be pleased to read”.⁶ Government also profited directly from *lala* because it provided readily available unpaid labour for public works.

Having their traditional authority complemented with administrative authority, it has been argued that Fijian chiefs functioned as the crucial link in the chain of containment and the stable and effective control over the indigenous population.⁷ However, in the early years of colonial rule the evidence suggests that chiefs could not function as an all-powerful oppressive or unified class. Power was fluid and their ability to enforce it was circumscribed by a number of factors including their tendency to extort excessive services, goods and money from commoners. These actions undermined their position and came under attack from numerous quarters⁸ including, tellingly, the people themselves.

The Murmurings of the People

The manner in which ordinary people chose to express their dissent took a variety of forms. In previous chapters, we noted the discontent felt in the interior of Viti Levu (Colo War) and parts of Ra (early Tuka) with the process by which sovereignty had been surrendered to Great Britain. Yet in other areas, especially on the coast, people seemed more receptive to the changes and the opportunities that were presented by

³ Gordon, *Records of Private and Public Life*, II: 207.

⁴ Durutalo, 1985a: 251.

⁵ Durutalo, 1985a: 217.

⁶ Anthony Chapelle, “Land and Race in Fiji: The Administration of Sir Everard im Thurn, 1904 – 1910.” PhD Dissertation. Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1975. 57.

⁷ Sutherland, 1992: 27.

⁸ Speaking at the 1877 meeting of the *Bose Vakaturaga*, the Roko Tui Rewa complained that “it is clear that all white men hate us Fijians who hold appointments under the Government, whether they themselves hold appointments or not”. “Proceedings of a Native Council,” Rewa, 1877. 3.

modifications in the organisation of power. They adopted a “wait and see” stance and sought out any benefits that could be gained from this transitional period.

The post-Cession transition entailed uncertainty, hesitancy, and limitations in the exercise of power. Resources were scarce and the ability of the colonial administration to enforce its new legitimacy was tentative, and its visibility and coercive capability were weak. Those chiefs who worked for the administration took their time to settle into their new roles and only gradually came to terms with their new responsibilities. The indeterminacy of authority which ensued, presented ordinary village men and women with an opportunity to work this power vacuum to their advantage.

Objection to chiefly abuses of *lala* was not long in surfacing. When the *Bose Vakaturaga* met again in 1876, complaints had been received about *lala* and the inability of people to pay both taxes to the government and *lala* to the chiefs. Ma’afu was quick to dismiss these complaints as the work of “bad natives of low origin” and Europeans “in the habit of writing what is not true”.⁹ But this criticism of chiefly practices was not isolated. The Roko Tui Ba reported that in some villages the people were disobedient and did not respect the Bulis.¹⁰ As the ears and eyes of Fiji’s eighty-four districts, the bulis occupied a strategic position in the surveillance of the populace and the enforcement of discipline and control. Their regular reports to the Governor formed an extensive database of intelligence on the general state of affairs among the Fijian population. Because of the central role in the government’s network of intelligence and surveillance, any public defiance of the Buli undermined not only the government’s capability to enforce its order in the area, it also affected its reputation among the people.

In 1877 a whole raft of regulations aimed at tightening and increasing the regimentation of village life, came into force. People were to obey and respect their chiefs and magistrates “in all things lawful according to their customs”, effectively

⁹ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” Waikava, 1876. 23.

¹⁰ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1876. 28.

making disobedience to chiefs a legal offence.¹¹ Regulation 5 of June 1878 prevented absence from villages for periods of more than three months and regulated every aspect of village life from gardening hours, type of crops to grow, care of the children, registration, house-building, labour contracts and movement in and out of villages, to “tattooing” and useless dogs. A long list of fines for non-conformity was added with almost all offences being punishable by imprisonment.¹² Writing several years later, Brewster remarked that “the Fijians were tied hand and foot by all sorts of enactments”.¹³ This regimentation became more refined with time.

Yet, legislation could not stem the growing disquiet about chiefly rule. At the 1878 *Bose*, the chiefs lamented that in the past, “we had a name in the land, but this day men and their positions are ignored”.¹⁴ It was reported that some people who took a thorough dislike to their Buli were organizing ‘Ridi-bati-ni tai’ or openly defying him by deserting their village en masse to settle in some other village.¹⁵ The Roko Tui Bua complained that as many as one thousand men in his province used all sorts of excuses to evade tax work.¹⁶ In Tailevu, regular complaints were made by the people to the native stipendiary magistrate that they were overburdened with work.¹⁷

In 1879, Bulis complained that it was impossible to work because people were “questioning the authority of the chiefs to make laws”,¹⁸ and would not listen to them.¹⁹ In Ra, the Roko Tui reported that individuals who wanted to evade taxes were in the habit of running away to another province and to claim they were from there. The Nasoko people, for instance, claimed to be from Nadrau to avoid paying taxes in Ra.²⁰ And in Nakelo (Tailevu), many people joined the Catholic school in the belief that Catholic students did not have to do tax work.²¹

¹¹ See Regulation 3.3 of 17 May 1877. *Regulations of the Native Regulation Board: 1877-1882*. London: Harrison and Sons, 1883. 16.

¹² See Regulation 5 1878 in *Regulations of the Native Regulation Board: 1877-1882*. 38-9.

¹³ Brewster, 1922: 230.

¹⁴ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” Bua, 1878. Cited in Scarr, 1980: 55.

¹⁵ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1878. 13.

¹⁶ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1878. 24.

¹⁷ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1878. 25.

¹⁸ See Recommendation XIX in “Proceedings of a Native Council,” Bau, 1879. 83.

¹⁹ See Buli Qaliyalatina’s remarks in “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1879. 26.

²⁰ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1879. 19. Nadrau was exempt from paying tax along with all other Colo districts.

Any doubt as to whether these incidents were isolated came to rest when in 1880, the council agreed to address the persistent and growing “murmurings of the people”.²² The 1880 *Bose* began as all others did with a report of the state of affairs in each of the provinces. Before long, however, the discussion turned to the rise in “insolence and disobedience” among the young and more particularly, the murmuring and grumbling of the people.²³ Grumbling, as Scott argues, stops short of insubordination – to which it is a prudent alternative. It is an attempt by the subordinate to bring the pressure of discontent to bear on elites.²⁴ Among other things, the chiefs were accused of accumulating excessive wealth.²⁵

The *Bose* resolved to convene a special gathering where “the voice from the land” would be heard and this accusation substantiated.²⁶ When the *Bose* reconvened, the report of the special Bulis’ meeting confirmed that there was “a great deal of murmuring, and that many of the people were not prosperous and were discontented”.²⁷ As for the cause of the murmuring, the reply was “very many”. The people said the work of the Government was at the bottom of it. Some blamed tax-making and the keeping of roads. Others complained that serving the Government, the chief, the village, the missionary and the work of the church, left them overburdened with little time for their own work, and “tired and pained”.²⁸ In their murmurings, the people asked why the promise made at Cession of rest, peace and plenty had not come:

We were told that if we became Christians we should have peace and quiet, that with it would come rest, but that rest never came. It is the very opposite in this age. There is an increase of work, an increase of fatigue, and an increase of oppression.²⁹

²¹ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1879. 21.

²² “Proceedings of a Native Council,” Vanuabalavu, 1880. 14.

²³ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1880. 12, 14.

²⁴ Scott, 1990: 155-6.

²⁵ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1880. 19.

²⁶ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1880. 40.

²⁷ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1880. 40.

²⁸ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1880. 41.

²⁹ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1880. 41.

From the island of Kadavu, to the Western district of Nadi, and the province of Cakaudrove in Vanua Levu, the cry was the same. As the Buli of Wainikeli (Cakaudrove) testified:

Our people are burdened with work, and they are much tired with the amount of tax appointed to us. ... I do not think our people will complain unless they have good cause, but it is often little matters which create dissatisfaction and murmuring amongst the people. The changes of this age are often not good. We go to do a work for the Roko Tui, and we are unable to find a house in which we may eat. In the house of the Buli, in the house of the chief of the town, there seems to be no room, and we suffer from want of food. It is such matters as these that our people talk and murmur about. We are the chief's people, we do his bidding and are pleased, and rejoice greatly therein; but the chief must do his portion. He must meet us as his people, and not as his labourers. If he would keep our goodwill.³⁰

One young Buli (from Tokatoka) who had lost his people's goodwill reported,

They say they despise me, and are bad-minded towards me, because I push to have the tax made, to have corn planted, and cotton; and the planting of sugar-cane has been a kind of warfare. ... These matters I have reported to the Roko Tui, and it is only because of his assistance that I am able to live at all in my district.³¹

In neighbouring Tai, the Buli warned that the district was in an evil state:

Our people are not in a good condition in this age. By day they do their work in the preparation of the tax, and matters belonging to the town. At night they do their own work, their planting and such like. Now, this has been greatly increasing, and our people are thoroughly tired since the introduction of the planting of sugar-cane. The work is heavy and is not well managed. The place

³⁰ "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1880. 42.

³¹ "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1880. 43.

is away at Wailevu [Rewa River]; we live on the coast. It is done, but our individual work and the work of our district is not done.³²

The common grievance across the populace was overwork. The normalisation of *lala* and the added burden of taxes affected the time and energy that people previously used to meet their everyday needs. Tax for the state, *lala* for the chief, and time for the Church seemed to overtake all other matters of village life.

The Buli's meeting at the *Bose Vakaturaga* of 1880 was remarkable in two senses. First it indicated the chiefs' willingness for self-criticism. They recognised that their people were disenchanted and chose to address the problem by consultation. This degree of openness suggests that the chiefs were keen to serve their people wisely and selflessly. This was their opportunity to collectively define their role in the new regime and they were surprisingly tolerant of criticism and candid in their assessment of each other's performance, competence and leadership. One native stipendiary magistrate for instance openly contested the Buli Navatu's report on the state of affairs in his district:

Buli Navatu's report is untrue when he says there is no evil mindedness amongst his people. I have heard it, and much of it. One day some of his people came to me and reported that they were discontented, and evil-minded towards their Buli; on account of his conduct and treatment of them individually.³³

Chiefs who did not act in the best interests of their people or "caused them much pain and displeasure" could expect serious censure and even deportation as was experienced by the Bulis of the western districts of Sabeto and Vuda.³⁴ Yet, this criticism did not extend to the more powerful chiefs in the *Bose* whose own abuse of power was generally left unpunished. This led one undaunted magistrate from Macuata to remark in 1885,

³² "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1880. 43.

³³ "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1880. 43.

³⁴ "Proceedings of a Native Council," Nailaga, 1881. 25. Later in 1889, three chiefs from Noco in Rewa were also deported for being troublesome and for frightening their people. They vandalised the

it would appear as if the law had two sides: some are punished, some are not. This applies to all Fiji. The law says that all are equal before the law: - rich and poor, high and low. It is not so among us. Some are judged, some escape, and the people of the land are wondering.³⁵

Secondly, if class consciousness among Fiji's chiefs was in its formative stage, the 1880 *Bose* reflected the people's ability to discern opportunities for change and use this transitional stage to work their agenda into the deliberations of the powerful. The meeting signalled that people's loyalties and obedience could not be taken for granted, that they wished their voices to be heard, and their concerns addressed. In this case, the combination of avarice by certain chiefs and the new tax regime had reached a threshold beyond which the people were not willing to compromise.

Murmurings about their chiefs' excessive exaction, oppression, and malpractices caused the matter to be brought up repeatedly through the early 1880s.³⁶ In 1881, Governor Des Voeux admitted the problem by referring chiefs to the murmurings of the people in his address to his first *Bose* in charge and rebuked some of them for their undue exaction.³⁷ In 1884 however, the Government defended the chiefs and reaffirmed the vital role they played in controlling the Fijian masses. Addressing those who wished to break the power of chiefs, Thurston questioned how they proposed to rule Fijians and preserve order without them (chiefs). "The chiefs," he told his detractors, "represent the army and navy, and practically the police of the country".³⁸

Yet, regular reports of discontent continued to reach the *Bose* and in May 1885, as Navosavakadua organised his movement in the Northern and interior districts of Viti Levu, Jonacani Dabea, the Native Stipendiary Magistrate for Rewa, warned that the

crops, killed pigs, and took women. See Roko Tui Rewa and Bulis Burebasag, Toga and Vutia to Governor, 8 April 1889, CSO 89/990.

³⁵ "Proceedings of a Native Council," Tavuki, 1885. 26.

³⁶ See for instance discussions in the Fiji Legislative Council meeting of November 1884. 246.

³⁷ "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1881. 8.

³⁸ Minutes of the Proceedings of the Fiji Legislative Council, 5 November 1884. 249. Privately however, Thurston was disgusted with the rapacity, avarice, and heavy handedness of some of the highest chiefs in Fiji. See Scarr, 1980: 119, and Scarr, 1984: 103. See also the letter of complaint from villagers to the Provincial Department, 18 May 1889, CSO 89/12181.

discontent caused by excessive village, tax, mission and chiefly work was becoming disquieting. Grumbling, he cautioned, was not discernable in the comfort of Provincial or District councils where chiefs might hope to manage it. Rather, it was heard “in the roads and houses of the people”.³⁹

Luveniwai

Dabea was well informed for in that year, *luveniwai*, a long surviving and evolved cultural ritual that had evolved from pre-contact times, found credence especially among young people partly as a distraction from daily humdrum but also as a way of rebelling against village authorities. Stories about *luveniwai* rarely enter public discourse nowadays and few can explain what it means and what it once stood for. This is not surprising given that it was one of several indigenous practices that the colonial government, the Church and the chiefs tried to suppress particularly from the mid 1880s. Adherents of *luveniwai* themselves concealed their activities to avoid detection and therefore left few traces. While secrecy and anonymity made *luveniwai* ideal for everyday cultural resistance, it also complicates retrieval by contemporary historians.⁴⁰

Luveniwai was a rite of invulnerability in which the participants, having persuaded themselves that a *luveniwai* (little god) had entered their body, presented themselves to the *vuniduvu* (priest)⁴¹ “to be struck on the top of the abdomen, believing that if the god was in them, they could not be wounded by the axe, or spear, or musket, whichever might be used”.⁴² However, the meaning and practice of *luveniwai* evolved considerably over time, with important variations from place to place. The first

³⁹ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1885. 24.

⁴⁰ What we know of *luveniwai* comes mainly from the observations of a few missionaries, the numerous dispatches sent to and from the Colonial Secretary’s Office, and a few anthropological notes by some of the colony’s longest serving administrators, Joske in particular.

⁴¹ Kaplan has argued that ritual experts such as the *vuniduvu* and the priests who served the great war deities were powerful, recognized figures, who acted as conduits of the gods and occupied a central position in the Fijian ritual and political system. Martha Kaplan, “Luve Ni Wai as the British Saw It: Constructions of Custom and Disorder in Colonial Fiji.” in *Ethnohistory*. 36: 4, Fall 1989. 353.

⁴² Thomas Williams, [1858] *Fiji and the Fijians: The Islands and their Inhabitants*. Suva: Fiji Museum, 1985. 238-9. For other descriptions of *luveniwai* see Webb, 1885: 410; SM Colo East to CS, 13 December 1886, CSO 86/2406; See also SM Macuata to CS, containing a minute by David Wilkinson about the ritual and a lengthy report on the matter by Ratu Savenaca Seniloli, 11 January 1905, CSO 05/303.

missionary accounts of *luveniwai* speak of it in tolerant terms “though it encouraged idleness, leading to neglect of the cultivation of crops”.⁴³

Joske,⁴⁴ the resident Stipendary Magistrate for Colo East and later Colo North where the practice was most common, translated *luveniwai* literally as “Water Baby” or “Child of the Water”. Reflecting on its meaning in the specific context of the interior of Viti Levu in the mid 1880s, Joske wrote that *luveniwai* was

a pastime for the young people, forming a sort of junior republic ... opposed to the restrictions and restraints of the seniors, who, as they attained old age, found it convenient to forget how they too had kicked against the pricks of authority. It had all the mysteries of a secret society, with occult signs and ceremonial so delightful to juvenile minds. In their eyes it constituted a sort of Freemasonry, jealously to be guarded, which made it extremely difficult to find out what it really was. It was composed mostly of minor chiefs and young people of restless dispositions eager to make themselves important.⁴⁵

The only noteworthy academic study of *luveniwai* is Martha Kaplan’s 1989 article “Luve Ni Wai as the British Saw It: Constructions of Custom and Disorder in Colonial Fiji”⁴⁶ in which she argues that the rites and practices of *luveniwai* were integral moments in the ritual system of nineteenth century Fijian war culture.⁴⁷ That is, warriors performed these rites publicly and sometimes openly as they challenged their enemies before battle. Kaplan writes that in nineteenth century Fiji, “these practices were hardly rebellious. They were integral to warfare, investing young men with warrior attributes and creating great invulnerable warriors.”⁴⁸ Her argument is that it was British colonial rule after Cession in 1874 that in criminalizing the practice, re-classified *luveniwai* as disorderly behaviour.⁴⁹

⁴³ Williams: 239.

⁴⁴ Joske abandoned his German father’s name during WWI and wrote of his experience as stipendiary magistrate in the interior of Fiji under his British mother’s name Brewster.

⁴⁵ See also Brewster, 1922: 222.

⁴⁶ Kaplan, 1989: 349-71.

⁴⁷ Kaplan, 1989: 350.

⁴⁸ Kaplan, 1989: 353.

⁴⁹ Kaplan, 1989: 351.

This thesis proposes instead, that while the British certainly constructed and criminalized relatively harmless practices which they often misunderstood, *luveniwai* did in fact evolve in the decades after Cession into a rebellious and secretive form of resistance against authority and caused considerable alarm among members of the new power regime of the colony. That is, if the British were constructing disorder, a large number of discontented, overworked, and increasingly defiant ordinary Fijians were engineering it. The many village and provincial chiefs and the new class of administrators whose role it was to enforce compliance with the colonial order, to extract work and taxes from their subordinate communities and to variously detect, place under surveillance, police, and punish transgression, had good reason to find *luveniwai* dangerous.

Luveniwai provided people with an ideal forum for the expression of their discontent. As it evolved in the 1880s, it took on a more cultural, secretive, and anonymous form and offered possibilities to defy and subvert colonial, chiefly and Christian edicts. Describing *luveniwai* in 1882, the Reverend William Lindsay thought of it as a “seemingly harmless craze”. Yet he also warned that it could easily become “the germ of future evil, not only to the Church but also to the State”.⁵⁰ Missionaries, as Thomas points out, had created an entire social geography of stations and circuits which imposed new temporal regimes of work, leisure, celebration, and worship.⁵¹ These regimes reflected the power of the Church in the most minute of local affairs. Gordon recognised this fact soon after his arrival in the Colony:

[T]hat for which I was most unprepared, for I had heard least about it and do not think its political significance had been hitherto fully appreciated is the really wonderful organisation of the Wesleyan body here. I know nothing equal to it except the Jesuits. In every village there is a “lotu” teacher. The different links of superior administration are admirably fitted on to one another and finally the Head at Navuloa has at his command a perfect machinery which enables him to know down to the minutest detail all that is doing in every part of the islands. His statistics and information are far grander

⁵⁰ Viwa Circuit, Annual Report, 1882. F/6. Circuit Reports: 1882-1883. Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia. Fiji District.

⁵¹ Thomas, 1994: 140.

than those which the government can obtain and his power is real, absolute and in constant exercise.⁵²

While Gordon's assessment of the power wielded by the Wesleyan mission and its chairman had some merit, in reality the hegemony of the Church was continually punctured both by internal inconsistencies and external challenges. The disciplinary effects of Methodism were only incompletely and unevenly administered and even as it was used as an instrument of pacification and control and welcomed as such by many people, it was also challenged by indigenous religious practices such as *luveniwai*. By prohibiting tattooing, hair cutting between sexes, wearing flowers in the hair, traditional swimming games, nocturnal dances, and other such practices,⁵³ the Wesleyans had significantly reduced the avenues by which young people could entertain and enjoy themselves. And by imposing the strictest of moral codes in the villages, it opened itself to defiance especially from its younger members.

By 1884, the disruptive side of *luveniwai* was serious enough for Governor Des Voeux to alert chiefs to the potential threat it posed to public order. On the occasion of the *Bose Vakaturaga* in Naiserelagi, Ra, he asked the assembled chiefs to discuss the problem with a view to legislating against it. On this occasion, the chiefs opted to control the practice within the existing framework of the Fijian administration because they saw such practices as "things of the land" that ought to be punished in the provinces.⁵⁴

In 1885 however, *luveniwai* took a permanent foothold in the central province of Naitasiri. The chief of Serea (then Fiji's largest village) and another from Waikalou, with a large delegation of elders from both villages, approached Joske and informed him that all the young men and boys including the son and heir of Tui Serea, were practising *luveniwai* and were altogether out of hand. They requested his assistance in restraining the youths. Joske harangued the culprits and pointed out "the enormity of their offence". Rather than greeting Joske with a conciliatory gesture, the youths

⁵² Gordon to Carnarvon, 21 August 1875, Carnarvon Papers. Cited in John D. Legge, *Britain in Fiji: 1858-1880*. London: Macmillan, 1958. 25.

⁵³ Andrew Thornley, "Fijian Methodism, 1874-1945: The Emergence of a National Church." PhD Thesis. Canberra: Australian National University, 1979. 122.

⁵⁴ Resolution XI. "Proceedings of a Native Council," Naiserelagi, 1884.

remained steadfast and united in their defiance. Pita, the ringleader, responded to Joske with a “rude and inflammatory speech”.⁵⁵ Such a public contravention of the normal ritual of subordination was extraordinary. Stupefied, Joske responded by instructing the sergeant to clap the handcuffs on him and to march the whole gang, some forty-four in number, down to Vunidawa. There they were locked in the courthouse because there was not enough room in the provincial jail.⁵⁶

The miscreants were publicly flogged in the hope that this visible form of punishment would serve to deter future breaches. Joske’s immediate superior in Colo concurred. Carew was well aware of *luveniwai*’s mass appeal and revolutionary potential. He regarded *luveniwai* as “most pernicious and to be put down, if possible”⁵⁷ and he chastised the “young fellows” in the administration who treated the matter lightly. Reporting on the outcome of the Serea trial, he added “the practice of *luve ni wai* as carried out at Soloira in plain speech means nothing less than sedition preparing for rebellion”.⁵⁸

The following year, the Native Commissioner issued a questionnaire to all provincial officials asking them for information and their opinion about the nature and threat posed by *luveniwai*. Most chiefs replied that the practice was evil, immoral, that it gave people confidence in their own strength, that it was used to stir rebellion, that it was anti-government and anti-church.⁵⁹ Most of them believed like Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, Roko Tui of Tailevu, that:

It is of no use in the land. It breaks the laws of religion, despises the chiefs, does not respect the work of the government, causes disturbances and sometimes brings about fighting. Another thing about those who practise this – they are insolent, conceited, black, “via Kaukauwa” and lying, they solicit women, are boasters and also indolent.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Brewster, 1922: 227.

⁵⁶ Brewster, 1922: 228.

⁵⁷ Brewster, 1922: 226.

⁵⁸ Carew to CS, 29 June 1885, CSO 85/1668.

⁵⁹ See the following CSO files for the chiefs’ responses to the circular: CSO 86/783 from the chiefs of Colo East, 86/692 from Roko Tui Ra, 86/898 from Acting Roko of Ba, 86/901 from Roko Tui Lomaiviti, 86/905 from Roko Tui Dreketi, 86/908 from Roko Tui Bua, 86/912 from Roko Tui Nadroga, and 86/923 from Roko Tui Macuata.

⁶⁰ Roko Tui Tailevu to Secretary of Native Affairs, 7 February 1887, CSO 87/270.

What was new for the chiefs was its transmission through *meke* (songs and dances). While some *meke* were considered “good and lawful” and were regularly performed at missionary and other general meetings, the *luveniwai meke* were, as Waisake Tuisese, Turaga ni Koro of Waikalou testified, “bad because distasteful to religion and government. People who practise them do it in opposition to government and religion. The youths who go in for it are extremely insolent and defiant to us old men.”⁶¹ Had it been an armed rebellion, a military repost could have swiftly dealt with the rising. But the Government was ill-equipped to deal with a secretive movement that used poetry and dance as its weapons. The key to *luveniwai*’s appeal was thus its ability to be deceptively innocuous.

In the context of popular discontent, poetry, dance, song, and other such constitutive parts of the evolving fabric of *luveniwai*, cannot be assumed to have been politically neutral. They functioned at least partly as accessories to subversion. In a context such as Colo where a sense of loss, insecurity and injustice prevailed, *luveniwai* provided an opportunity to reconstitute an independent social space where participants could feel insulated from control and surveillance, protected from identification and prosecution, sheltered from retribution, and free to plot against authority.

This oral setting yielded a fertile ground on which cultural expressions of dissent could thrive. Scott has argued that the great bulk of lower-class cultural expression has typically taken an oral rather than written form. Oral traditions, he says, “due simply to their means of transmission, offer a kind of seclusion, control, and even anonymity that make them ideal vehicles for cultural resistance”.⁶² Like gossip and rumour, the folk song’s origins are quickly and safely lost. As he observes, this makes the human voice irrepressible.⁶³

Efforts to criminalize and punish *luveniwai* were thus mostly unsuccessful. For instance, during his trial in 1885, a *vuniduvu* from the village of Serea assured Joske that his only crime was to have learnt songs, dances and other rites of the custom in

⁶¹ Joske to CS, 21 July 1887, CSO 87/1625.

⁶² Scott, 1990: 160.

⁶³ Scott, 1990: 162.

the depths of the forest from a handsome little *veli* (fairy).⁶⁴ To compound the administration's woes, it was almost impossible to verify the seditious nature of *meke* because as Joske's informants put it, "the youths call their Luveniwai mekes by the names of old mekes in order to confound the uninitiated".⁶⁵ The seriousness with which the administration treated the matter is underlined by William Allardyce's warning in March 1887, that *luveniwai* would lead "at any moment to excesses of a very dangerous nature".⁶⁶

By mid-1887, it was clear to all in Serea that the youths had never ceased dancing the *meke* for which they had been punished in 1885. Nobody could ascertain when they had recommenced or the exact *meke* that were being performed. The outcome however, was the same. Chiefs and elders were being defied and the prisoners who had been charged for the burning of Joske's new quarters the previous December were openly insolent and insubordinate to him and other officers at the Vunidawa government station. They blackened their faces, a sign of hostility, and deliberately absented themselves from evening parade. They were also engaged in 'mock' praying "for the ruin of the provincial authorities who had imprisoned them".⁶⁷ Commenting on the latest outbreak, Carew wrote "when Fijians abandon the pretence of religion they abandon at the same time the pretence of loyalty to the Government".⁶⁸ As it had been in 1885, the hierarchical equilibrium was restored⁶⁹ with the public flogging of Colo East's most prominent *vuniduvu*, Kalodonu (thirty-nine lashes), his solitary confinement, and the imprisonment of his followers under the new laws criminalizing "luveniwai, kalourere and like practices".⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Brewster, 1922: 228.

⁶⁵ The Daniva and Nuqa for instance were the names of old *meke* but with a distinctly *luveniwai* flavour. See Buli Matailobau and Native Stipendiary Magistrate testimony to Joske, 21 July 1887, CSO 87/1625.

⁶⁶ Allardyce to CS, 31 March 1887, CSO 87/728. These comments were made in the wake of a trial during which Allardyce convicted twenty-one men to be whipped for practicing *luveniwai* in Batiwai, Serua.

⁶⁷ Carew to CS, 24 July 1887, CSO 87/1626.

⁶⁸ Carew to CS, 24 July 1887, CSO 87/1626.

⁶⁹ Scott argues that patterns of dominance will accommodate a reasonable amount of practical resistance so long as that resistance is not publicly acknowledged. Once it is, however, it requires a public response if the status quo is to be recovered. See Scott, 1990: 57.

⁷⁰ This new law had been initiated by the *Bose Vakaturaga* of May 1887 at its meeting in Rukurukulevu in Nadroga. See Resolution XII in "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1887: 22. A mandatory three months hard labour jail term was legislated, one year for a second offence and flogging for ringleaders if male (see the *Fiji Royal Gazette*, 1887: 230). By 1912, the penalty had been doubled to six months imprisonment with hard labour, with the option of prosecution in the Supreme Court in very serious cases. See clause 64 of the *Regulations of the Native Regulation Board*, 1926.

The trouble in Serea was symptomatic of wider discontent. In 1888, the murmuring of the people returned to the agenda of the *Bose Vakaturaga*. After the customary reports from each province, several chiefs were condemned by Ratu Jone Colata, Bauan chief and Native Stipendiary Magistrate for Tailevu, for overstating the extent to which peace and satisfaction reigned in their districts and provinces. “The worst of it”, he claimed, “is that some of the chiefs, who on visiting Suva give a flourishing account of their own administration, are, all the time, murmured against by their people”.⁷¹ He was supported by the Roko Tui Ra, Ratu Tevita Rasuraki, who remarked that “if we were sincere in our expressions and ruled our people justly, they would not complain so often. ... The whole matter rests with some of you, Chiefs, who are in the habit of continually making levies. Cease to do so.”⁷² In the province of Cakaudrove, Jone Masinamo, the Native Stipendiary Magistrate argued that taxes were not so much the cause of complaint as poverty was. Some people in his province had “nothing on them but banana leaves”.⁷³ He resumed his criticism of chiefs in the official Fijian language newspaper *Na Mata* where he asked why people should continue giving when they received so little in return.⁷⁴ Other chiefs were not so tolerant. Irritated by the whole matter, the Roko Tui Nadroga, exclaimed “it is useless our discussing the murmurings of the people, we can never prevent them”.⁷⁵

At the next meeting in Suva, the chiefs were urged by Thurston to do more to put down *luveniwai*. Many adherents of *luveniwai* had remained undeterred. It had become rampant in several provinces.⁷⁶ In Colo East for instance, the people had profited from Joske’s temporary secondment as acting commissioner of neighbouring Colo West in 1889, and forged an even more virulent strand of the custom. In northern Viti Levu, *luveniwai* conflated itself with Tuka, and threatened to develop

⁷¹ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” Sawaieke, 1888. 20.

⁷² “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1888. 21.

⁷³ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1888. 20.

⁷⁴ Cited in Scarr, 1984: 103. This view was supported by the letters of individuals who wrote to the Government to complain about the behaviour of chiefs. Ratu Epeli Nailatikau was a particularly frequent target of criticism. One man complained that “some of the chiefs ... neglect their duties in the land and think only of acquiring money, debauching women; taking all they can get from their people and giving nothing back again.” Another warned that the people of the land were “beginning to despise their true chiefs” and were losing respect for them. See the letter from the Provincial Department, 18 May 1889, CSO 89/12181.

⁷⁵ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1888. 20.

into a full-blown rebellion against chiefly, Christian and British authority. Among its latest recruits, *luveniwai* counted a number of government employees. The Buli of Nadrau who had been an ally of the government during the Colo War of 1876, had become a “tevoru” (devil), the term used to label those who shunned Christianity. At Narokorokoyawa, *luveniwai* was led by the district vakatawa (scribe). When Joske returned from Colo West, the vakatawa proposed that their transgression could be overlooked in return for ‘free’ work on nearby roads to make up for their offence.⁷⁷ On the other hand, in the Serua province *luveniwai* was responsible for a number of assaults on another symbol of the colonial order: the constabulary.⁷⁸ The rest of the country was not immune to the sweeping appeal of *luveniwai*. Numerous reports were received by the Colonial Secretary’s Office (CSO) from all parts of the archipelago including one from the capital, Suva, and another advising the Colonial Secretary’s Office that *luveniwai* had infiltrated the prison walls at Fort Carnarvon and was being preached to inmates.⁷⁹

The most common means of punishing *luveniwai* was by way of flogging and imprisonment. However, in a departure from standard practice, Joske tried a different approach. To eliminate *luveniwai* or at least co-opt it in a way that minimized its competition, Joske set up cricket clubs in several Colo East villages. This, it was hoped would eliminate the clandestine element of *luveniwai*, and bring social interaction under closer scrutiny. Cricket would create a new, more controlled social space where the attention of young people could be diverted from malevolent behaviour to a more formal, regularized, and regimented use of their time. As the epitome of British values, cricket would foster gentlemanly conduct, respect,

⁷⁶ See for instance the 1888 Rewa Circuit Report of the Wesleyan Mission. F/6/1888. Circuit Reports: 1882-1883. Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia. Fiji District. NAF.

⁷⁷ Brewster, 1922: 278.

⁷⁸ See “Proceedings of a Native Council,” Suva, 1890. 10.

⁷⁹ Resident Commissioner Colo West to CS, 28 October 1889, CSO 89/2987. See CSO 89/438 for reports of *luveniwai* in Namataku, Colo West; CSO 89/1069 in Namosi; CSO 89/2244 in Nadroga; CSO 90/606 and CSO 90/777 in Serua; CSO 90/953 in Savusavu (Cakaudrove); CSO 90/1744 for another outbreak in Nadroga (see also Sutherland’s account in his “The ‘Tuka’ Religion” in *Transactions of the Fijian Society*. 1910: 56); CSO 91/1546 in Noikoro; CSO 93/3440 in Naqiqi; CSO 93/2939 in Solaira district; CSO 95/4187 in Serua; CSO 96/1896 in Ketei Totoya; CSO 99/2175 in Korolevu, Noikoro; CSO 03/5484 in Nanuyamalo; CSO 04/3041 in Nakuailava, Ra; CSO 05/303 in Mali, Macuata; CSO 05/3153 in Lakeba. See also Cook to Small, 17 March 1905 and 27 March 1905, F/1/1905. Methodist Mission Society of Australasia. Fiji District. This list is representative but not exhaustive.

discipline, moderation, uniformity and order where *luveniwai* was breeding disorder and insubordination.

The initiative was promptly turned on its head and an enquiry into the operation of these clubs revealed that they had become

sorts of guilds, with books, registers, codes of signals, etc., and that the badges were for the captain, or elder of the guild, as he was called, for the secretary, for the treasurer, for the chief of the outer circle and for the chief of the inner circle. The two latter were for the arrangement of the internal economy and the external policy; in fact, Home Secretary and Secretary for Foreign Affairs.⁸⁰

As he later admitted, Joske's blueprint for efficient pacification had been thoroughly undermined by the subjects whose behaviour he tried to reform.⁸¹ His suspicions that the clubs had metamorphosed and were now acting as a cloak for *luveniwai*, were promptly confirmed. In one district, he wrote, "the members decided to emancipate themselves from the thrall of British rule. With a sincere imitation of it they elected a Governor, Chief Justice, Chief Secretary, and a host of other officials."⁸²

There are various possibilities for interpreting this appropriation of cricket and British bureaucratic rituals. It could for instance, reflect an attempt to mock. In the Colo context however, it is plausible to see it as audacious mimicry that served subversive ends and openly but non-violently challenged colonial and chiefly systems of ranking and ordering. Members of cricket clubs cum *luveniwai* cells adopted terms and categories of the colonial order so as to subvert them. British sports clubs which were used in the colonies at least partly to help in the inculcation of the new colonial order, were thus effectively reconfigured to become Fijian cultural instruments by which to express and disseminate dissent.

The resourcefulness and versatility of *luveniwai*, and its simultaneous appropriation and inversion of the colonial order is remarkably similar to the contraventions of

⁸⁰ Brewster, 1922: 231.

⁸¹ Brewster, 1922: 231.

⁸² Brewster, 1922: 231.

Navosavakadua and Tuka. In some places, Tuka was an adjunct to *luveniwai* and in some cases, the two fused together.⁸³ Yet, the relationship between *luveniwai* and Tuka was never going to last. Tuka arose out of a specific religious, cultural and geographic locality among the Vatukaloko people at the foot of the mystic Nakauvadra Range. It derived much of its vigour from the charisma and vision of its leader, Navosavakadua. *Luveniwai* on the other hand had no distinct locus of origin and was more amenable to adaptation and appropriation in other contexts. It had no formal organisation or manifesto, more discreet leaders, less hierarchy, more intimacy, and safer possibilities for free expression. It had no publicly declared agenda to refuse compliance and therefore did not breach the normative order of domination to the extent that Tuka did. The ideological warfare was more circumspect because participants wished to keep their activities more concealed and coded. Tuka required a more intimidating kind of militancy and demanded a more hazardous commitment. By contrast, *luveniwai*'s appeal lay more in its festive character.

It is difficult to affirm with certainty, the factors that led to the suppression of *luveniwai*. The practice was still common in the earlier parts of the twentieth century. Efforts to suppress the practice in 1903 for instance, led several villages to threaten to secede from Methodism if they were reported to the Government. To compound matters, two Wesleyan teachers were implicated in this resurgence.⁸⁴ What is certain however, is that the rigorous enforcement of the new laws, a marked increase in the surveillance of village activities and the rapid transformation of Fijian village life after the late 1880s and early 1890s, all produced changes in the practice and effects of *luveniwai*. Together, these factors combined to cause the gradual decline of the practice and impede its detection.

⁸³ See Thurston to Carew, 17 December, 1885. Carew Papers. He suspected Navosavakadua's of involvement in *luveniwai* practices. See Buli Saivou's example in "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1887. 21. See Joske's "Report on the Suppression of Tuka in Colo East," 1 August 1891, CSO 91/2344, about *luveniwai* being a factor at the origin of the resurgence of Tuka in Naboubuco. And see another example of fusion from Nadrau in 1907 cited from CSO 08/974 in Macnaught, 1982: 95.

⁸⁴ Small to Brown, 1 December 1903, F/1/1903. Correspondence: Inwards and Outwards. Fiji District. Methodist Mission Society of Australasia. NAF.

Village Absenteeism

Compared to the sustained groundswell of protest and dissent which characterised the 1880s, the 1890s produced a more random and sporadic form of everyday resistance. This may be attributable to the deterrent effect that the unceremonious crushing of Tuka in 1891 had on the general population. It may also be due to the gradual consolidation of the colonial power and the routinization of ordinary people's lives. It can also be attributed to the severe decline in the Fijian population which was symptomatic to some degree of demoralisation among many ordinary people.

Among the most mundane but subversive of protests was the choice made by hundreds of individuals to walk away from their villages and from the authority of their chiefs. Macnaught describes village absenteeism as “a running sore in Fijian society” because it represented the indifference of individuals to the demands of traditional authority.⁸⁵ Simply put, the people of the land traditionally functioned as the power of the chief. If the people left the villages, much of the power wielded by the chief left with them. Absenteeism found chiefs increasingly unable to meet their tax quotas, while the depletion of able-bodied men also seriously undercut the material basis of their power.⁸⁶

Numerous attempts to tighten legislation and to police the movement of people had since the late 1870s failed to curb these private transgressions. For instance, hundreds of individuals worked the system to their “minimum disadvantage”, as Hobsbawm put it,⁸⁷ by returning to their village on the fifty-ninth day of their absence (or a day before they could be charged for a breach of the law), only to depart again the next day for a successive period of fifty-nine days.⁸⁸

Flight from villages became an increasingly common phenomenon throughout the 1880s raising the ire of chiefs at every council meeting. In 1881, the Roko Tui Ba reported that “all those at Nakalawaca who were married fled, leaving their wives,

⁸⁵ Macnaught, 1982: 101.

⁸⁶ Durutalo, 1985a: 217.

⁸⁷ Cited in Scott, 1985: 301

⁸⁸ See among others the Roko Tui Tailevu's complaints about men evading communal duties, 16 November 1909, in CSO 10/1242. See also Macnaught, 1982: 102.

Why? Because they were against sugar-cane planting.”⁸⁹ If leaving women and children to feed and clothe themselves as best they could created a rural problem, it also produced an urban one.

By the mid 1880s, the Fijian male population in Suva had grown to such a number that it caused some malaise within the town’s European residents. The growing Fijian community comprised mainly male absconders and the runaways from all provinces they harboured. All were united in their efforts to evade tribal obligations and taxes.⁹⁰ Repeated attempts to repatriate them had failed⁹¹ and in 1887, Governor Mitchell voiced his fear that this concentration of Fijian males created “an idle body which in time will become dangerous to society”.⁹² Hence, even if they formed a useful source of casual labour for public and other works in close proximity of the administrative centre, it was not in the interests of the administration or its chiefs to allow this rural to urban flow to continue and discussion about how to combat absenteeism loomed high on the agenda of practically every *Bose Vakaturaga* until the 1920s.⁹³

In 1892 for instance, the *Bose Vakaturaga* declared its satisfaction with the existing state of things and claimed that people were “happy and contented”.⁹⁴ However, it also heard of the increased propensity of women to move about the country, indulging in gossiping, smoking tobacco, drinking yaqona and other things “hurtful” to them. The men too were reported to be going about the country in a disorderly fashion, sailing in boats from one district to another, or idling in Suva and Levuka where they could escape paying taxes. In addition, the villages were said to be “a disgrace to the people”, and as a result of all this, children were dying in increasing numbers.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1881.

⁹⁰ Testimony from the “Proceedings of a Native Council,” Sawaieke, May 1888. 9. See also Resolution I of the meeting preventing men from absenting themselves from their province without permission. 29.

⁹¹ See CSO files 84/3027, 85/2715 and 87/1741 in particular.

⁹² Despatch 70, Mitchell to SS, 1 June 1887. CSO Despatches.

⁹³ See among others, Recommendation 22 of the *Bose Vakaturaga*, Bua, 1878; Recommendation 6 of the Council, Vanuabalavu, 1880; the deliberations of the Buli’s meeting at the *Bose* in 1881; Resolution 1 of the *Bose Vakaturaga* in 1888; the new regulations passed regarding absence from villages at the 1902 *Bose* in Suva; Resolutions 1 and 4 of the Tailevu provincial council held at Bau from 16-19 November 1910, in CSO 10/1242; and Recommendation 2 of the *Bose Vakaturaga* in Suva, 1917.

⁹⁴ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” Vanuabalavu, 1892. 2.

⁹⁵ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1892. 24-5.

Some of the evidence suggests that many individuals used the opportunities for personal advancement offered by rival denominations to leave their villages. The 1894 *Bose* in Suva heard a long discussion about the large number of men and women who, according to the chiefs, joined religious institutions to evade communal burdens. Jonacani Dabea maintained that “many of them only run away and say they have received a ‘call’ as an excuse for going”.⁹⁶ At the May 1896 *Bose* in Bua, there were renewed complaints about Catholics absenting themselves for several weeks for religious festivals and neglecting their communal obligations.⁹⁷ This religious dimension of resistance is discussed further below.

Village absenteeism, even if it was unspectacular, was certainly one of the most enduring aspects of everyday resistance. Contestation of chiefly rule was marked far less by open confrontations than by the path of least resistance offered by wilful evasion and non-compliance. As McCreery has shown in relation to Native Indian labourers in Guatemala, subaltern groups, “because they were not foolish ... chose those modes of resistance most effective to their purposes and least likely to bring down upon themselves the devastating violence of the state”.⁹⁸ In Fiji, as in the Malaysian examples cited by Scott, there rarely were riots, demonstrations, arson, organised social banditry, open violence, popular leadership, elaborate ideologies, or ambitious revolutionary goals.⁹⁹

Yet in their multiplied effects, these individual votes of no-confidence undermined colonial rule by weakening the chiefs’ capability to wield their power. This spirit of independence among young adults and their apparent indifference to the authority of their chiefs caused colonial officials much anxiety. As Thurston wrote in a confidential despatch to the colonial office, Fijian commoners were asserting

⁹⁶ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1894. 41. For other accusations against the Roman Catholic Church for encouraging the evasion of communal obligations among Fijians, see “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1890. 6. See also Resident Commissioner Colo East to CS, 19 October 1889, CSO 89/2980. Further frustrations about this tendency were expressed by Carew in a minute to the CS, 26 October 1888, CSO 88/3262. Among many other Roman Catholic repudiations of these accusations, see Gallais to Vidal, 12 April 1890. Roman Catholic Mission, Fiji: Correspondence with Government and Others re Native Affairs 1883-1924. Microfilm Copy PMB 459. Pacific Manuscripts Bureau. Canberra: The Australian National Library. 1972.

⁹⁷ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” Bua, 1896. 45.

⁹⁸ David McCreery, “Hegemony and Repression in Rural Guatemala.” in *Plantation Workers: Resistance and Accommodation*. Brij Lal, Doug Munro, and Edward Beechert (eds.) Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993. 226.

themselves too rapidly. They were shaking off their obedience to chiefs “not only in respect of what may be wrong on the Chief’s part, but also in respect of what it is right for the Chief to order or forbid”.¹⁰⁰ Speaking about the Nakelo fracas of 1897 (referred to in Chapter Three), David Wilkinson agreed that young Fijians had recently acquired “a very strong disposition to see how far the Courts and authorities can be resisted under the idea that ‘this is the age of everyone please himself.’”¹⁰¹

Tax Evasion

Another of these sporadic types of everyday resistance was tax evasion. Fijians’ experience of pre-Cession taxation had been negative. When they did not pay their tax, their nets, mats, and axes, were confiscated and most offenders were arrested and sold into servitude on plantations “merely for the crime of being too poor, after disposing of their all, to pay their tax in full”.¹⁰² In this fashion, as we saw in previous chapters, whole districts had been decimated of their able-bodied men. Gordon was aware of this problem, and opted for a graduated taxation system, where a tax in produce was calculated according to “the amount of population, the nature and productiveness of the soil, and the degree of civilisation which the province had attained”.¹⁰³ The effect of this produce tax on village life however, was to turn villagers into an agricultural collective oriented primarily at production for the state.

For the first few years, Fijian produce taxation accounted for the government’s largest source of revenue after customs’ duties.¹⁰⁴ But while it was profitable to the government, few of the benefits of their hard work ever seemed to trickle down to ordinary Fijians. The bulk of the income went into the government’s revenue and paid

⁹⁹ Scott, 1985 and 1990.

¹⁰⁰ Confidential despatch, Thurston to Colonial Office, 13 December 1894. CO 83/59. Cited in Scarr, 1980: 282.

¹⁰¹ Wilkinson to CS, 30 October 1897, CSO 97/4573.

¹⁰² Rev. Lindsay (Viwa District) cited in Andrew Thornley *Exodus of the I Taukei: The Wesleyan Church in Fiji 1848-74. Na Lako Yani ni Kawa I taukei Na Lotu Wesele e Viti 1848-74*. Andrew Thornley and Tauga Vulaono (trans.) Suva: USP, Institute of Pacific Studies, 2002. 502. Missionaries were particularly critical of the excessive pressure from pre-Cession taxation.

¹⁰³ Arthur Gordon, *Paper on the System of Taxation in Force in Fiji*. London: Harrison and Sons, 1879. 26-7.

¹⁰⁴ See *Fiji Blue Books* 1876-1880. Sutherland estimates that Fijian communal taxes accounted for thirty percent of total state revenue between 1875-1879. During this period, the state made huge profits by paying low prices for Fijian tax produce with very low labour costs. See Sutherland, 1992: 29.

for the salaries of colonial officials, the public education of European children, and other colonial public works of little consequence to ordinary villagers.¹⁰⁵

Other problems caused widespread discontent. At the beginning, some chiefs used their position to trade the tax and kept the proceeds. In some places, the government had failed to assign enough boats for the collection of the taxes and much produce was left to rot in full view of the people who had spent much time and energy to grow, weed and harvest these large quantities of crops.¹⁰⁶ Transporting the tax produce to collection points was also much maligned. In Gau for instance, men, women and children were required to carry copra and other heavy baskets of taxes for up to twenty miles over mountainous terrain to the designated point of delivery. Many refused to do so and were charged and convicted of *talaidredre* (disobedience).¹⁰⁷ Later, when tax refunds accrued, some chiefs used their traditional status to keep for themselves money that should have been redistributed for the welfare of their people.¹⁰⁸ In their combined effect, these factors caused much of the popular discontent which found expression in the murmuring of the people through the 1880s.

Some tax evasion had very specific local geographical and historical roots and was not specifically anti-administration. In some cases for instance, the tax quota was too great for the size of the land and the fertility of the soil. This led some villagers on small outer islands (often with the backing of their chiefs), to steal coconuts from nearby plantations to meet their tax quotas.¹⁰⁹ Some provinces with small populations and resources were too heavily taxed, with too few individuals having to shoulder too high a burden.¹¹⁰ In other districts, people felt that taxes should be paid to them in accordance with indigenous custom, as compensation for their goodwill. As Carew explained, “they cannot and will not understand that having agreed to give their

¹⁰⁵ Durutalo, 1985a: 214.

¹⁰⁶ See the numerous complaints of chiefs regarding the taxation system in the “Proceedings of a Native Council” for the 1870s and 1880s.

¹⁰⁷ Langham to Gordon, 29 January 1878, *Records of Private and Public Life*, II: 690. The same letter reveals that in the previous year, sixty villagers had been brought before the police court in Gau for neglecting to work on the tax plantations. Among many other cases of tax protest in the 1870s, see Friend to CS, 17 September 1878, CSO 78/1368, about the conviction of Noco people in Rewa for refusing to work on their tax plantations.

¹⁰⁸ See for instance Brough’s “Private and Confidential Memorandum” to im Thurn, 18 July 1904. Paper 25, M.S. 2, im Thurn Papers.

¹⁰⁹ Emberson to CS, 1 December 1884, CSO 84/2707.

¹¹⁰ See remarks by the Roko Tui Ba in “Proceedings of a Native Council,” Naduri, 1883. 26.

country ... they should also have to pay taxes. The payment should they think be the other way.”¹¹¹

Sometimes, tax evasion took the form of retribution for perceived pre-Cession wrongs. Such occurrences reflected long-standing rivalries and involved the aggrieved party deliberately undermining the usurper by evading or consuming the tax. In 1890 for instance, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau (Roko Tui of Tailevu) complained bitterly that the “impudent” and “conceited” Verata chiefs and their people were causing him much trouble. Notwithstanding the neglect they showed for governmental duties and communal obligations, they actively desisted from tax work. Not only were they refusing to take the first fruit of the cane crop to him at Bau, but they left in large numbers to work in the Yasawas and Koro at the very time that their taxes were due. In defiance of all authority, they also drank their yaqona tax crop.¹¹² This impertinence of Verata towards its Bauan neighbour continued through to the 1910s when the Ratu mai Verata, Ratu Peni Ravoka, declared himself (and Verata) independent even of the King.¹¹³ As we saw in Chapter Three however, the most spectacular rejection of the Gordon-Thurston tax regime was the 1894 Seaqaqa War.

For the most part however, opposition to tax work in the late nineteenth century tended to be expressed through murmuring, grumbling and evasion. After Thurston’s death in 1897, tax evasion however gave way to tax refusal. It is difficult to identify the precise cause of this break. It is likely that Fijians endured Thurston’s tax regime because they generally trusted his leadership. His death and the new tax regime proposed by his successor, spurred long-standing discontent about tax work to surface.¹¹⁴ The distant location of some tax plantations was particularly irksome. Villagers resented the long periods of dislocation they had to spend away from home sometimes without appropriate food and accommodation. Deprived of the able-bodied men, the burden of village subsistence, care for the young and other duties fell on

¹¹¹ Carew to CS, 1 September 1893, CSO 93/2939.

¹¹² See Ratu Epeli Nailatikau to Governor, 29 May 1890 in CSO 90/1734, about the behaviour of Verata people. See also CSO 90/3091.

¹¹³ Macnaught, 1982: 73. Ratu Peni Ravoka was an outspoken critic of the administration in Tailevu. He was arrested and committed to the Lunatic Asylum. In 1936 he was exiled to Batiki.

¹¹⁴ Macnaught (1982) identifies Thurston’s death as a major turning point in the administration of Fijian affairs.

women.¹¹⁵ The returns they acquired from government after such a heavy investment of time and effort compared poorly with the social costs.

Although Governor O'Brien made sanitation the centrepiece of his Fijian policy and pressed for better efficiency in tax production, collection and refunds, his achievements on that front¹¹⁶ must be tempered by the resentment they created. O'Brien's policies entailed much more visible, vigorous and forceful intervention and interference in the day to day affairs of Fijian villages. This was widely resented, not the least by the chiefs whose power was being eroded by "new white men [who] have taken charge of our affairs".¹¹⁷ People gradually withdrew the willingness to collaborate that Thurston had been so dependent on and insisted that more congenial ways of meeting their needs be found. In some cases the unease led to insubordination and even mutiny. The Mali people in Macuata proclaimed that they would rather go to jail than continue to work their tax fields near Labasa. Through their Buli and Turaga ni Koro, they lodged a serious protest:

This district of ours of Mali is an island a little distance from the shore ... but our cane is on the mainland and here we frequently repair for a month at a time leaving our wives and children behind us and with no one to take care of them or to plant for us. As a consequence we are suffering from a scarcity of food and have neither peace nor rest, the peace and plenty which we have enjoyed under government rule are no more. ... [O]ur cane work is done against our will and under compulsion.¹¹⁸

In a similar case, thirty-four men from Nausori were charged and convicted for *talaidredre* after refusing to work on a road without getting paid. In his defence, one of the men said

It is true that we are unwilling to work on the roads. If we must work on the roads then let us work on the roads as prisoners, for then we shall be fed and

¹¹⁵ See CSO files 00/321, 00/293, 00/308, and 00/561 about complaints already alluded to in Chapter Three by Serua and Namosi villagers and the long distances they had to travel to get to their tax fields. See also the protest by Mali villagers (near Labasa) in CSO 97/4245.

¹¹⁶ See his farewell speech in the *Western Pacific Herald*, 20 July 1901. 6.

¹¹⁷ Remarks by the Roko Tui Ba in "Proceedings of a Native Council," Suva, 1902. 15.

have but one master, but when we are free and work on the roads we have many masters and are always hungry.¹¹⁹

Road-building without remuneration and other such frequent abuses prompted Rev. William Slade to accuse the Government of “dipping its hand too deeply in Fijians’ purse”.¹²⁰ He further accused the Government of ruling by fear, of being tyrannical, and of preying on the easiest victim – ordinary Fijian villagers.¹²¹ Slade calculated that indigenous Fijians were taxed nearly forty percent of their gross income while others in the colony were exempt from this special taxation. As a result, he wrote, the “greatest discontent” was felt in large parts of the country, even if this discontent was “mostly voiceless.”¹²² This climate of unrest and dissatisfaction explains at least partly the extensive support that ordinary Fijians, and several chiefs, gave for the New Zealand Federation Movement at the turn of the century (discussed in Chapter Three).

When he took over the reins of government in 1902, Henry Jackson was immediately advised by Rev. Arthur Small, chairman of the Wesleyan Mission, of the discontent that prevailed among Fijians throughout the group. It was caused in his opinion “by the almost incessant round of communal and other duties” which left them too little time for self-betterment. If allowed to persist, this widespread feeling of unrest would prove “disastrous for all concerned”.¹²³ Jackson supported the gradual phasing out of the produce tax and its replacement by a coin tax. The unpopular European provincial inspectors were withdrawn and for a time this seemed to have an appeasing effect on the populace.

There is evidence however, that at the local level, tax-related transgressions continued unabated. For instance, half of all cases appearing before the provincial court in

¹¹⁸ Buli Mali to Governor, 18 October 1907, CSO 97/4245.

¹¹⁹ Cited in the *Fiji Times*, 2 November 1901.

¹²⁰ *Fiji Times*, 1 September 1900.

¹²¹ *Fiji Times*, 1 September 1900.

¹²² *Fiji Times*, 1 September 1900.

¹²³ See Small to CS, 8 December 1902, CSO 02/5562. See also item 14 in Appendix to Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Fiji District Committee at Ba, 9 October 1902. F/4/A and B. Minutes and Journals of the Fiji District Annual Synod 1874-1892 and 1891-1907. Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia. Fiji District. NAF.

Macuata in 1908 were heard for breaches of the native tax regulations.¹²⁴ One factor which makes it difficult to estimate the extent of resistance to taxation in the first decade of the twentieth century, is the stifling of the voices of chiefs caused by the discontinuation of the *Bose Vakaturaga*. Jackson's successor as Governor, im Thurn decided to replace consultation with a more direct administrative style. Many insights into ordinary village affairs and the mood of ordinary people previously conveyed freely at these meetings were thenceforth lost.

The Boycott of Land Registration

It is also likely that during this period, fears about land alienation replaced taxation as the primary source of anxiety among ordinary Fijians. Land had always been a contentious issue. Some of Gordon's earliest initiatives after arriving in the colony, were to find a uniform Fijian system of land tenure (through the *Bose Vakaturaga*), to sort through hundreds of pre-Cession land claims, legislating against any further alienation of native lands (through the Land Claims Commission), and from 1880 to define and register native land ownership (through the Native Lands Commission). These initiatives set in motion a process that led to the formation of a uniform system of land tenure in Fiji and transformed almost all ordinary Fijians into permanent landowners.¹²⁵

Commissions, as Kaplan points out, were probably the pre-eminent ritual-political means by which the British tried to establish authority and order in colonial Fiji. Commissions set terms and relations of authority among all participants and routinized colonial power "in ways well beyond what any use of force might have accomplished".¹²⁶ The focus of this section lies less in how land commissions routinized colonial power in Fiji and more in the variety of ways in which they were undermined and subverted by ordinary people. It will show that ordinary Fijian villagers were very cautious and often intensely suspicious of the Native Lands

¹²⁴ Paper 20: "Report on Macuata Magisterial District, Vanualevu, for 1908." in *JFLC*, 1910. 5. See also the petition from Komave people to repeal native regulations, 18 May 1912, CSO 12/3178. The villagers complain about excessive taxes, provincial rates and service to chiefs. The 1912 *Bose* continued to hear evidence of people flocking to Suva to evade taxes and village duties. See "Proceedings of a Native Council," Suva, 1912.

¹²⁵ For a discussion of this process see France: 102-128.

¹²⁶ Kaplan, 1995: 144.

Commission (NLC) and that they often actively obstructed the commissioners and those charged with the surveying, marking and registration of the land.

The first sittings of the NLC failed miserably. Fijians simply failed to respond and no submissions were received.¹²⁷ Many Fijians did not support the Commission because of their previous experience with the earlier Land Claims Commission (1875-1882). Many of them felt that they had been cheated out of substantial portions of their land and feared that the new Commission would do more of the same.¹²⁸ Settlers and their lawyers had a quasi monopoly over the interpretation of the law, and this was widely resented. At the 1878 *Bose Vakaturaga* the Roko Tui Bua assured the colonial officials in attendance that there was no problem in participating in the commission. "The evil" however, was that the lawyers made it so complicated and intricate.¹²⁹ Hence, the chiefs recognised the value of a commission in resolving their own existing disputes, between each other and with settlers, avoiding future ones, and guaranteeing the long term security of this asset. But they were apprehensive about the advantage that settlers had in swaying the Commission.

This fear was justified. Gordon for instance, was "horrified" by some of the Commission's adjudications in the fertile districts of Sigatoka. Writing to Carew, he expressed his fear that if the Lands Claims Commission chairman Williamson's reports were to be accepted and "the Sigatoka in its lower course is to become European land, and its occupants expelled", the administration would be faced with another war and in his opinion "a most unjust one".¹³⁰ The Commission also failed to compensate Fijians for the guns which they were now instructed to surrender to the state. As their chiefs argued, these guns had been received in return for large tracts of land: "If the guns are now taken away, the land should also be returned".¹³¹

Hence, the Land Claims Commission's record of adjudications and award of compensation inspired little confidence among Fijians in the wisdom of trusting the new Native Lands Commission and participating in the registration of their lands.

¹²⁷ France: 131-2.

¹²⁸ See the chiefs' letter to the Queen in "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1876. 34.

¹²⁹ "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1878. 46. See more complaints about the advantage of "white men" over Fijians before the Commission in the "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1879. 3.

¹³⁰ Gordon to Carew, 22 March 1880. The Carew Papers.

Writing in March 1878, Carew took the liberty to impress on the Governor that in the matter of their lands, “considerable excitement and dismay” prevailed in the minds of ordinary Fijians.¹³² By 1881, a silent but effective boycott of the Commission’s work had become apparent. Asked to explain why their people refused to collaborate with the Commission, the chiefs replied:

our people did not understand the meaning and object of what was being done. Now that is clear, and all are desirous of persevering with the work. Still it would be best, we think, that there should be as little hurry about it as possible. It is important and weighty to our people; and if they do not understand it as it proceeds there will be probably murmuring, and fresh difficulties may only arise.¹³³

Whether they understood the process or not, Fijians continued to thwart land registration, rendering the Commission’s work virtually meaningless. In 1886, a group of Fijian men confronted a government surveyor in Rewa, beat off his Polynesian labourers and uprooted the survey pegs.¹³⁴ By 1889, as Carew put it, Fijians were clearly “determined that nothing shall be final as far as land boundaries are concerned”.¹³⁵ The incidence of people who “wilfully, designedly, and with intent to defraud, interfered with and altered the boundaries of native lands” or simply pulled survey pegs, became frequent enough to warrant Regulation 1 of 1889 making such sabotage unlawful.¹³⁶

The failure of the first commission led to the convocation of a second commission in 1892 whose term of reference was “to turn over any land not utilised by chiefs or tribes to the state”.¹³⁷ Under Wilkinson’s chairmanship, the commissioners were given greater powers but managed only marginal gains. Because progress was so

¹³¹ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1881. 20.

¹³² Carew to Gordon, 19 March 1878. *Records of Private and Public Life*, III: 76.

¹³³ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1881. 27.

¹³⁴ *Fiji Times*, 10 March 1886.

¹³⁵ Minute by Carew to CS, 19 October 1889, CSO 89/2980.

¹³⁶ See Paper 15: “Regulations of the Native Regulation Board.” in *JFLC*, 1890. A law against tempering with survey pegs had been passed as early as 1876 but with little effect. See Ordinance XVII of 1876 in *Ordinances of the Colony of Fiji*. Suva: Government Printer, 1906. For individual cases of sabotage involving survey pegs in the late 1870s, see CSO files 78/1061, 78/1621, and 78/1650.

¹³⁷ “Native Lands Ordinance, 1892.” in *Supplement to the Royal Gazette*. 2 December 1892.

slow, Thurston again implored the chiefs in 1894 to have their people register their lands.¹³⁸ Six months earlier, he had been forced to enact a new ordinance to stop the ongoing obstruction of surveyors appointed by commissioners to enter and survey native land. Those who tampered with or removed any mark or surveying equipment would thereafter be liable to six months imprisonment with hard labour.¹³⁹ Further amendments were again needed in 1897 following concern about the contemptuous manner in which Commissioners were treated during sittings. In the same year, trouble erupted in Nakelo over the presence of CSR surveyors. As Wilkinson put it in his report on the disturbance, had it not been for the intervention of the Rev. W. A. Heighway, the leading surveyor “with his paraphernalia would without doubt have been thrown into the river”.¹⁴⁰

Surveyors and the instruments by which they named, tamed, marked out and mapped the land, were regular targets of retribution. They represented the means by which colonisation advanced physically on the ground. As Byrnes has argued in relation to the role of surveyors in the colonisation of New Zealand, they were “charged with extending the boundaries of empire” and “operated literally at the cutting edge of colonisation”. She adds that surveyors, more than most other groups, explored and evaluated the resources of the colony and transformed ‘space’ into ‘place’.¹⁴¹ In Fiji however, British ‘space’ was already ‘place’ to Fijians. The boundaries may have been fluid but they were firmly rooted in people’s conceptual world. As Williamson, the first chair of the Land Claims Commission had observed, “every inch of Fiji has an owner. Every parcel or tract of land has a name and the boundaries are defined and well known.”¹⁴² On this (Nakelo) and other occasions when they obstructed surveyors, Fijians struck at the physical instruments by which their conceptual sense

¹³⁸ See Thurston’s closing address at the 1894 *Bose Vakaturaga* in “Proceedings of Native Council,” 1894.

¹³⁹ “Amendment to the Native Lands Ordinance, 1892.” in *Supplement to the Royal Gazette*. 20 December 1893.

¹⁴⁰ Minute from Wilkinson to CS, 30 October 1897, CSO 97/4573.

¹⁴¹ Giselle Byrnes, *Boundary Markers: Land Surveying and the Colonisation of New Zealand*. Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2001. 5.

¹⁴² Cited by the Secretary of State for Colonies in his letter to im Thurn, 26 October 1907. MS 2/10/vi. im Thurn Papers. NAF. These sentences previously appeared word for word in the Goodenough and Layard report on the Offer of Cession where they were attributed to Consul Pritchard. See “Report of Commodore Goodenough and Mr Consul Layard on the Offer of Cession of the Fiji Islands to the British Crown.” London, July 1874. 10. NAF.

of ‘place’ was being attacked. These were mostly non-violent and anonymous tactics but they were very costly and disruptive.

Interestingly, Wilkinson commented on several other sources of discontent which all seemed to converge in the Nakelo agitation. Two districts in the vicinity complained that “scheming” and “nefarious” Bauan chiefs were “browbeating them into acquiescence with the scheme of despoiling them of their lands”. Others in the area had a more general complaint against their own chiefs, whom they accused of being “always on the lookout for ‘plunder’, scheming for their own advantage only”. “Our chiefs,” they said, “in olden times oppressed us, oppressed us sore, But they always conserved our land right, but to day our chiefs join with Govt. officials to dispoil [sic] us of those rights”.¹⁴³ One Nakelo man added:

Ah Sir if the Governor could only hear our conversations in our homes, at night with our families, he would know the truth of our “rarawa, kei nai balebale ni neimame tiko vakaca” irritation, and the meaning of our perplexity and discontent.¹⁴⁴

It was the confluence of these various streams of discontent that formed the basis of support for the Federation Movement. Ironically, had the movement succeeded, Fijians would have probably lost the secure inalienable status of their lands. Fijians lost that status in any case between 1905 and 1907 through a series of amendments which Governor im Thurn used to overturn Gordon’s land laws.

im Thurn’s principal aim was “to ensure the actual release, by every available means, of as much native land as possible for development by European settlers”.¹⁴⁵ To achieve this goal, im Thurn constituted a Lands Department which, he hoped, would oversee the individualization of native titles. This tactic had often been used in other colonies as an effective way to achieve a rapid transfer of native land to European settlers.¹⁴⁶ He also attacked the conventional interpretation of the Deed of Cession as

¹⁴³ Minute by David Wilkinson, 30 October 1897, CSO 97/4573.

¹⁴⁴ Minute by David Wilkinson, 30 October 1897, CSO 97/4573.

¹⁴⁵ Paper 14: “Governor’s Address.” in *JFLC*, 1905. 4.

¹⁴⁶ Macnaught, 1982: 36. See also Alan Ward, *An Unsettled History: Treaty Claims in New Zealand Today*. Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1999.

a document that charged the state with the protection of Fijian lands. Targeting Wilkinson in particular, im Thurn suggested instead that the chiefs had ceded all land and that any surplus land not used by them should automatically belong to the Crown.¹⁴⁷

However, declaring all surplus lands the property of the Crown and replacing communal with individual ownership, did not automatically translate into actual transactions or land acquisition. Whether land was surplus or legitimately owned was a matter which had yet to be determined. Land still needed to be identified which presupposed that the claims of would-be owners needed to be heard. This evoked the notoriously slow process of land registration, over which the Native Lands Commission could only claim limited success after twenty-five years of trying.

It is in this context that the long undeclared boycott of registration in the late nineteenth century acquires its foremost significance. The boycott had slowed the process of registration long enough that im Thurn and his supporters in the settler community did not have a sufficient pool of legally defined lands and owners with which to engineer the purchase of enough land. Had people chosen to collaborate more readily with the Commission in the 1880s and 1890s, the pool of registered lands available on the market in 1905 may have been sufficient to render the process of selling Fijian land irreversible.

Similarly, the release of surplus lands had been painstakingly slow, convoluted and ultimately futile. The effort had yielded a few parcels of mostly isolated, rugged and infertile land. Aware as he was of this problem, im Thurn chose to co-opt a few influential chiefs, Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi and Ratu Kadavulevu in particular in his scheme. While this strategy delivered the desired outcome, it also attracted stiff opposition as discussed in Chapter Three.

The policy of individualizing land title was not resisted by all Fijians. Some regarded current practices as outmoded and restrictive, and were cautiously optimistic that the changes would advance their personal development. However, within two years

¹⁴⁷ Paper 1: "Governor's Address." in *JFLC*, 1908. 6-7.

(1905-1907), as acres of Fiji's best agricultural land passed into the hands of settlers, the mood soon changed from guarded optimism to outspoken pessimism. One contributor to *Na Mata* in September 1907, condemned the policy outright, saying that the chiefs were taking all the money from the sale of lands, spending it, getting drunk, with the result that both the land and the money were lost.¹⁴⁸

In addition, in choosing to work with some chiefs but not others, im Thurn offended a number of them and lost their support. When he was instructed by the home Government in 1908 to seek the views of the indigenous people in relation to his land policies,¹⁴⁹ im Thurn was faced with the prospect of consulting the *Bose Vakaturaga*, a body whose use he had discarded earlier in his tenure. Having alienated many of them, it is unlikely that he would have received the chiefs' support,¹⁵⁰ and when Arthur Gordon intervened in the House of Lords to have the new laws repealed,¹⁵¹ im Thurn's project came to a premature end. Outside agency, although less prominent than it was for indentured labourers, had come to play a critical role in counterbalancing colonial power and supporting Fijian struggles to retain control of their land assets.

im Thurn's experiments with native land intensified the suspicion and scepticism with which Fijians regarded any exercise in land registration. Governor May's attempts to resurrect the Native Lands Commission in 1911 led to a renewed though undeclared campaign of impeding surveyors and sabotaging survey pegs.¹⁵² Byrnes writes that when surveyors planted pegs in the ground, it symbolised an explicit act of possession. This was often regarded by indigenous landowners as an overt challenge on their property and sovereignty.¹⁵³ In this light, the removal of pegs by villagers can be viewed as a deliberate, and like most popular acts of defiance, a clandestine rejection of the Crown's attempts to appropriate their land.

¹⁴⁸ Cited in France: 156.

¹⁴⁹ Paper 25: "Governor's Address." in *JFLC*, 1908.

¹⁵⁰ See im Thurn's scathing attack on chiefs in his opening address to the *Bose Vakaturaga* in "Proceedings of a Native Council," Suva, 1905. 2-4. im Thurn had recently received a letter from concerned villagers expressing their gratitude for his plans to take away chiefly *lala* rights. See letter from the people of Nabitu and Vanuadina to the Governor, 17 April 1905, CSO 05/1971.

¹⁵¹ France: 161.

¹⁵² Among others, see CSO 09/7260, CSO 10/7297, and CSO 10/6685 for individual cases. For general statements, see the concerns raised by Governors May and Sweet-Escott at the 1911, 1912, 1914, and 1917 *Bose Vakaturaga*.

In particular localities, the activities of landowners were highly coordinated. Meetings would often be called before the sitting of the Commission, at which landowners would arrange what was to be told and what was to be concealed from the Commission. The chairman of the NLC reported in 1914 that Fijians did not welcome the Commission because they stood to lose much and gain little from the exercise. They therefore resorted to “every possible means to conceal the truth”.¹⁵⁴ A substantial source of revenue could be lost or gained depending on landowners’ ability to influence arbitration.

In the Ba province for instance, where the greater part of the sugar industry was now based, the investigations of the Commission in 1913 and 1914 were remarkably difficult. Landowners resented any measure that threatened the source of income they were now accustomed to from the lease of their land to Indian farmers. The result was, “an organised resistance to investigation by means of carefully prearranged suppression of inconvenient truths, accompanied in most cases by a somewhat grotesque fabrication of palpable untruths by which the parties hope to improve their position”.¹⁵⁵ Much evidence which had been previously given to the Commission in the form of oral history was now deemed dubious, forcing weeks of prior work to be disregarded and the process started over. Charges for perjury were difficult to lay given the “traditional” and oral nature of the testimony, and hence the presentation of divergent truths, or “fraud” as the commissioners described them, brought little ill consequence for the perpetrators. These sorts of obstructions in Ba were such that it took the Commission eighteen months to complete its work in the area.¹⁵⁶

Another common tactic used by landowners, was to delay proceedings for as long as possible by opting not to turn up at sittings or by neglecting to mark the boundaries of their lands. The Government reacted with an ordinance which proclaimed that “any tribe refusing to make a submission [would] be deemed not to own any land”.¹⁵⁷ It is unlikely that the Government enforced the law with any conviction for in his report

¹⁵³ Byrnes: 113.

¹⁵⁴ See Paper 27: “Report of the Chairman of the Native Lands Commission.” in *JFLC*, 1914. 3-4.

¹⁵⁵ Paper 61: “Report of the Chairman of the Native Lands Commission.” in *JFLC*, 1915. 4.

¹⁵⁶ Paper 61: *JFLC*, 1915.

¹⁵⁷ Governor’s address to the *Bose Vakaturaga* in “Proceedings of a Native Council,” Suva, 1914. 8.

for 1917, the Commissioner of Lands explained with much despair and frustration that numerous petty acts of sabotage continued to impede the Commission's work:

I regret to have to report that the progress has again been seriously retarded by the attitude of the native land owners, who for weeks together have refused to attend to point out tribal boundaries to the surveyors. No less than *one hundred and sixty – one* working days were lost in this manner and of course it has affected the cost of the work done.¹⁵⁸ (Emphasis in original)

It is worth remembering that at this time thousands of ordinary Fijians chose quietly but actively to support the Viti Kabani and thus partake in the colony's largest popular movement as discussed in Chapter Three.

Religious Conversion

Some officials blamed the Roman Catholic mission for the unrest. The Roman Catholic Church had long been on the receiving end of attacks by the political and Wesleyan establishment of the colony. As early as 1881, Thurston considered the disruptive influence of Roman Catholicism to be so great that he feared for the stability and welfare of the Colony. He accused priests of engendering feelings of hatred and of exciting disobedience among villagers.¹⁵⁹ Among the long list of charges against them, the "priests of Rome" were also accused by the Wesleyan mission of fanning "smouldering discontent into a flame," of fomenting "a spirit antagonistic to law and order", of reviving old quarrels, and of "preaching disobedience and even revolt" in the hope of acquiring new adherents.¹⁶⁰ They were

¹⁵⁸ Paper 58: "Lands Department: Report by the Commissioner of Lands for 1917. in *JFLC*, 1918. 2. For a similar example see Paper 14: "Report of the Chairman of the Native Lands Commission." in *JFLC*, 1917.

¹⁵⁹ Cited in Scarr, 1980: 90.

¹⁶⁰ See Minutes and Journals of the Fiji District Annual Synod 1874-1892 and 1891-1907. F/4/A and B. Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia. Fiji District. See also Appendix to Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Fiji District Committee begun at Viwa 12 October 1888 and Navuloa 9 October 1889. Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia. Fiji District. For numerous other such references to the threat of Roman Catholicism in the various districts of the colony, see the Circuit Reports from 1888 to 1899 of the Methodist Church. F/6. Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia. Fiji District. For Roman Catholic records of such accusations, see Gallais's letter to the CS, 11 February 1890, and Gallais to Vidal, 12 April 1890. Roman Catholic Mission, Fiji: Correspondence with Government and Others re Native Affairs 1883-1924. Microfilm Copy PMB 459. Pacific Manuscripts Bureau. Canberra: The Australian National Library, 1972.

also accused by village and district chiefs of variously obstructing work, upsetting good order, disturbing the unity of village life, encouraging the lazy and disaffected, condoning the non-payment of government tax, and more generally of being at the origin of disturbances to the peace.¹⁶¹ Writing in 1891 in the wake of the resurgence of Tuka in the Ra region, Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi estimated that the activities of the Roman Catholic mission were more harmful to the colony than those of Tuka:

Roman Catholicism is doing more harm: It endeavours to withdraw allegiance of the people from the chiefs. Its leaders continually look for and accept the first fruits that are payable to chiefs only. Its agents have endeavoured to relieve prisoners from gaol, have caused unseemly wrangling among native officers, have been concerned, several times, in the withdrawal of children from their natural guardians so that they might imbibe its doctrines, like the disciples of the “Tuka” they teach that “there is no salvation outside the Church. ... Votaries accord to the Head priest forms of respect due alone to the Queen or her representative, and in the service of this “religion” leave their communal duties undone. They remove women from their communities and shut them up where they are not available as wives and mothers ... These things amount to a very substantial form of “vakatubuca”.¹⁶²

Priests fervently denied these allegations and protested that Roman Catholics were being persecuted. In a letter to the Colonial Secretary, Father Gallais defended Roman Catholic doctrine and stated unequivocally that “a Catholic who is not respectful of the established law is in fact a bad Catholic, because he should know that any regular authority comes from God himself”.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ See the accusations by the Buli Nailega as reported by Carew, 19 October 1889, CSO 89/2980. See also the allegations of the chiefs of Ba and Yasawa at their provincial meeting in CSO 90/309, and by the Buli Qaliyalatina on the defection of Nakoroboya people to Qara in Bulu (Ba) after their Roman Catholic teacher was evicted from their village by the chief. Buli Qaliyalatina to CS, 9 June 1890, CSO 90/2013; and Thomson to Governor, 21 April 1890, CSO 90/1061.

¹⁶² Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi report on the revival of Tuka in the Nalawa district, 15 March, 1891, CSO 91/1133.

¹⁶³ Gallais to CS, 11 February 1890. Roman Catholic Mission, Fiji: Correspondence with Government and Others re Native Affairs 1883-1924. Microfilm Copy PMB 459. Pacific Manuscripts Bureau. Canberra: The Australian National Library. 1972.

The rivalry is important because in between the accusations and counter-accusations that opposing priests hurled at each other, the presence of a rival denomination provided an alternative for people to express their dissatisfaction with the government, their chief or the mission. I do not deny that there were important doctrinal, cultural, and practical reasons for choosing Roman Catholicism, but like Tuka, Catholicism represented a different kind of political and religious entity which seemed to exist quasi-independently from the Wesleyan-colonial alliance. It gave people the option of contemplating an existence beyond the confines of established religious and secular authority while still remaining within the legitimizing force of Christianity.¹⁶⁴ This caused all sorts of complications for the management of people. Expressing his frustration at the 1879 *Bose Vakaturaga*, the Roko Tui Ba explained:

Is it not a capital sin that there should be two religions – that when one is vexed or put out for having been reprimanded, one can flee to the Catholics and become of their religion at once, or, if a Catholic, do the reverse?¹⁶⁵

This view was supported by other chiefs in the *Bose* who feared that such “light-minded” conversions would challenge their authority.¹⁶⁶ Their concern was shared by Carew who despaired at the ease with which people evaded their communal work by simply joining the rival denomination:

Catholics have far too many Holy Days besides Sundays – this interferes altogether with public work. They go over to the Catholics to get away from their chiefs and from communal work of all descriptions.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ The increased defection from Methodism to Seventh Day Adventism was also accelerated by the “Number 8 Movement” of Sailosi Nagusolevu that swept through the Northern and inland district of Viti Levu in 1918. Nagusolevu linked his vision of the overthrow of Fiji’s colonial government, the Methodist Mission, and Britain’s surrender to Germany with the prophecies of Navosavakadua and the administrative and economic aims of the Viti Kabani. Sailosi Nagusolevu and his movement are discussed by Nicholas Thomas in *In Oceania: Visions, Artefacts, Histories*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997. 50-67. See also Andrew Thornley, 1979: 155, 197-8.

¹⁶⁵ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” Bau, 1879. 20.

¹⁶⁶ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1879. 20.

¹⁶⁷ See Carew’s minute in Resident Commissioner Colo East to CS, 19 October 1889, CSO 89/2980.

By 1893, Thurston was positively hostile to the Roman Catholic Mission and its head Monseigneur Vidal. He accused Vidal of enticing Fijians with the following invitation:

Come over to us and we will give you protection against the chiefs. Join us and we will stand between you and every obligation under which you lie.¹⁶⁸

He also accused Father Rougier, a priest stationed in Rewa, of inviting former Tuka votaries to join Roman Catholicism because the mission was “free from any control and could ‘veitalia’ that is, do anything it pleased”. Rougier appealed to them to be “big minded”, to set their chiefs at defiance and to be afraid of nothing.¹⁶⁹ This, Thurston claimed was a menace to the public peace because it tended to appeal to those who were “inimical to the Government” and provided a refuge for the discontented and disorderly.¹⁷⁰ He added that “if the natives at large come to believe that there is any authority superior, or even equal, to that of the Queen and the “Matanitu”, government by moral suasion in this colony will cease to exist”.¹⁷¹ The Government was therefore clearly annoyed by the influence, authority and independence which the Roman Catholic Mission enjoyed in the colony. It was also worried about the kind of convert that the Church was attracting, and the potential for subversion and even secession that existed.

When the Seventh Day Adventists (SDAs) entered the fray in the 1890s, they added another dimension to Fiji’s religious landscape. One of their first converts was the influential but rebellious Tui Suva, Ratu Avorosa who, as we noted in Chapter Three had already played a role in the Federation movement and other land claims in Tailevu. Among his first deeds as an SDA convert, Ratu Avorosa distinguished himself by washing the feet of commoners in his village at Suvavou.¹⁷² Commenting on the popularity of the Adventists in Colo, Brewster wrote, “although its introducers were good, homely men, who led the most exemplary lives, it proved a veritable causer of strife and another Cave of Adullam”. This was in no small part due to a

¹⁶⁸ Despatch 84, Thurston to SS, 19 October 1893. CSO Despatches. NAF.

¹⁶⁹ Despatch 84, Thurston to SS, 19 October 1893.

¹⁷⁰ Despatch 84, Thurston to SS, 19 October 1893.

¹⁷¹ Despatch 84, Thurston to SS, 19 October 1893.

¹⁷² Thornley, 1979: 195.

large number of those opposed and punished by the Government or the rival Wesleyan and Roman Catholic authorities, flocking to the new body.¹⁷³

By 1904, the SDA Church was making progress in Ra and the Northern interior of Viti Levu after receiving unlimited access to the villages from Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi.¹⁷⁴ When the Vatukaloko deportees returned from their exile in Kadavu, many of them became SDAs. The conversions continued through the 1910s and by the 1921 census, many areas of Colo and Ra had adopted Roman Catholicism or Seventh Day Adventism as their preferred creed. For instance, in the rebellious district of Navatusila only thirty-one out of 259 villagers were Methodists. The whole of Nadrau was SDA. In neighbouring Savatu, the majority were SDAs. One quarter of the district of Nasau was SDA. In some villages such as Naloto in Naboubuco, the proportion of Methodists, Roman Catholics and SDAs was almost equal. The districts of Nailega and Noemalu also had significant non-Methodist populations. Hence if the overwhelming majority of coastal villages in Viti Levu were Methodist, a large proportion of interior villages were either Roman Catholic or SDA.¹⁷⁵

There is little coincidence in the prevalence of Roman Catholicism and Seventh Day Adventism in those areas where the Government and its affinity with the Wesleyan Church and Eastern chiefs was most resented. Some villages such as Drauniivi and areas such as Ra with a strong history of opposition to the colonial order chose to remain mainly within the Wesleyan fold. In the case of Drauniivi, as Kaplan argues, this strategic decision was taken to equip their customary and land claims with a greater degree of legitimacy, and to help challenge and overturn their political, economic and spatial dispossession from within the governing political and religious institutions.¹⁷⁶

Moreover, Methodism, was not a religious monolith and neither were its missionaries a homogenous group. While the Wesleyan Church was close to the chiefs and the Government, some of its missionaries acted in support of ordinary people against the exactions of their chiefs and the Government. As we have seen, several were opposed

¹⁷³ Brewster, 1922: 141.

¹⁷⁴ Thornley, 1979: 196.

¹⁷⁵ *Fiji Census Report*, 1921: 14-17.

to chiefly *lala*. They were also actively engaged against unscrupulous traders and labour recruiters. They raised their concern about such problems as poverty and other social and economic ills which made some villagers so destitute that they could no longer attend church.¹⁷⁷

In this matter, the Reverend William Slade was one of the government's staunchest opponents. Rev. Slade distinguished himself by his frequent attacks on the tax regime and his support for Federation with New Zealand. He denounced the Government's native policy for stifling individual enterprise:

In Fiji, a young man who feels the village boundaries to be too strait for him and has aspirations and ambitions to attain to something beyond the rank of mere hewer of weed or drawer of water, is met at the outset by an inflexible communal system that holds him in relentless grip.¹⁷⁸

By regulating "every detail of native life" through the multiplication of Ordinances, the ordinary Fijian had been hedged round "like the spikes in regulus barrel".¹⁷⁹ Fijian chiefs were the principal enforcers of this system and often abused it. They took advantage of the 1877 regulation IX relating to *vakatubuca* or "evil speaking" and *talaidredre* to punish anyone who did not agree or disobeyed them. In Kadavu for instance, two men from Nabukelevu were punished by fine and imprisonment for refusing to prepare *yaqona* for two petty chiefs from neighbouring Daviqele village.¹⁸⁰ On the same island, a Buli proceeded against two men for *talaidredre* after they spent ten shillings of their money earned while working for a year in Viti Levu. They were punished because the Buli had earmarked the money to be used for

¹⁷⁶ Kaplan, 1995: 158.

¹⁷⁷ See for instance Cakaudrove Circuit Report by Rev. William Slade. F/6/1888: Circuit Reports. Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia, Fiji District.

¹⁷⁸ Letter in the *Fiji Times*, 1 September 1900. This view was shared by Dr Brough who on a visit to Kadavu reported that "at present the commoners have little to interest them in life, beyond the gratification of their animal passions – if they try to accumulate property, it is taken from them – if they try to leave their towns, they are brought back – all commoners who remain in their towns are kept constantly working ... for the benefit of somebody else. ... If they go to work in other provinces under labour contracts their earnings are taken from them, either for public or private purposes." Brough to im Thurn, July 18 1904. Paper 25, M.S 2, im Thurn Papers. 11.

¹⁷⁹ Letter in the *Fiji Times*, 1 September 1900.

¹⁸⁰ Brough to im Thurn, July 18 1904. Paper 25, M.S 2, im Thurn Papers. 7.

building a church.¹⁸¹ These excesses led one official to call for the people to be “saved from their chiefs”.¹⁸² There was therefore little incentive for villagers to stay.

Slade was also critical of the policy of amalgamating villages. The only purpose which it served, he claimed, was to free up land for lease to foreigners. He demanded to know why the chiefs who opposed amalgamation were charged with “vakatubuca”.¹⁸³ From the government’s perspective, the purpose of amalgamation of so many villages was to ease administration and for hygienic reasons. Nicholas Thomas has argued that the public health and sanitary programmes between 1876 and 1920, were a form of social engineering which allowed Britain to rule Fiji without violent repression. The amalgamation of such a large number of villages functioned to create an orderly, accessible and visible village while simultaneously reducing the potential for disorder. It allowed the process to appear as an operation of welfare rather than conquest.¹⁸⁴ This is particularly noticeable when reading through the “Report of the Commission on the Decrease of the Native Population.”¹⁸⁵

However, the evidence suggests that there was little resistance to village amalgamation.¹⁸⁶ In fact, many of the practical recommendations of the Commission on the Decrease of the Native Population had already been discussed by the chiefs in several previous *Bose Vakaturaga*, and measures to improve the health and life expectancy of villagers were already being implemented in the villages by villagers themselves.¹⁸⁷ While the Report was a typical case of colonial intent to intervene in the lives of ordinary people, its impact in the villages was severely diluted.

Moreover, while the administration may have wished to enhance its power, surveillance mechanism, and disciplinary effects, the impetus to move often came from the people themselves. They had their own agenda. Some wanted to move

¹⁸¹ Brought to im Thurn, July 18 1904. Paper 25, M.S 2, im Thurn Papers. 12.

¹⁸² Brought to im Thurn, July 18 1904. Paper 25, M.S 2, im Thurn Papers. 15.

¹⁸³ Letter in the *Fiji Times*, 1 September 1900.

¹⁸⁴ Thomas, 1990: 149-70.

¹⁸⁵ *Report of the Commission on Decrease of the Native Population 1893*. Suva: Government of Fiji, 1896.

¹⁸⁶ For villages that resisted amalgamation, see SM Macuata to CS, 26 April 1898, CSO 98/1996; the petition by the people of Votuna to CS, 3 January 1907, CSO 07/395; and the petition by the people of Navunimono to CS, 16 January 1907, CSO 07/1535.

because they knew better sites.¹⁸⁸ Some wished to move because they disliked an official.¹⁸⁹ Some wished to move to join a different district with which they had stronger historical and cultural connections.¹⁹⁰ Some wanted to evade paying taxes.¹⁹¹ Some wanted to move because of internal village disputes or harassment.¹⁹² Some simply moved out of religious conviction.¹⁹³ Hence, while Slade (and Thomas) was sensitive to the designs of power, he may have underestimated the willingness of ordinary villagers to participate in the sanitation exercise, by subverting and occasionally substituting the colonial agenda with their own.

Education

Reverend Slade was also critical of the Government's policy on the education of Fijians. So much of the individual's time was required for tax work that their demands for education were often refused. "To educate the Fijian", he wrote, meant "to promote discontent, because when the eyes of the natives are opened, and they are able to compare their condition with the other races in Fiji, they naturally become dissatisfied".¹⁹⁴

Slade had good reason to attack the government on its educational record among the Fijian populace. Had formal education been left solely in the hands of the colonial administration, very few, of Fiji's people would have received anything more than elementary schooling. While Ordinance 15 of 1877 stipulated that all children between the ages of six and twelve were to attend school,¹⁹⁵ the state itself provided no assistance in the education of these children. Instead the Government relied exclusively on the missions to provide this service. More than thirty years later, when

¹⁸⁷ The issue of sanitation in Fijian villages was discussed at consecutive meetings of the Bose Vakaturaga. See the "Proceedings of a Native Council" from 1881-1896.

¹⁸⁸ See for instance, SM Macuata to Governor, 5 September 1889, CSO 89/3559; item XII in the Report of the Ba and Yasawa Provincial Council Meeting, 19 December 1889, enclosed in CSO 90/309; and SM Lau to CS, 28 November 1896, CSO 96/4495.

¹⁸⁹ See Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi to CS, 5 May 1891, CSO 91/1029; and Assistant Commissioner Colo West to Acting CS, 27 October 1900, CSO 00/4252.

¹⁹⁰ See Chalmers to Commissioner Colo West, 21 May 1899, CSO 99/2633; and Minutes of a Provincial Council for Naitasiri Province, 4 June 1889, CSO 89/1561.

¹⁹¹ See Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi to CS, 5 May 1891, CSO 91/1029.

¹⁹² See Acting Roko Tui Rewa reporting on the wish of the Nakere people to remove their town, 14 October 1897, CSO 97/4720.

¹⁹³ See Buli Qaliyalatina reporting on the removal of people to Ba, 9 June 1890, CSO 90/2013.

¹⁹⁴ *The Fiji Times*, 23 April 1902.

¹⁹⁵ *Regulations of the Native Regulation Board: 1877-1882*. London: Harrison and Sons, 1883: 38.

the long promised Education Commission sat in 1909, the Headmaster of the newly constituted Queen Victoria School tabled a severe indictment of the government's record on education. Of ten other British colonies generally similar to Fiji (including Mauritius, British Guiana, Barbados, Cyprus, British Honduras, and Gold Coast), Fiji rated the lowest both in terms of the percentage of its revenue spent on education (1.3 %) and of its spending on education per head of population (less than five pence.)¹⁹⁶ Of that, only a tiny fraction was spent on the education of the sons of Fijian chiefs at the Queen Victoria School and nothing at all on the education of Indian children.¹⁹⁷

After thirty-five years of colonial rule, the government did not have an Education Department. It could boast two public schools reserved for Europeans (and “well-behaved and respectable half-castes”¹⁹⁸) two failed technical schools for Fijian boys, and one school recently established to cater for the secondary education of the sons of Fijian chiefs. During this period, the burden of providing basic formal education in the colony had fallen entirely on the shoulders of the missions.¹⁹⁹ In 1909, the Methodist mission had one of its 1,041 schools in almost every village of the archipelago with 912 teachers, 1171 pupil-teachers, and 17,695 students. The Catholic mission had 159 schools, with 225 teachers, and 1750 students.²⁰⁰ School was mostly conducted in the village church, the teacher's salary was mostly paid for by the voluntary contributions of the villagers, and the curriculum consisted of various

¹⁹⁶ Paper 30: “Education Commission Report of 1909.” in *JFLC*, 1910. 46.

¹⁹⁷ Education Commission Report: 46.

¹⁹⁸ The education of children of mixed parentage was always a contentious issue and requires more attention than is possible here. The following is a sample of the divergent opinions that existed. The chairman of the Suva School Board told the Education Commission about ‘half-castes’: “We try to keep them all out.” Education Commission Report: 70. On the other hand, Brother Alphonsus who had taught in Fiji with the Marist Brothers since 1888, supported a more inclusive approach: “Personally I am not in favour of excluding well-behaved half-castes of respectable parentage from European schools. We are a very mixed people, and the more distinctions we make, the more bitterness we stir up. In places such as Suva, I would suggest only two classes of schools for different races - one for Europeans and respectable half-castes, the other for all other shades and races.” Education Commission Report: 51. Adding to the discussion, David Wilkinson added about ‘half-caste’ children: “Yes, I would not make any exception. I have heard unfavourable reports of the conduct of half-castes in the playground, but I am of opinion that they are no worse than white children. I think they should have the same privileges as European children.” Education Commission Report: 102. Owing to the shift of the capital to Suva, the Levuka Public School experienced a gradual change in the ethnic composition of its student population. In 1909 only twenty-eight percent of children were considered to be “pure” Europeans. Education Commission Report: 3. Note also that there were small schools for “Polynesians” in Suva and Levuka.

¹⁹⁹ For pre-Cession historical background on mission education in Fiji, read Thornley, 2002: 191, 358, and 480, and Appendix F of the Education Commission Report of 1909.

²⁰⁰ Education Commission Report: 4.

combinations of reading, writing, maths, geography, drill English, history, scripture studies, elementary book-keeping, elementary agriculture, and elementary science.²⁰¹

The government's lack of interest in the education of non-Europeans in Fiji reflected the dominant view held by administrators and business leaders that "black races" were naturally suited for agriculture and nothing else.²⁰² A good cross-section of these views is contained in the Report of the 1909 Education Commission. Speaking in his capacity as the Deputy Native Commissioner, W. A. Scott declared that "speaking generally, there is at present no scope in the Colony for highly-educated natives".²⁰³ A. G. Ross, another commissioner who was in correspondence with the celebrated African-American intellectual Booker T. Washington about the education of Fijians,²⁰⁴ believed that practical agricultural and industrial training were the most appropriate for Fijians. The headmaster of QVS concurred. In a minute regarding Education in the British Empire, he wrote:

In my opinion there is always a danger in giving anything more than an elementary literary education, except in a very limited number of cases, to native races.²⁰⁵

Hence, ordinary Fijians faced considerable opposition to any education that would give them the means of breaking the cycle of communal and agricultural labour.

Because their chiefs were better placed in the administrative structure of the colony, it was through them that Fijian educational aspirations were first channelled. The chiefs understood education to be a potent instrument with which they could secure and improve their status and that of their immediate families. They responded by taking

²⁰¹ Education Commission Report: 94, 100.

²⁰² As early as May 1876, Gordon had articulated this view unambiguously by declaring that "Fijians are agriculturalists by birth and inclination". Despatch 87, Gordon to SS, 6 May 1876. CSO Despatches.

²⁰³ Education Commission Report: 65.

²⁰⁴ Education Commission Report: 121. While Ross's views on Fijian education are clearly stated in the Commission Report, the content of Booker T. Washington's replies to Ross on this subject remain unknown. Ross was supported by another of Booker T. Washington's admirers, the Reverend A.G. Stewart, superintendent of the Seventh Day Adventist training school in Buresala Ovalau, who submitted that the educational improvement of Fijians should follow the example of the 'American Negro'. See Education Commission Report: 116.

²⁰⁵ Thompson's minute is dated 13 July 1909, CSO 09/2649.

initiatives that reflected their own interests. In this endeavour, they were widely supported by the administration. In their letter to the Queen after the 1879 *Bose Vakaturaga*, they made their desire for an industrial school known to the administration.²⁰⁶ Within two years, a technical school was opened at Yanawai in Bua, Vanua Levu, where about a hundred students came every year to learn carpentry, mechanics and agriculture. By the mid 1880s the number of students began to decline ostensibly because it was too far from the new capital and only accessible by boat.²⁰⁷ However, most of the students were the sons of Bulis, and it is likely that the students and their fathers had other aspirations in mind than careers in agriculture or boat-building.

In 1890, the chiefs asked the Governor for more schools to educate young people beyond the elementary standard of mission schools where students could learn English.²⁰⁸ The request was repeated at the next *Bose* in 1892, with renewed emphasis on English as the medium of instruction and a call for the school to be located close to Suva. A suitable site for the new school was duly found in 1894 at Naikorokoro near Veisari, nine miles out of Suva. In approving the school, Thurston told the chiefs that this school would be used to train “young men of intelligence and good family” for Government work and in the duties of Buli, Turaga-ni-lewa, Turaga-ni-koro, Provincial Secretaries, officers and so forth. They would be taught English and technical subjects.²⁰⁹ In the end, the school prioritised the learning of carpentry and boat-building, and suffered the same fate as the Yanawai school. By 1900 it was closed and the chiefs proposed a new school.²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 197. 74.

²⁰⁷ Despatch 171, H. S. Berkeley to SS, 23 January 1896. CSO Despatches.

²⁰⁸ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1890. 13.

²⁰⁹ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1894. 4-5.

²¹⁰ Some chiefs took their own initiative in the education of their sons. In 1898 for instance, Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi asked for permission that his eldest son Ratu Josefa Sukuna be allowed to enter the Government’s “Europeans Only” Suva school. The request was declined. See clerk of Suva School Board to CS, 21 February 1898, CSO 98/913. Using Ra Provincial Funds which he repaid in instalments, Ratu Joni then sent his son to the Wanganui Preparatory School for Boys whose headmaster had worked as superintendent of the Naikorokoro technical school for six years. See CSO 02/147 for official correspondence relating to Ratu Sukuna’s education. Ratu Sukuna went on to Wanganui Collegiate in 1903 where his performance was “most praiseworthy”. He excelled in History, Grammar and Algebra. Atkinson to CS, 26 August 1903, CSO 03/3915. In 1914, the *Bose Vakaturaga* resolved that the provinces further subsidise Ratu Sukuna’s education in England. With the previous resolution they had severely censured Apolosi Nawai for his activities with the Viti Kabani. See “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1914. Ratu Sukuna and Apolosi Nawai would eventually become bitter foes with Ratu Sukuna insisting on Nawai’s exile to Rotuma in 1917.

At the *Bose Vakaturaga* of 1902, they resolved that a high school, rather than a technical school, be built for Fijians with the money raised for a memorial to the Queen.²¹¹ They did not wish for any teaching in trade but rather that only those subjects that were taught in English public schools and colleges be taught at the school. In his budget address for 1905, Governor im Thurn announced the building of a school at Nasinu (just outside Suva) for “the young generation of Fijians in order that, as far as is desirable, they may imbibe European rather than Fijian habits of thought and work and - what is to my mind not the least important item - language”.²¹² However the school was to be restricted to the sons of chiefs. im Thurn believed that there were two classes of Fijians and that so far as these performed two different functions – “the chiefs as thinkers and overseers, the commoners as manual labourers,” he recommended that a different education was desirable for each class.²¹³

Queen Victoria School was completed in 1906 and admitted its first intake the following year. An average of two students per province (and three for the more populous provinces) were selected by the Native Commissioner and the Rokos of each province and took classes in hygiene, agriculture, type-writing and shorthand and telegraphy for employment in branches of the Public Service and the Native Department. At first, only a fraction of the students were the sons of chiefs. However, under the insistence of the headmaster, this policy was soon reversed and by 1910 only the sons of chiefs were admitted:

After three years' experience I have come to the conclusion that as a general rule a chief's son is far more intelligent than the son of a commoner, and that it will always be to the advantage of the Government to admit a chief's son in preference to another. Many of these boys will become Rokos and Bulis and as such will be able to repay the Government for the training that they have received at Queen Victoria School.²¹⁴

²¹¹ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1902. 10.

²¹² Paper 21: “Estimates for 1905.” in *JFLC*, 1904. 8.

²¹³ Minute on the Educational Question in Fiji. im Thurn to Charles Major, 4 November 1908. Paper 37. im Thurn Papers. im Thurn conceded that abler boys of the commoner class should be encouraged to enter the new school. In the first two years, there were more commoners enrolled at Queen Victoria School than sons of chiefs.

²¹⁴ Paper 24: “Report on Queen Victoria School.” in *JFLC*, 1910. 4.

With Queen Victoria School, the chiefs acquired the means by which to perpetuate their hold over the key administrative positions in Fijian affairs. It was a milestone not so much in Fijian as in elite development and consolidation.

Throughout this period, commoners were largely left to fend for themselves. As we saw earlier in the chapter, ordinary people had quickly realised that in the evolving world of British colonial rule, education was one of the means by which they could acquire greater control over their own future and that, beyond the elementary education provided by the village mission schools, they would have to seek and find it through their own efforts. Some chose to shape their own destinies and left their villages in search of the educational opportunities made available by the technical and theological training schools at the Methodist stations of Navuloa and Davuilevu and the Catholic stations at Cawaci on Ovalau and Naililili in Rewa. This accounts partly for the “very large” number of people who were “irregularly” absent from their villages as previously discussed.²¹⁵

Davuilevu functioned increasingly like an augmented secondary school and a tertiary institution. It contained a theological college for ministry, a training institute for native teachers and a secondary school for young Fijian men desiring a higher education. However, the instruction was entirely in Fijian. The Roman Catholics, on the other hand, taught in English in bigger schools with well-trained expatriate staff and good boarding facilities. For these reasons, Thornley has remarked, many parents sacrificed denominational loyalty for educational opportunity and ‘yielded up’ their children to the priest.²¹⁶ With the additional three schools from the Seventh Day Adventist mission,²¹⁷ this competition created more opportunities for ambitious commoners to break out of the cycle of village-based communal obligations.

Yet, those who remained in the villages also made substantial sacrifices for the education of their children. Children were usually encouraged to attend school and only when the demands of tax work, chiefly *lala*, or plantation labour became

²¹⁵ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1894. 68.

²¹⁶ Thornley, 1979: 192.

²¹⁷ The SDA mission ran schools in Bureta, Ovalau, Ra, and Suvavou.

excessive, did school attendance decline. Some chiefs led the way in the promotion of provincial education and in the absence of any support from the Government, the people responded by producing excess taxes and freed up large blocks of land for the establishment and running of these provincial schools. The most successful of these schools were established in Natuatuacoko (Fort Carnarvon) in Colo West after the 1876 Colo War, Lakeba in Lau where the enterprising headmaster A. M. Hocart used a distinctly Fijian curriculum, and Nanukuloa in Ra at the initiative of Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi.²¹⁸

The determination with which Fijians sought out the advantages of education did not go unnoticed. In his 1907 address to the Fiji Legislative Council, im Thurn observed, “it sometimes seems to me that the natives appreciate the advantages of education more than do some of the European residents”.²¹⁹ Apolosi Nawai and his supporters were certainly aware of such advantages, when they embarked on their scheme to set up a network of Viti Kabani schools throughout the country previously discussed in Chapter Three.

One of the striking and recurring motifs of the battle for education was the insistence and emphasis on the teaching of English. The process by which English became synonymous with power has its roots embedded in the Government’s administration of the law. From the beginning, the colonial courts took centre stage in the adjudication of right and wrong between Europeans and non-Europeans and the former’s quasi monopoly of English placed them at a considerable advantage over the latter.²²⁰ In this setting the position of interpreter, almost always occupied by a European official, was particularly powerful. Many Fijians came to dread interpreters and feared their power to mislead the court and thus determine the outcome of cases. This was particularly so in the early years when European magistrates were seldom fluent enough in the Fijian language to determine the veracity of the interpreter’s translations. Considerable anxiety was caused and much disquiet ensued when the

²¹⁸ See Paper 37, M.S. 2, Sir Everard im Thurn Papers. NAF; see also Education Commission Report: 29, 125-6.

²¹⁹ Paper 24: “His Excellency’s Message to the Legislative Council.” in *JFLC*, 1907.

²²⁰ For an example of a report on a court case where the leader of a group of Fijian labourers, tried to address the court in English and was barred from doing so and told to speak Fijian instead, see Borron to CS, 4 February 1888 in CSO 88/466.

stakes were high, as in the adjudication of pre-Cession land claims. Speaking on the matter at the 1880 *Bose Vakaturaga*, Ratu Maika testified:

I know other cases where a Native has given an explanation of a native custom, most important to the subject, and has been told by the interpreter to shut up, that nobody understands Fijian customs, or that this is not the age for them. ... Many of the evils complained of about the land enquiry, I believe are more to be attributed to the interpreters than to the gentlemen who are conducting the enquiry.²²¹

English was the language of power. It has been argued that the English language was used as an instrument of imperialism to establish mental and cultural control over the colonised.²²² While I am sympathetic with it, very little direct evidence exists to support this view in the first forty years of British rule in Fiji. On the other hand, there is much evidence to suggest that rather than impose English as a form of mental colonisation, the Government and the missions, except the Roman Catholics, adopted a deliberate policy of withholding the teaching of English from the non-European population. The English language thus became an important site of contestation between the colonised who viewed it as the means to secure their own advancement, and the authorities, who viewed it as an instrument of power to be preserved for Europeans only.

Representing the latter view, E. W. Fenner, Manager for the CSR in Fiji, told the Education Commission that “to teach English to Fijians as a whole would, in my opinion, be a great mistake as it would only tend to make them despise manual labour which, after all, must be the source of livelihood of most natives”.²²³ Joske agreed. Calling on his twenty-five years of experience in the administration of Fijians, he claimed that those “natives” who spoke English were unreliable.²²⁴ Expressing a different opinion, J. V. Thompson, principal of Queen Victoria School, held that in

²²¹ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1880. 12. See also Resolution 4 of the 1879 *Bose Vakaturaga* when the matter was first raised and brought to the attention of the Governor. “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1879. 77.

²²² Ngugi wa Thiongo, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1986.

²²³ Education Commission Report: 91.

²²⁴ Education Commission Report: 92.

teaching English at his school, Fijians were gradually being “anglicised” and this would help them become more useful members of the community. Knowledge of the language would literally give them something to think about:

It is unreasonable to expect to find thinkers among the Fijians in their present state, and I have little doubt that when they are alone they think of “Maistly nothin”; but if a knowledge of English becomes general and they are able to read for themselves, they will have something to think about.²²⁵

These views were expressed in the highest echelons of the administration. Speaking about his policy on Education in 1911, Governor Henry May explained in his first meeting with the chiefs that Fijians should be instructed in methods of agriculture, the care and management of cattle, carpentering, and the elements of building construction. While he agreed that English could be taught, the emphasis of Fijian education should be placed on those subjects that he thought would be most suited for the development of the agricultural resources of the colony.²²⁶

The place of women in this problematic is inconclusive. This is because, while there is some evidence about the objectives of the missions and Government in educating Fijian girls,²²⁷ very little is known of the objectives of these girls and their communities in supporting their education. An even greater silence prevails over the early education of Indian girls. As we will see in Chapter Seven, this archival silence is due in part to the traditional exclusion of women and their voices from the records. It is also due to the fact that with a few exceptions, the post-elementary education of girls was not deemed necessary until after our period of study. Hence, this important aspect of education is mentioned as a signpost in the hope that it will lead to a more comprehensive and conclusive study in the future.

²²⁵ Education Commission Report: 124.

²²⁶ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1911. 3.

²²⁷ Reference to women leaving their villages to attend religious training institutions has already been made. For other documents treating with the early education of girls in Fiji, see the *Report of the Commission on Decrease of the Native Population 1893* (page 125 especially); See also references to the education of girls in the Education Commission of 1909; For a short history of the well-regarded Matavelo School for girls in Nailaga, Ba which was established by Reverend Slade, see M/150/L in the Second Series of Miscellaneous files in the Methodist Church Records. Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia. Fiji District; See also CSO 98/3498 and CSO 98/3755 regarding the establishment of

In their totality therefore, the efforts of ordinary villagers to acquire greater self-determination through education beyond elementary school, bore very little visible signs of success. At the end of our period of study, ordinary Fijians remained a largely semi-literate population denied the means of participating in the social, political and economic life of the colony beyond their assigned role as agricultural workers.

Reflections

The evidence presented in this chapter supports the view that ordinary people, even when they were marginalized, retain considerable agency to fashion their lives in ways not entirely controlled by the dominant. While their actions may not seem spectacular or revolutionary, they displace the unified image of Fiji and Fijians as obedient, submissive beings living an idyllic life under the supervision of chiefs and the tutelage of benevolent colonial officials.

We can also conclude that contestation was not restricted to those exceptional moments of popular explosion as were the Colo and Seaqaqa wars, Tuka, the plantation strikes and riots, and the organised grassroots movements of the early twentieth century. Much of their battle was fought in the distinct political environment which lay in the vicinity of their villages. There, they navigated between that immense political terrain that Scott says, lies between quiescence and revolt.²²⁸

In that space, they confronted those charged with their immediate coercion: their own chiefs.²²⁹ For the most part, this confrontation took the form of non-compliance and evasion. People took flight to evade communal obligations including tax work and *lala*, or joined undeclared boycotts such as that which rendered the Native Lands Commission's work so difficult. While a few were impromptu and spontaneous, most were preoccupied with the practical matter of surviving in an often hostile environment.

the school; for the threat to the Wesleyan mission posed by the opening of an SDA girls school at Natewa Bay in Vanua Levu, see Thornley, 1979: 200.

²²⁸ Scott, 1990: 199.

Success depended on the adoption of tactics that were beyond the gaze of the powerful. This was necessary to avoid detection and punishment. Clandestine and anonymous activities such as the removal of survey pegs were therefore well suited to the circumstances of the discontented. Occasionally however, everyday resistance took on a more public manifestation as did the resurgence of *luveniwai* rituals of invulnerability. At other times, it formed the basis for larger popular movements to emerge as was the case for the Federation Movement and the Viti Kabani.

The inconsistencies and divisions that existed between the main Christian denominations and between secular and religious authorities, produced multiple avenues for people to variously question, contest and occasionally reject the designs of the powerful and to inject into that space, their own ambitions. Some found such an avenue in the education provided by the missions, which furnished a few enterprising individuals with the powerful means with which to break out of the perpetual cycle of subservience and agricultural labour.

There were also shifts across time. While people exploited the avenues created by the transitional period of the 1870s and 1880s, they became more circumspect in the 1890s when village life became more regimented and colonial rule more routinized. Yet, when pressure mounted on their land in the early twentieth century, people regrouped and defended this most vital of resources. Everyday resistance in Fiji was therefore shaped as much by space as it was by time.

The extent to which everyday resistance in the villages was similar and yet different from the plantation world is the subject of the next chapter. It is to the insurgent stories of those who formed the underclass of the plantation that we now turn.

²²⁹ Not all chiefs were resisted all the time. Some chiefs supported the rebellious actions of their people and occasionally provided leadership. Their role in leading resistance is important and deserves more space than is available here.

Chapter Six

Everyday Resistance on the Plantations

The prevailing wisdom about organised resistance on Fiji's plantations, as we saw in Chapter Four, is that it was rare. In this chapter, a window is opened into the everyday world of Fiji's plantation microcosm to examine the everyday forms of resistance that labourers used in-between large conflagrations. For reasons identified in the previous chapter, it is impossible to reproduce here the entirety of the spectrum of experiences that was spawned by the indentured system. The focal point of the chapter is the plantation labourer and that fragment of his and her experience that defied authority. Because the bulk of labourers on Fiji's plantation were Indian indentured immigrants, the discussion examines the particularity of their everyday lives and forms of protests. Beginning with the spectacular forms of retributive violence which labourers used against plantation authorities, the discussion explores physical violence as the point at which resistance was forced outside "normal channels" by aggrieved labourers against their immediate superiors, against other *girmitiyas*, and against themselves. This section is followed by an examination of various "weapons of the weak"¹ such as evasion, absenteeism, desertion, sabotage, and petitions. The chapter ends with a discussion of the role of religion and education as instruments by which labourers contested the fate of perpetual bondage reserved for them by managerial and government authorities.

Violence and Retributive Justice

The violence of indenture is well documented in Fiji's historiography.² All studies have shown Fiji's plantations to be sites of extraordinary physical violence where numerous murders, attempted murders, assaults, suicides, rapes, etc., were actually or potentially a part of everyday life. They also indicate that violence was not the unilateral prerogative of plantation authorities, but that it permeated the lives of all

¹ See Scott, 1985.

² Gillion, 1962; Ali, 1979, 1980; Naidu, 1980; Shameem, 1990; Kelly, 1991a and 1991b; and Lal, 2000.

irrespective of their place in the hierarchy often resulting in tragic consequences for both employees and employers.

In the absence of a comprehensive study of attacks by labourers against their employers, it is difficult to differentiate between violence which functioned as resistance and violence which was committed as crime. Some statistical evidence about the frequency and type of labourer violence can be derived from the Annual Reports for Indian Immigration. However, these statistics tend to reflect reported violence (or violence which resulted in legal proceedings) rather than actual violence in the seclusion of plantations. Other sources of information including Supreme Court records, press reports, and stipendiary magistrates' monthly reports of cases brought forward in their districts, tend to represent Indian labourers' violence as irrational, instinctual, brutal, ruthless, animal-like and motivated mainly by jealousy.³

The newspapers, the *Fiji Times* and the *Western Pacific Herald* were particularly conspicuous in this regard. In their reports of labour attacks on employers, the motive of the defendants was often lost in copious details of the assault, and long transcriptions of the testimony of victims and prosecution witnesses. For instance, in March 1901 Bhola and Dilla both indentured labourers at Vunisamaloea in Ba severely wounded their sardar, Sultan. The *Western Pacific Herald* began its coverage with a lengthy report of the wounds sustained by the sardar followed by the victim's testimony supported by European witnesses. A passing remark was the only acknowledgement of the defendants' complaints about overtasking and assaults on their persons prior to the attack.⁴ Earlier that year, sixteen labourers from Vuo plantation in Labasa attacked their overseer, J. M. Kemmis. In its report of the case, the *Western Pacific Herald* again highlighted the testimony of European witnesses, detailing the assault itself and the physical injuries sustained by the victim, but leaving the motive for the attack to speculation. It is only as a brief aside in a long transcription of the prosecution's case to establish the presence of one of the assailants at the site of the attack, that motive is established for the attack and a

³ Representing the views of many colonial officials, the Agent-General for Immigration Arthur Robert Coates attributed the high incidence of crime among indentured immigrants to "mere brute animalism". See Coates' minute of 25 February 1913 in CSO 13/1626.

⁴ *Western Pacific Herald*, 13 July 1901.

labourer is cited as having overheard that some of the defendants were unable to complete their tasks and were fearful of going to gaol.⁵

As partial as they may be, these sources reveal several interesting patterns. The first is that violent acts of retaliation were often driven by an outraged sense of injustice. Attacks on overseers and sardars were often committed in public view with the full knowledge of the likely consequences. Reporting in 1893 on the preponderance of such attacks on the plantations, sub-agent John Forster wrote:

There is no firing through windows or shooting from behind a hedge or blowing up, and they are committed in broad daylight with generally available witnesses of them. Under any ordinary rules as to human conduct or motives these circumstances would be held to indicate a sense of injustice as the probable moving impulse.⁶

Other testimony suggests that much of the violence perpetrated by labourers against their employers or against their peers was retributive. Writing about this subject in 1903, J. W. Davidson reported of indentured immigrants that “if redress and revenge is not promptly sought with the ever-handy working-knife or cutlass, the man will be apt to brood his wrongs and nurse his wrath until his feelings are relieved by an act of violence upon the object or objects of his resentment, or upon himself”.⁷ Commenting on his experience ministering to indentured labourers in the Rewa Region, the Reverend J. W. Burton wrote in similar vein: “It frequently happens that the coolie takes the law into his own hands and tries the edge of his cane knife upon the skull of the English overseer.”⁸ Being an overseer on Fiji’s plantation, he added, was a hazardous occupation “open to very serious dangers”, and the loss of life in the form of the violence from the coolies was “surprisingly great”.⁹ Recounting one particular

⁵ *Western Pacific Herald*, 13 April 1901. In the same period, see among other similar reports of attacks on overseers and sardars: *The Fiji Times*, 30 September 1899; *Western Pacific Herald*, 30 July 1901; *Fiji Times* 30 November 1901; *Fiji Times*, 11 December 1901; *Fiji Times* 9 April 1902; *Fiji Times*, 5 July 1902; *Fiji Times*, 9 July 1902; *Fiji Times*, 10 December 1902; *Fiji Times*, 13 December 1902. See also John D. Kelly’s study of press reports of indenture violence for the year 1912 in his essay “*Fiji Indians and the Law, 1912*,” in Sanadhya, 1991.

⁶ Minute from subagent Forster to Agent-General for Immigration, 11 September 1893, CSO 93/3121.

⁷ Paper 20: “Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1902.” in *JFLC*, 1903. 19-20.

⁸ John Wear Burton, *The Fiji of Today*. London: C. H. Kelly, 1910. 269.

⁹ Burton: 287.

case, Burton described how a brutal overseer who had “outraged” an Indian woman was set upon by her fellow labourers and “literally chopped into pieces”. Having taken their revenge, they “went to the gallows in the most nonchalant manner”.¹⁰

Secondly, because they personalised the coercive element of the production process, overseers and sardars were the most likely target of retribution by labourers. Retributive violence often occurred in response to beatings, abusive language, extortion, overtasking, meddling with women labourers (this is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter), or rape.¹¹ These are the same grievances that lay at the origin of the strikes and boycotts already discussed in Chapter Four. In this sense, retributive violence acted as a complement of organised forms of resistance.

A third characteristic of this violence is that it occurred as a consequence of the dynamics that prevailed on particular plantations. While such dynamics arose under the same oppressive system of indenture, they varied greatly from plantation to plantation. Attacks on overseers and sardars occurred at regular intervals throughout the period of indenture but they occurred because labourers had specific grievances against specific overseers or sardars.¹² These were not attacks on colonialism or the

¹⁰ Burton: 294.

¹¹ See among others, SM Rewa’s monthly report for September: Case no 550 was against a labourer who attacked the overseer Warbrook with a knife on Vunimaca plantation, CSO 84/2140. He had been beaten several times by Warbrook for having used abusive language towards him; SM Rewa’s monthly report for November about three labourers’ attempt to murder sardar Dharma on Nakoroqaqa plantation, CSO 85/3101; SM Rewa’s monthly report for December about fourteen labourers from Koronivia on a charge of attempting to murder their overseer, CSO 86/45; SM Rewa’s report for the month of January, especially case 89 brought by an overseer of the Rewa Sugar Company plantation of Uluicalia against thirteen immigrants for an assault and battery charge committed on him out in the field, and case 123 against an Indian for threatening to “do” an overseer at the court house, CSO 87/236; reported assaults on overseers in Ba and Navuso in the *Fiji Times*, 20 April 1887; the report of a dual attack on an overseer and a sardar at Korociriciri, *Western Pacific Herald*, 30 July 1901; from the Agent-General Immigration regarding overseer violence in Labasa and five men beating up an overseer and surrendering themselves at once to custody, CSO 02/4411; the murder of Alexander Coutts, overseer in Labasa, CSO 05/559; an attack on A. H. Witherow by Fijian labourers, the *Fiji Times*, 30 November 1901; SM Rewa reporting on more trouble at Navuso. An indentured woman accuses overseers and sardar of rape and attempted rape. They are shut up in the coolie lines and assaulted by labourers. On this occasion the head sardar sides with the labourers, CSO 06/4850; a shooting affray at Navua: members of the rifle club are brought in to help kill Gujraj Singh who has killed Karem Singh and Robert Prider, an overseer. He also intended to kill the SM Navua, 08/2223; the murder of the overseer Benjamin Hall, 21 August 1908, on Esivo plantation in Lautoka, CSO 08/4050; Naikorokoro labourers engage in retaliatory beatings against their sardar mostly for extortion, CSO 08/5171; the assault by labourers on their sardar in Navua after overtasking, extortion and attempted rape, CSO 08/4431; the attempted combined assault on an overseer at Baulevu and subsequent drowning of the attackers, CSO 08/6913.

¹² The evidence suggests that Indian sardars were just as likely to use force against labourers as their European superiors. For statistical evidence, see the Annual Reports on Indian Immigration for 1900

indenture system per se, but on individuals in retaliation for specific acts. Hence, the gradual increase in Labasa in the number of cases of assault by immigrants against those in authority and the upsurge of murders from 1895 onwards is closely connected to the development in Labasa of a new sugar estate and mill, and the accompanying culture of brutality and violence that arose. In 1900 there were thirty-two cases of assault against overseers and sardars in Labasa. By 1902 that number had jumped to fifty-three.¹³

The individual character of overseers was also an important factor. For instance, the arrival of the overseer H. B. Burn on Wailevu estate in Labasa at the beginning of 1902 triggered, in the Agent-General's opinion, "more trouble and more court cases there than in the entire previous two years". Burn worked in partnership with the sardar, Chattar Bhuj, and bred more trouble on the estate than on any other estate of the CSR. While some Wailevu labourers endured their misery, several chose desertion and a few others assaulted him. They later killed Alexander Coutts, another Labasa overseer. This is important because it indicates that labourers were more likely to use retributive violence on overseers who treated them violently. Such cases usually involved a small group of men seeking revenge and believing that "what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander".¹⁴

Fourthly, because the state frequently renounced its responsibility to protect them, labourers were forced to take the law into their own hands. When this resulted in violence, labourers often stamped their revenge on the overseer or sardar's body. In justifying Section 5 of Ordinance XIV of 1886 to the Secretary of State, Thurston explained that it was intended to meet "the not infrequent violent assaults with knives and other tools, upon overseers".¹⁵ Dismembering the body of the despised employer appears to have been intended to remove his ability to ever inflict physical pain again.

(page 25) and 1910 (page 18). There was no ethnic discrimination in the application of managerial terror. Neither was ethnicity a consideration in labourers' retaliations.

¹³ For statistical evidence, see Annual Reports on Indian Immigration 1895-1905.

¹⁴ For Burn's record of violence in Labasa, see Agent-General Immigration to CS, 29 September 1902, CSO 02/4411; also Manager CSR (Fiji) to CS, 6 February 1905, CSO 05/559, regarding the murder of Alexander Coutts; and Inspector of Immigrants (Labasa) to CS, 8 July 1905, CSO 05/3029, regarding assaults on immigrants by sardars. For press coverage of Labasa labourers' assaults on Burn, see the *Fiji Times*, 10 December 1902, and 13 December 1902.

¹⁵ Despatch 62, Thurston to SS, 31 July 1888. CSO Despatches to the SS.

One girmitiya, Abdul Aziz, recalled how he and a number of his peers became “fed up with of a sirdar and chopped off his hand”.¹⁶

In his study of jute mill workers in Bengal (1890-1940), Chakrabarty shows that managerial power in India worked more through physical force and spectacle than by the foucauldian mechanisms of control by discipline and the routinization of work.¹⁷ The same applies to Fiji’s plantation microcosm. In addition, however, if the application of power was spectacular in the form of its violence, when the labourer struck back it was displayed in the same spectacular fashion.¹⁸ The men who attacked Kemmis in the case cited above, did so with sticks and hoe handles. It caused him extensive injuries which among other things prevented him from ever riding again. They broke his arm as did those who attacked Sultan the sardar from Vunisamaloa. In both cases the intention was to maim or to physically impair their employer and neither Kemmis nor Sultan were able to use their arms to inflict pain again.¹⁹

Labourers tolerated a great deal of employer violence before deciding to retaliate. As Aziz recalled, he would have killed an overseer for committing an outrage against the women in his care but could do nothing: “we were in a hopeless and helpless state in this place hence I could do nothing”.²⁰ However, even within the generally unacceptable system of forced labour in which they were held, labourers participated in the process of demarcating the limits of acceptable treatment they were willing to endure before they retaliated. Recounting his experience of indenture, the old girmitiya Narsamma attested:

If we tried to run away before the beating ended, the *sahib*’s wrath would increase. The *sahib* would never forget and the beating would follow the next day. ... [the] beating stopped after we showed signs of pain and suffering. ... Some Indians who were strongly built frequently helped us to finish the task. In the presence of such stronger people, the *sahib* dared not touch us. He knew

¹⁶ See *Girmit: A Centenary Anthology 1879-1979*. 53.

¹⁷ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working Class History: Bengal 1890-1940*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989. 170.

¹⁸ See press reports already cited above.

¹⁹ *Western Pacific Herald*, 13 April 1901, and 13 July 1901.

²⁰ *Girmit*: 53.

how in the past stronger immigrants snatched the whip from either the *sahib*'s or *sardar*'s hand and beat him back.²¹

Potential and actual retribution by labourers appear to have been significant deterrents against excessive force and abuse by employers. Writing about his life as an overseer on Fiji's plantations, Walter Gill wrote: "inexperienced as I then was, I was learning that when he was driven to a state of sufficient desperation the humble coolie would strike back".²² One of the first things that he learnt in the field was not to fool around with a coolie's money:

Generations of having only a few pice between him and starvation had taught him that his earnings were about the only thing in life worth fighting for. One mistake, two, and I could feel the mob's vibrations. A few more and I could have a riot on my hands.²³

Another striking characteristic of plantation violence is the propensity of indentured labourers to lash out at other labourers rather than to attack their immediate superiors. For instance, the bulk of murders in Labasa in the decade from 1895 to 1905 were not committed against overseers or sardars but against indentured women. Kelly's study for instance, suggests that rather than confront the agents of their misfortune – sardars, overseers and plantation managers – aggrieved labourers most often targeted women and rivals for women. Kelly suggests that girmitiya displaced their aggression and hatred of overseers and indenture and attacked women because they were weak and not overseers because they were powerful.²⁴ He adds:

While whites from their position of control, and with interests in "feral" novelties, responded to their own demographic imbalance by pursuing women of other races, the Indian men competed among themselves for the same women the whites were freely appropriating. ... Competition led to beatings and threats, and while overseers and sardars could bully the coolies with impunity, direct counterthreats often landed coolies in prison, or left them paying large fines,

²¹ Prasad: 26-7.

²² Walter Gill, *Turn North-East at the Tombstone*. Adelaide: Rigby, 1970. 30.

²³ Gill: 53.

²⁴ Kelly, 1991b: 164.

bound over to keep the peace. The coolies could not control the sardars and overseers, so they tried to control the women.²⁵

The inability to defend oneself or members of one's family against the abuses of domination, forms an immense field of emotional, moral, and psychological violence. "There is no system of domination," writes Scott, "that does not produce its own routine harvest of insults and injury to human dignity".²⁶ In Fiji many overseers were accused of openly soliciting the wives of labourers. The enactment of new legislation in 1891 against the common practice of "enticing away" wives from their husbands,²⁷ was aimed at reducing the number of attacks on women caused by the shortage of women on plantations. However, there is little evidence that the violence stopped. On the contrary, the figures show that from 1895 the overwhelming majority of murders and a large proportion of unlawful wounding were committed against women. In that year, six of the seven reported murders of Indian immigrants were of women.²⁸ This suggests that some men were pushed beyond their threshold of tolerance when they lost their public claim to a woman and chose to kill and face execution rather than to continue to live with a burden of loss and humiliation. A more detailed discussion of the gendered aspects of resistance is dealt with in the next chapter.

While some labourers attacked and murdered their sardars and overseers, others took their own lives. Lal writes that in Fiji suicide was both "a cry of despair and an act of protest directed ultimately at the principles and ethics of the indenture system itself."²⁹ Naidu has shown that between 1890 and 1919, 206 immigrant men and twenty-three women committed suicide, the highest rate of all British colonies where Indians lived.³⁰

Admittedly, not all suicide was committed as a mark of rejection or protest. Victims of suicide did not usually leave testimonies about their motives. Official reports

²⁵ Kelly, 1991b: 176. See also Mani, 1998 for the long tradition of men trying to control women in Indian history.

²⁶ Scott, 1990: 37.

²⁷ This legislation is cited in Paper 20: "Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1891." in *JFLC*, 1892.

²⁸ This trend continued for well over ten years with nine homicides recorded in 1910, seven victims of which were women. See the Annual Reports for Indian Immigration 1895-1910.

²⁹ Lal, 2000: 18.

³⁰ Naidu: 71.

attributed the high suicide rate to cultural factors such as jilted love, jealousy over women, disagreements with sardars about tasking, desertions, or to mental instability and deficiency.³¹ None of these reports admit to the high correlation between the decision that some labourers took to end their own lives and the violence of indenture, the relentless pace of work, the humiliations, the fears of prison and violence, the hunger, and loneliness. Totaram Sanadhya's testimony is useful in this regard:

Overseers commit outrages against us whenever they like. Many of our brothers there make a noose and hang themselves, from fear of hard work, and from fears of jail, and the blows of overseers. Not many days ago several Madrasis at a plantation in Navua hanged themselves for this reason.³²

The combination of fear, pain, displacement, hopelessness and helplessness created a profoundly alienating situation which, in some circumstances, made death more attractive than life. Sanadhya himself appears to have contemplated suicide. In his story "The Haunted Line", he ponders the worthiness of living a life without hope. Resisting the temptation to take his own life, Sanadhya contends that his mother entrusted his body "to the protection of God for use in her old age". Even if by his wish the time of his body had come to an end, he had no authority to destroy it: "I am a man. God has sent me into this world to fight for life."³³ Showing similar spirit, most labourers won their battle against death and survived *narak*.

Avoidance Protest

Managerial violence did not automatically provoke retributive violence. Most labourers survived indenture without resorting to violence. When formal avenues for raising grievances were removed or rendered futile, labourers continued to seek survival rather than revenge. They feigned illness, absented themselves from work, deserted, or vented their frustrations on the crops and tools of their employers.

³¹ See among others Paper 57: "Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1913." in *JFLC*, 1914. See a report by the inspector of immigrants about a South Indian labourer's attempt to take his own life after a row with a sardar, CSO 05/3029.

³² Sanadhya: 43. Lal, 2000 and Naidu, 1980 have both attributed the preponderance of suicides among South Indians to their greater social dislocation, homesickness, suffering social oppression from North Indians, and working in newer plantations isolated from the main centres and rarely visited by inspectors.

³³ Sanadhya: 125.

Throughout history, as Scott has observed, one of the most frequent and effective responses by ordinary people to oppression has been “avoidance protest”. Evasion and desertion, he writes, have “always proved more attractive than the risk of open confrontation”.³⁴ In Fiji, plantation workers responded in the same way.

Because they had homes to escape to and possibilities of subsisting off their own lands, Fijian labourers found evasion more attractive and less consequential than physical attacks on their employers.³⁵ Commenting on the character of hundreds of Colo labourers who were hired on plantations, Brewster recalled that they seemed “fairly amenable to their master”. Yet, they also worried and harried the overseers “to the utmost of their ability”.³⁶ He observed “a curious mixture of extreme veneration and latent covert insolence in the Fijian”.³⁷ Fijian labourers could afford to be annoying and insolent towards their employers. As Thurston explained:

[N]o Fijian will go from home to be worked from morning ‘till night upon paltry pay, indifferent fare, and frequently anything but wild treatment, if he can avoid doing so. The cultivation of his own land is much more attractive to a Fijian than that of a stranger’s land 100 miles away.³⁸

Land functioned as a source of security and protection which made Fijian labourers less vulnerable than immigrant labourers who had nowhere to go. As landowners, Fijian labourers were therefore less amenable to control and their continued employment on plantations less desirable. Besides, they were needed in the villages to prop up the power of their chiefs and to produce taxes for the government. In this light, the decision of the colonial administration to confine Fijians to their villages and bring indentured labourers from India, had less to do with the prevailing wisdom that Fijians had “no taste for sustained effort”³⁹ and more with the consolidation and good

³⁴ Scott, 1985: 245.

³⁵ Only one example of Fijian labourers’ physical attack on an overseer was retrieved from the archive. It involved labourers employed in Rewa who attacked A. H. Witherow, and seriously injured him. See *Fiji Times*, 30 November 1901.

³⁶ Brewster, 1922: 150.

³⁷ Brewster, 1922: 151.

³⁸ Thurston to Gordon, 25 November 1878, CSO 78/1748.

³⁹ Derrick, 1950: 169.

workings of indirect rule. By 1894 as Gillion suggests, Fijians were no longer a factor on Fiji's plantations.⁴⁰

The preferred form of resistance by imported labourers was to deliberately absent themselves from work. Burton observed Indian indentured labourers as having “an innate genius for dodging work and ... [bringing] an almost infinite amount of cunning to bear upon the art”.⁴¹ However, there were many reasons other than protest for labourers to stay away from work. For instance, labourers were often forced to stay in the lines because they suffered from debilitating ailments, such as anaemia, diarrhoea, or syphilis.⁴² The high number of convictions for absence from work also reflects the propensity of employers to bring charges against their labourers to intimidate and control them. Among the large number of cases involving unlawful absence from work, it is therefore difficult to identify what proportion of them occurred as a deliberate attempt by labourers to obstruct production.

In the mid 1880s when the indentured system was still in its early stages, undefined absence from work had become one of the major obstacles to production. In 1884, for instance, one in five labourers was absent from work for undefined reasons.⁴³ In 1885, the persistence of unlawful absences was attributed to the “somewhat growing tendency on the part of a limited number of dissatisfied, dissipated, and vicious coolies to desert from indentured service in order to indulge in gambling, prostitution, or seclusion and idleness”.⁴⁴ Close to 2,600 immigrants, or about half of the total number of Indian indentured labourers, were prosecuted for unlawful absence.⁴⁵ Through 1886, only fifty-four percent to sixty-five percent of the total indentured labour force turned out daily to work.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Gillion, 1962: 77.

⁴¹ Burton: 288.

⁴² For an explanation that absence from work in Fiji was mainly caused by sickness, see Forster to Agent-General for Immigration, 28 November 1887, CSO 87/1377.

⁴³ Paper 25: “Annual Report of Indian Immigration for 1885.” in *JFLC*, 1885. 13.

⁴⁴ Paper 25: “Annual Report of Indian Immigration for 1885.” in *JFLC*, 1885. 13.

⁴⁵ Paper 25: “Annual Report of Indian Immigration for 1885.” in *JFLC*, 1885. 16. Useful figures and comparisons between Rewa and Ba plantations, between indentured labourers from different ships, and between rates of absence in Fiji and Mauritius plantations are furnished in CSO 86/1107.

⁴⁶ Despatch 62, Thurston to SS, 31 July 1888. CSO Despatches to the SS.

When set in the context of the economic downturn and worsening labour practices already discussed in Chapter Four, these figures suggest that a large number of labourers could not cope with the rhythm and rigours of plantation work and stayed away. The portion of them who did so out of protest is impossible to determine. Yet, that some did is undeniable. Writing to the Colonial Secretary, the manager of the Rewa Sugar Company complained that “for some time back and now there appears to exist a combination amongst the Indian Indentured labourers on this and other plantations to resist all efforts to get them to work”.⁴⁷ The inconvenience caused by labourers in repeatedly absenting themselves was a greater loss to the employer than the punishment of two shillings meted out to the offending labourer. Knowing the reluctance of employers to prosecute such minor cases before the courts, one official remarked that “coolies will confidently take two days absence from work”.⁴⁸ Labourers could therefore repeat their offence with tolerable security with the added option of falling back on their collective fund, should they want to avoid jail terms.

It was in this context that Ordinance XIV of 1886, already mentioned in Chapter Four, was enacted. It was meant just as much to prevent organized resistance as to put an end to the cumulative disruptive effects of thousands⁴⁹ of labourers’ non-fulfilment and absence from work. Even if it failed to eradicate evasion altogether, the ordinance had a noticeable impact on the frequency of violations of labour laws. The number of offences for unlawful absence fell from 7,121 in 1886 (for a total immigrant population of 6,341) to just 1,814 in 1887 (for a total immigrant population of 6,193).⁵⁰ The number of such offences declined progressively as the new sanctions kept labourers disorganized and forced them to seek other avenues through which to channel their grievances.⁵¹ The lengthening of indenture for time spent in gaol and the adoption of a stricter regime of work in prisons also helped deter further breaches.

⁴⁷ Manager Rewa Sugar Company to CS, 3 March 1886, CSO 86/481.

⁴⁸ Agent-General for Immigration to CS, 19 March 1886, CSO 86/1107.

⁴⁹ In 1886, there were 7,121 cases of unlawful absence for a total immigrant population of 6,341.

⁵⁰ See Paper 29: “Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1887.” in *JFLC*, 1888. 12. The number of offences for desertion also fell to 162 and continued to decline thereafter.

⁵¹ An important exception was the Northern sugar centre of Labasa which from 1895 experienced a major surge in such offences. See Chapter Four.

Until then, gaol terms had been an attractive alternative to plantation toil. The work was not as difficult and the food sufficient.⁵² Those who chose prison knew that at the Suva gaol they could escape incarceration by paying their fine to the gaoler and then earning money in the Capital, during the term of their sentence. Because there was no agent for planters in Suva, many immigrants stayed on in Suva after their term and lived with free immigrants.⁵³ A similar strategy was used by labourers on Mago Island. In February 1886, Basil Thomson, then Stipendiary Magistrate of the Lau Group, prosecuted fifty-four cases involving indentured immigrants from the Mago Island plantation. On conviction, each labourer refused to pay his/her fine opting for gaol instead. This was in spite of the existence of a communal fund which could have been used to avoid gaol time. The labourers chose gaol time because they knew that there was not enough space at the Lomaloma gaol to lock them up permanently. They could expect less work, and more free time to enjoy the sedative effects of *yaqona*.⁵⁴

Fijian labourers mounted similar campaigns of attrition. For instance, in November 1887, a group of Fijian labourers effectively paralysed work on the Rakiraki plantation at Penang. Work slowed to such an extent that Chalmers, the plantation manager, could see “ruin staring him in the face”.⁵⁵ In addition, rails were tampered with and pieces of iron were concealed in railway trucks which, had they not been detected, could have caused considerable damage to the mill. By December, Chalmers had obtained convictions of various kinds for sixty-six of his eighty-one men, but he was left with only a handful of labourers with which to do all the work.⁵⁶ Such acts of petty disobedience were therefore more injurious to the employer than mass demonstrations.

⁵² Subagent Carruthers to CS, 13 May 1886, CSO 86/987.

⁵³ Acting Agent-General to CS, 19 March 1886, CSO 86/1107.

⁵⁴ Thomson to CS, 6 March 1886, CSO 86/524. Elsewhere, Thomson described the Nadroga gaol in the following terms: “The gaol existed only in name. The prisoners lived in a house without doors and were in the habit of returning to their villages from Saturday to Monday every week. The Gaoler lived in a different town, and seldom visited the Gaol, while there were no warrants nor other documents connected with the detention of the prisoners; nor could I find any traces of public or provincial work that they had done.” Thomson to CS, 22 June 1885, CSO 85/1679.

⁵⁵ Chalmers to CS, 19 November 1887, CSO 87/3348.

⁵⁶ Chalmers to CS, 19 November 1887, CSO 87/3348.

For their part, “Polynesian”⁵⁷ labourers featured much more prominently in the death-rates than in offences against labour laws. The rate of mortality was particularly bad in the Southern regions of Rewa and Navua where in 1884 nearly one third of all “Polynesians” died. The opening of new land for sugar, the concentration of large numbers of men in cramped lines, and the wet climate forced these men to focus their attention on survival rather than seeking redress. The acting Agent-General wrote in his report for 1884 that “the Polynesian is in most cases too shy, too untutored, and too submissive, to openly resent such treatment”.⁵⁸ There were only 106 violations of the labour laws by 6,125 Melanesians in the colony in 1884. By comparison, 4,152 Indian labourers committed 1500 offences against the same laws in the same period.⁵⁹ It is difficult to account for such a disparity. Aside from the cultural reasons given by the administration, it is possible that employers conceived of separate ethnic groups as deserving different treatment and thus entered into different employment relations with them. Consequently, employers may have had different expectations about the amount and type of work that Melanesians were supposed to do and how they should be treated if they failed to complete their tasks.

In 1891, three ordinances were passed which were generally intended to improve the living and working conditions of immigrants. Among others, they strengthened the power of immigration officers to protect immigrants. More time was set aside for meals, a per diem was allocated to labourers for attending court, and special provisions were made for the protection of women.⁶⁰ These comprehensive ordinances formed the basic legal framework of indenture thereafter although as Lal points out, in practice the ideals enshrined in the legislation varied considerably from the realities which confronted labourers in the field.⁶¹ Still when considered together, the repressive ordinance of 1886 and the protective ones of 1891 help to explain why indentured immigrants turned to other means of obtaining redress in subsequent years.

⁵⁷ Most “Polynesian” labourers in Fiji were ethnically Melanesian and came from Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. See Moore, Munro and Leckie, 1990.

⁵⁸ “Annual Report on Polynesian Immigration for 1884.” 12. Paper 44, MS 2, im Thurn Papers. NAF.

⁵⁹ “Annual Report on Polynesian Immigration for 1884.” 23. im Thurn Papers.

⁶⁰ Paper 20: “Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1891.” in *JFLC*, 1892. It is important to note however, that not all the provisions in the legislation were intended to protect the interests of labourers. For instance, section 227 of Ordinance 1 provides for the compulsory transfer of immigrants suspected of disturbing the peace to other plantations. Such provisions were aimed at negating or breaking effective collaboration among immigrants and removing dangerous leadership.

⁶¹ Lal, 2000: 175.

Desertion was one such device used by labourers to avoid the violent excesses of plantation life. Desertion was particularly attractive to discontented Fijian labourers. They could leave their plantations and return to their villages.⁶² However, for Indian and Polynesia labourers, this was a risky proposition. As immigrants, they were regarded as strangers and could not simply melt into the indigenous population. Some were prepared to take the risk and in 1885 some ninety-four Indian immigrant labourers were reported to have deserted. By the end of 1886, this figure had tripled to 272 with Rewa providing three quarters of all offenders.⁶³ Many deserters went to Suva where they sought refuge with free immigrants. Others were received into Fijian villages. Joske reported in 1888 that many Indian “vagrants” were living in Colo and that he was having difficulties identifying who was free and who was a deserter. Colo Fijians, he wrote, had a predilection for them for they helped to enliven the dull monotony of Fijian village life.⁶⁴

Desertion subsided in the wake of the legislative changes of 1886 (see Chapter Four) reaching an all time low in the late 1890s. However, the construction of a new mill in Lautoka and the arrival of large numbers of South Indian labourers caused the number of desertions to rise from a mere twenty-one in 1899 to 283 in 1903 and 324 in 1905.⁶⁵ Desertions continued to plague the industry into the 1910s.⁶⁶ Many deserted their estates to find more lucrative employment and induced others to follow suit. One irritated planter and member of the Legislative Council complained:

I had a man who deserted for twelve months. At the end of that time he asked for his free paper. He told me that he was able to earn 2s. a day as a free labourer – and he told the other men on the plantation – and within four weeks

⁶² Carew to CS, 6 March 1886, CSO 86/551.

⁶³ See the Annual Indian Immigration Reports for 1885 and 1886. Pages 16 and 17 respectively.

⁶⁴ Joske to CS, 3 July 1888, CSO 88/2154.

⁶⁵ See Reports on Indian Immigration for the years 1899, 1903 and 1905 in *JFLC*, 1900, 1904 and 1906 (papers 24, 25 and 24) respectively.

⁶⁶ For desertion into Fijian villages see CSO 2667/05 and 3340/05. For the growing problem of desertion from plantations see CSO 07/5021 and Paper 39: “Report of the Fiji Constabulary for the Year 1910.” in *JFLC*, 1911. For reports of groups of Indians setting off across Viti Levu by foot in the hope of reaching India, see Gillion, 1962: 127.

there were any number of desertions from that plantation although there had been very few before.⁶⁷

But labourers who remained on their plantations devised other tricks to deceive overseers and finish their excessive tasks on time. As Hausildhar recalled, they purposely missed some furrows while planting sugar cane: “Without resorting to these small tricks, one would never complete the task and therefore forfeit the wages in fines or even end up in prison.”⁶⁸

Getting back at the employer could also take the form of sabotage. Under the cover of darkness labourers could damage the cane crop by trampling on it, drop pieces of iron in the train trucks carrying the cane to the mill, place stones on or tamper with railway tracks, damage plantation machinery and implements, throw farming equipment into the river, set fire to standing crops and other property, and other such acts. As an official pointed out, such transgressions could be easily carried out and cause considerable cost without the agents ever being traced and punished.⁶⁹

To escape the physical and mental pains of plantation life, some labourers sought the relief of drugs. Indian hemp or “ganjah” was introduced in the colony in 1882 through the *Berar* or *Poonah* ships and by early 1885 it was so widely used that stipendiary magistrates began pushing for its prohibition.⁷⁰ According to the Report on Indian Immigration for 1886, ganjah was cultivated “until it was to be found in nearly every district in which coolies were employed”. Fijians began to take it as well and productivity on plantations was considered to be severely affected by its abuse.⁷¹ When ganjah was banned, labourers bought opium from European storekeepers.⁷²

⁶⁷ See the third session of the Fiji Legislative Council Debates for 1910 in *JFLC*, 1910.

⁶⁸ Cited in Naidu: 36.

⁶⁹ Sub-inspector Wager to CS, 21 June 1908, CSO 08/2912. Among other examples of sabotage see Subagent Carruthers to CS, 13 May 1886, CSO 86/987; Forster to Agent-General, 28 November 1887, CSO 87/1377; Chalmers to CS, 14 November 1887, CSO 87/3347; Chalmers to CS, 29 November 1887, CSO 87/3657; Paper 24: “Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1894.” in *JFLC*, 1895; and a report in the *Fiji Times*, 18 December 1901.

⁷⁰ Carew to CS, 2 March 1885, CSO 85/632.

⁷¹ Paper 38: “Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1886.” in *JFLC*, 1887. 18.

⁷² Native Commissioner to CS, 10 July 99, CSO 99/3108. Ganjah reappeared in the early 1900s and necessitated a tightening of the laws and increased punishments. See Paper 24: “Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1905.” in *JFLC*, 1906. Drug related cases in the magistrate courts were also reported in the *Fiji Times* and *Western Pacific Herald*.

Others adopted the *yaqona*-drinking habits of their Fijian neighbours. This is captured in the words of an anonymous Navua songwriter:

Oh! My beloved
I cannot leave yaqona
I left my country
And left my caste
Left behind my parents
But I cannot leave yaqona
The thrilling drug of this island
Which I drink the whole night.⁷³

Some took to alcohol. On public holidays, as the former Girmitya Jhagru explained, “the intoxicated people would challenge their enemies, swear about the *sirdar* and *sahib*, fight among themselves and then retire to their homes”.⁷⁴ Most however, would simply sit around in the evenings and gather strength from their collective grief. They talked about such problems as the sardar’s extortions, but preferred not to meddle further for fear of being implicated.⁷⁵ These evening get-togethers were weak social sanctions and did not venture beyond the established normative framework. They were prudent assertions in conditions where power and likely violent repression made open or planned acts of retaliation too dangerous. As Scott observes about gossip, these informal gatherings allowed resistance to occur under the safe disguise of compliance.⁷⁶

Disguised compliance was a vital part of the labourer’s resistance arsenal. Management was always keen to cultivate informers and collaborators so that even in the nocturnal confines of dilapidated lines, it was not safe to plot resistance. This difficulty is well captured by the girmitya Shiulagni, a woman of Vunivau, Labasa, who testified:

⁷³ Cited in Jogindar Singh Kanwal, *A Hundred Years of Hindi in Fiji*. Suva: Fiji Teachers Union, 1980. 40.

⁷⁴ Cited in Prasad: 28.

⁷⁵ See Govind Singh’s testimony in *Girmit*, 1979: 44.

⁷⁶ Scott, 1985: 282.

We were always told by the *kulambar* (overseer) about the arrival of the inspector, but he would never let us give a fair account of ourselves to him. Before the inspector arrived, the *kulambar* would come to us in the field, assemble us all, look at us with red fiery eyes, stare at some complaining type of people and begin: “The inspector will be here one of these days. He will ask you some questions and then will be gone. If you report anything against your bosses (meaning the *sardar* and himself), we will come to know it. You know, we white men can find out things quickly. But before we can find out, your *sardar* will find out about your reports. *He has got friends among you*. You should be able to guess what the outcome will be if you pinch the serpent. You have to work under me all the time. Don’t spoil your chances of survival in five minutes’ talk!” After he was gone, the *sardar* would begin his harangue, “you’ve heard the *sahib*. He is right. You have to live and the only good way to live is to obey your superiors. The inspector will just write down your report but will do nothing. He might only advise us, but who has got the key to your future? WE. Now move to your sections of work.”⁷⁷ (Italicised emphasis added)

In this climate of fear and the multiple possibilities for group and class fragmentation, that solidarity was fostered at all was an achievement. Solidarity was especially forged on the ships that brought labourers to Fiji. These bonds of *jahaji bhai* (brotherly relationship) replaced kin and caste groups from India,⁷⁸ a few of which survived on the plantations. Hugh Tinker writes of *jahaji bhais* that “they never forgot the ship which brought them over, and they never forgot the men they were shackled to. The shipboard relationship took on the quality of a blood relationship, which no subsequent divergence erased.”⁷⁹ As a pre-emptive measure, labourers from the same ship were often scattered among different plantations. The few who kept their *jahaji bhai* bonds were better organised and occasionally succeeded in having vicious employers removed.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Cited in Prasad: 19.

⁷⁸ Naidu: 29.

⁷⁹ Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*. Oxford University Press, London, 1974. 142.

⁸⁰ For an example of Jahaji Bhai solidarity, see Manager Vancouver Company to CS, 5 January 1909, CSO 09/446. On this occasion the collective action forced the sardar off the Lobau plantation near Navua. However, the inspector of immigrants in the district subsequently recommended the break-up and transfer of these former shipmates and they were dispersed to separate plantations. See also the role of Pathan and Punjabi Jahaji Bhais in the 1907 Labasa strike already discussed in Chapter Four.

Gambling represented a different kind of problem for the authorities. Gambling *per se* was not threatening but its potential for generating deviance, its relative insulation from surveillance, and its capacity to bring people together in unauthorized assembly were enough to cause administrators some concern. In November 1908, the stipendiary magistrate of Lautoka reported with alarm that:

A very large amount of gambling goes on amongst Indian labour upon the estates, and they choose all sorts of places for the indulgence, to escape notice of the Police. Sometimes it is in the middle of a cane field, again on the upper staging in the Mill, near the roof. A large amount of trouble arises out of gambling – assaults, larcenies and quarrels with the women whom they often despoil of their jewellery to pawn for gambling debts.⁸¹

Petitioning

In his work on the indigenous peasant workers of Guatemala, McCreery has observed that “by far the most common mode of resistance was the undramatic but often effective petition of rights and grievances, of which the indigenous population filed thousands. ... For the authorities who received these petitions, they represented no small problem and could rarely be ignored with impunity.”⁸² In Fiji, while petitioning was the preferred mode of complaint used by indigenous Fijians, the evidence suggests that Indian labourers were much more sceptical about the effectiveness of this course of action. Their doubts were steeped in their experience of the justice system which was heavily prejudiced in the employers’ favour and had helped secure for employers convictions for eighty-two percent of the charges they laid, compared to the thirty-five percent success rate of labourers against their employers.⁸³ As Munro observes,

Not only did employers enjoy a higher success but they laid far more complaints before the courts – almost 10,000 between 1890 and 1897, for example, as

⁸¹ Excerpt from SM Lautoka’s Report for the Month of November, enclosed in CSO 08/6545, Agent-General to CS, 18 December 1908.

⁸² David McCreery, “Hegemony and Repression in Rural Guatemala, 1871-1940.” in Munro, Lal and Beechert, 1993: 228-9.

⁸³ Munro, 1993: 16.

against 311 by laborers during the same period, which indicates the latter's sense of futility in attempting to go through judicial channels.⁸⁴

By contrast, Fijians could expect to have their grievances heard and acted on. Fijian labourers were often led by chiefs or sons of chiefs who were literate, well versed in the workings of the administration, and well connected. They had several channels through which to seek support. If the local European stipendiary magistrate did not respond, they could notify the native stipendiary magistrate, the local Wesleyan teacher or missionary, or their own Buli or Roko. They could also write to the Native Commissioner or even send their letters directly to the Governor. Through the Deed of Cession, the administration felt an obligation to respond to the grievances of indigenous Fijians. By contrast, Indians were largely regarded as units of production whose only *raison d'être* was to work the land.

Petitions from Fijian labourers were usually a last resort, written only after long periods of inhuman treatment, overtasking, unpaid work, work on Sundays, insufficient or bad food, unhygienic lodgings, poor sanitary conditions and insufficient medical care. The response was usually speedy and resulted in token sanctions against the employer. Petitions were particularly numerous in plantation islands such as Mago or isolated plantations such as Wainunu in Bua. This was due to the inaccessible nature of these places, the infrequent visit of plantation inspectors, and the difficulty of contacting the authorities or running away. In Mago, the manager Borron forbade his labourers from complaining. His close relationship with the Stipendiary Magistrate of Lau prompted some desperate petitioners to carry their letter of complaint all the way to Suva.⁸⁵

The same situation arose in Bureta, Ovalau where three Malaita labourers absconded on one of the plantation boats to lay a complaint in Suva. This drastic measure to get the ear of the government and the Agent-General for Immigration was taken after their complaints were repeatedly ignored by the stipendiary magistrate in Levuka. For some time they and their co-workers had been forced to work on Sundays and had not been paid for it. They had not been fed meat for several weeks, and had suffered from

⁸⁴ Munro, 1993: 16.

⁸⁵ Petition by eighty-seven labourers on Mago Island Estate, 7 August 1895, CSO 95/3256.

insufficient food. They were regularly beaten, and complained that the plantation authorities showed no respect for the government or its laws. The sick were forced to work even in the rain, and no one was allowed to wander beyond the plantation boundaries even in their own time. On both occasions the men were arrested on order of the respective stipendiary magistrates but later released after the object of their travel and the condition of their employment were revealed. Agent-General Coates noted that “had these men not come to Suva, the illegality to which they were subjected would have continued”.⁸⁶

The intention of these petitions was therefore reformatory rather than revolutionary. They were the instruments provided by the state for labourers to voice their grievances. They were largely ineffective because of the considerable overlap between the interests of the state and those of large plantation owners, and because aggrieved workers only used them as a last resort. As such, petitions worked only at punishing the most extreme of employer abuses. Those who chose to voice their grievances through this official outlet, did so to survive indenture rather than to overthrow or transform it.

Religion and Indenture

In confronting the daily violence of indenture, labourers were not without help. The role of religion looms large as a source of strength both to survive and to challenge the excesses of the strong against the weak. This is illustrated in the Christian campaigns of such missionaries as J. W. Burton to reform indenture and by Hannah

⁸⁶ Agent-General for Immigration to CS, 25 September 1894, CSO 94/3490. For more examples of petitions please refer to the following: CSO 90/894: Koronivia labourers (natives of Kadavu) complaining of ill-treatment; CSO 90/3563: Fijian labourers from Baulevu Estate complaining of ill-treatment; CSO 92/1916: Ra and Tailevu labourers complaining about their treatment; CSO 93/830: Complaint by Muaniweni immigrants of insufficient pay, overtasking, and extortion and bad treatment by the sardar Khundai; CSO 93/985: Complaint by Fijian labourers at Matei; CSO 95/752: Complaint of ill-treatment by Ra labourers against Mr Mune; CSO 95/4187: Fifty Navua labourers start overland to Suva to lay their grievances directly to the Administrator; CSO 95/3598: Complaint by Moturiki men about food, overtasking, insufficient rations, etc.; CSO 03/2324: Report by Potts on complaints by Naitasiri labourers on Wainunu Estate; CSO 03/3647: Colo West and Nadarivatu labourers on Tamanua Estate complain of overtasking and being underfed; CSO 06/599: Complaint against employers of the Navua Trading Company by Ratu Kini, head of twenty-five indentured Fijians from Yasawa; CSO 06/1844: Immigrants on Wainunu Tea Estate complain against their employer; CSO 06/5115: Complaint of Polynesian labourers about ill-treatment by Mr Smith; CSO 06/5138: Grievance of Matia Tavoraurau and ten other natives from Ellington against their employer.

Dudley and C. F. Andrews to end it. It is even more evident in the inspiration drawn by labourers from their own Indian religious texts, symbolism, and practices.

In the early years of indenture, neither the Wesleyan nor the Catholic mission paid much attention to the immigrant population. They were regarded as an unfortunate, expansive, and cumbersome appendix to the principal task of converting and strengthening Christian influence among Fijians. It was not until the number of immigrants was so large, their disregard for the Sabbath so damaging that it undermined its observation among Fijians, and their sexual relations so offensive to Victorian ideals of propriety and righteousness, that the mission began to agitate for a representative from India to begin to minister to Indians in Fiji. From 1891 when work started on the construction of the new sugar mill in Labasa, the Fiji District of the Methodist Church began to anticipate a large increase in the number of indentured labourers, and its annual synod began to make persistent calls to the parent body, the Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia, to find and finance someone to minister to indentured labourers.⁸⁷ With the exception of the Indian catechist John Williams who worked from 1892 to 1894 in the Suva and Rewa region, these calls went unanswered. Williams lacked support from the missionaries and when he returned to India the Rewa Circuit Report sounded another note of alarm:

Possibilities of the gravest danger lie in the fact that many hundreds of heathen men differing in colour, in capabilities, in tastes, in language, in aspirations, in beliefs, are flowing constantly into Fiji and are being brought into daily relationship with an aboriginal race, which has itself only recently stepped out of a cruel and barbarous heathenism.⁸⁸

In 1896, the Reverend Worrall put together a scheme for the conversion of thousands of Indian immigrants. But his scheme demanded a substantial increase in the size of

⁸⁷ F/4/A & B, Minutes and Journals of the Fiji District Annual Synod 1874-1892 and 1891-1907. See the Appendix to Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Fiji District Committee at Rewa, 28 October, 1891.

⁸⁸ F/6/1894, Rewa Circuit Report. Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia. Fiji District.

the mission staff and other additional resources which the Australasian mission board could not approve, and his plan failed to clear the first hurdle.⁸⁹

Missionaries specially assigned to minister to indentured labourers did not arrive until 1897. Confronted by the moral and physical brutality of the system, their sense of morality was immediately and profoundly shaken. The first of them was Hannah Dudley, an Australian Methodist, whose work among labourers and their families gained her much respect among her peers. She spent relatively less time on evangelical work and more on the day-to-day needs of the community. On Sundays, she could be seen visiting the local gaol and hospital taking separate men's and women's services in each location. She was also a regular visitor to Indian homes and, with her fluent knowledge of Hindustani, became a trusted friend especially among women.⁹⁰ Her reports on the status of Indians in Fiji and her public condemnation of indenture were most influential and provided opponents of indenture with much needed ammunition. In a letter published in *India*, she exclaimed:

I beseech of you not to be satisfied with any reforms to the system of indentured labour. I beg of you not to cease to use your influence against this iniquitous system till it be utterly abolished.⁹¹

Perhaps the most celebrated missionary who worked among indentured labourers in Fiji was the Anglican Reverend Charles Freer Andrews. Andrews was sent to Fiji by Mahatma Gandhi to enquire into the status of Indians in Fiji and made three separate visits (the first two in 1915 and 1917).⁹² Unlike the official Indian commissioners Chimman Lal and McNeill who met labourers in the presence of company officials in 1913,⁹³ Andrews lived among the labourers in the lines and drew his conclusions

⁸⁹ Andrew Thornley, "The Methodist Mission and Fiji's Indians: 1879-1920." in *The New Zealand Journal of History*. 8: 2, October 1974. 139.

⁹⁰ Thornley, 1974: 139.

⁹¹ Cited in Sanadhya: 73.

⁹² For biographical details see Chaturvedi, Benarsidas and Marjorie Sykes, *Charles Freer Andrews: A Narrative*. Prefaced by Mahatma Gandhi. London: Allen and Unwin, 1949. See also Hugh Tinker, *The Ordeal of Love: C. F. Andrews and India*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

⁹³ See the James McNeill and Chimman Lal *Report to the government of India on the conditions of Indian immigrants in four British colonies and Surinam*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1915.

from first-hand experience. After his first visit together with W. W. Pearson in 1915, they wrote somewhat moralistically:

We cannot forget our first sight of the coolie 'lines' in Fiji. The looks on the faces of the men and the women alike told one unmistakable tale of vice. The sight of young children in such surroundings was unbearable to us. And, again and again, as we went from one plantation to another, we saw the same unmistakable look. It told us of a moral disease which was eating into the heart and life of the people.⁹⁴

Andrews and Pearson met a wide cross-section of the community including industry leaders and warned employers and government officials that the mood in India had changed and that the abuses of the system would no longer be tolerated. In a speech to the Fiji Planters' Association Executive Committee, Andrews informed them that "every part of India has awakened" and that "the question of freedom and self-respect is now a bigger question than anything else".⁹⁵ His judgement was well founded and like Dudley's, these reports had important repercussions. They galvanized public opinion in India against indenture, and mobilised opposition among sympathetic trade unions and women's groups in Australia and New Zealand.⁹⁶ They produced much negative publicity for the Fiji Government and the CSR and affected labour supply to Fiji. They also placed yet more pressure on the Home and Indian Governments to abolish indenture. A year after the publication of the Andrews and Pearson report, Gandhi decided that the issue was suitable for his first trial in India of Satyagraha, the form of non-violent resistance that he had previously used with such effectiveness in South Africa. He announced that ships would be picketed unless the system was ended. By July 1917, the Government of India announced the immediate abolition of the indentured system.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ C. F. Andrews and W. W. Pearson. "Report on Indentured Labour in Fiji: An Independent Enquiry." Calcutta, 1916. 27.

⁹⁵ M/34. "Report of Mr Andrews' Speech to the Planters' Association Executive Committee, Fiji." 7 December 1915. 5, 6. Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia. Fiji District. NAF.

⁹⁶ Gillion, 1962: 186. Much of the work in publicising the evils of indenture had already been done by India's foremost statesman Gopal Krishna Gokhale, who had made the abolition of the system his dying wish.

⁹⁷ Gandhi, Mahatma. *An Autobiography or The Story of my Experiments with Truth*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Trust, 1927. 333-7.

If Dudley and Andrews were effective in bringing the abuses and injustice of the system to a wider international audience and thus helped in the dismantling of indenture, they also left important local legacies. They appear to have both gained the love and trust of the immigrants with whom they came into contact. Dudley founded an orphanage in Nausori and a school in Suva while Andrews founded a school in Nadi and another in Suva.⁹⁸ If the majority of those who knew her referred to Dudley as “Mai” (Mother)⁹⁹ many others conferred on Andrews the title of “Dinbandhu” (Friend of the Poor).¹⁰⁰ The Catholic Mission too did much for the education of Indian children and its Marist brothers were outspoken believers in multi-cultural education.¹⁰¹ By 1900, they ran the largest multi-cultural school in the colony at Toorak in Suva.

Other sympathetic missionaries such as the Reverend J. W. Burton, deplored the excesses of the system but sought reforms rather than abolition. Burton believed in the moral superiority of Christianity and was active in the proselytism of indentured labourers in Rewa, where he created the “Indian Circuit” of the Methodist Church in 1902 and promoted and distributed Christian literature. He also developed some lasting friendships with the immigrants.¹⁰² Totaram Sanadhya remembered with fondness his time spent in the company of the Reverend:

The door of his house was always open to our people. Burton would visit the workers in the fields and shed tears at their plight. Burton wrote *The Fiji of Today*, where he has painted a true picture of our plight, but he published it

⁹⁸ All these institutions survive to the present day.

⁹⁹ Cited by Thornley, 1974: 139.

¹⁰⁰ Gillion, 1962: 184. On the other hand, the administration was clearly annoyed by his visits. He was accused of exaggerating, misleading and slurring the European population in Fiji. See Paper 112: Governor C. H. Rodwell’s “Memorandum on Indian Immigration (with special reference to certain statements made by the Rev. C. F. Andrews, who visited Fiji in 1915 and again in 1917 in order to investigate the conditions of Indian labour in the Colony).” in *JFLC*, 1918. The Government’s hand was further weakened by the publication of Florence Garnham’s *Report on the Social and Moral Conditions of Indians in Fiji*. Sydney, 1918. Garnham had been sent by the London Missionary Society’s Calcutta district to investigate the condition of Indians working and living in Fiji and her report substantiated most of Andrews’ findings.

¹⁰¹ Brother Claudius wrote: “I am not in favour of mixing the sexes, but I favour mixing the races.” “Education Commission”: 74, 98.

¹⁰² Burton’s work is documented in the Minutes of the Nausori Circuit 1902-1934. M6 Nausori (Indian)/B/1. See also M/104/(a): “Our India Work in Fiji.” By J. W. Burton. 1909 (located in the recently catalogued second Miscellaneous Series of the Fiji Methodist Church Records, NAF. See also Burton, 1910, and Sanadhya, 1991.

only after leaving Fiji. He was savagely attacked by the local whites and the Planters Association even petitioned the governor to prosecute Burton and confiscate the book. But they failed. Rev. Burton was the first person in Fiji to raise his voice against the indenture system.¹⁰³

However, while workers recognised the friendship and care of such missionaries at a time when few others were on their side, they feared and resisted the evangelical drive that formed the primary purpose of mission work. Commenting on her work in 1898, Dudley explained to the synod the reluctance of parents of Indian children in sending their children to school. They feared that their children's affection would be won over and that they would be induced to become Christians:

Children attend school for a few months and then are taken away by their parents for fear of their becoming Christians. To become a Christian is to them to become something exceedingly contemptible. ... An Indian in becoming a Christian they believe ceases to be an Indian; he ... breaks other Hindu religious laws the doing of which is considered by them far more heinous than any violation of the moral code.¹⁰⁴

At the end of 1898, she could count only one Indian convert in the entire district.¹⁰⁵ Supporting Dudley, and commenting on the specific difficulties of mission work among Indians, the Reverend Howard Nolan noted:

The difficulties of the work are of a totally different character from that which confronted the earlier missionaries to the Fijians. The Indian has an old religion – will quote his sacred books – and is supported by a thousand subtle influences and considerations by which he is prepared to combat the teaching and object to the reception of Christianity. These are difficulties which are far greater than the savagery of a cannibal people. The difficulties are again increased by ... their objections to Christianity arising out of the in-

¹⁰³ Cited in Lal, 2000: 257.

¹⁰⁴ F/6/1898: "Report by Miss Dudley on Indian Work." in Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia. Fiji District Circuit Reports.

¹⁰⁵ F/6/1898: "Report by Miss Dudley on Indian Work." in Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia. Fiji District.

consistencies of many white people with whom they are more immediately connected.¹⁰⁶

Such inconsistencies became the subject of debate between Burton and Totaram Sanadhya. Reminiscing about his discussions with the Reverend, Sanadhya asked somewhat rhetorically:

You call them Christians? How can that be when these people treat their workers like animals and skin them alive? Their cruelty knows no bounds. They pay them a pittance. Look at the atrocities they commit against our women. And yet in a court of law they take the oath on the Bible and deny their evil deeds. Does baptism wash away all their evil deeds?¹⁰⁷

These contradictions in the theory and practice of Christianity allowed many Indians to reassert the essential goodness of their own faith in Hinduism or Islam. As Totaram argued, baptism in the Christian faith did not really matter as long as one followed the path that served humankind, the path of righteousness. All this he said “has been preached by our sages long before Christianity”.¹⁰⁸ These Christian missionaries, as renegade members of the dominant society, came to represent to the colonial and Christian establishment, a greater danger than their small number might suggest. It also broke the semblance of homogeneity, unity and prestige which European elites tried to display.

Hinduism and Islam: “It was our religion that saved us.”

Andrews and Pearson conceived the cause of the degradation and moral bankruptcy of the indentured labourer to be the breakdown of religion. Dismayed at the lack of religious vitality, they concluded that “everything that could be recognised as Hindu has departed, and with this, the religious spirit has departed too”.¹⁰⁹ In a separate

¹⁰⁶ F/6/1898: “Report on Indian Work.” Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia. Fiji District Circuit Reports.

¹⁰⁷ Cited in Lal, 2000: 256.

¹⁰⁸ Cited in Lal, 2000: 256.

¹⁰⁹ Andrews and Pearson: 36.

paper for the Acting Governor of Fiji, in which Andrews sought to advise the government on the central position of religion in the lives of Hindus, he wrote:

With the Hindu, it has been rightly said, the whole round of life, from birth and even before birth, to death and even after death, is one perpetual act of religion. ... This religious sense among the Indian people, ever welling up in their lives, has been the sap in the tree of Hindu civilisation.¹¹⁰

He believed somewhat romantically that in Fiji the sap of this tree was drying up. He advised the Governor that until religion was re-established in the hearts of the people, the basis of Hindu social life in Fiji would continue to be radically unsound.¹¹¹ While there is no doubt that religion played a vital role in anchoring the lives of indentured labourers, Andrews' sombre opinion about the spiritual impoverishment of Hindus seems overstated.

Burton often despaired at his failure to convert Indians and attributed this difficulty to the steadfast observance and dedication that Indians had for their religious beliefs. One of the immigrants responded to Burton's overtures by telling him rather bluntly: "The chances of your becoming a Hindu are much greater than those of my becoming a Christian."¹¹² Burton believed that the devout strength of immigrants in their faiths was born out of their long and pre-eminently religious history "more religious even than that of the Jews. Possibly they still are the most naturally religious people on earth".¹¹³ Burton conceded that while the British might boast literary giants like Shakespeare, Shelley and Browning, Indians need not lower their heads as long as the *Vedas*, the *Ramayana*, the *Bhagavat Gita*, and the *Mahabhart*a remained. He concluded that on the basis of this religious foundation, "they are a people who cannot be patronised by the European" and that as a consequence "the Indian is predisposed to question everything the white man says".¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Appendix to the Andrews and Pearson Report: 1.

¹¹¹ Appendix to the Andrews and Pearson Report: 8.

¹¹² Burton: 323.

¹¹³ Burton: 335.

¹¹⁴ Burton: 335-6.

There is also ample evidence recorded among Girmitiyas to suggest that it was religion which enabled Hindus and Muslims to survive indenture. One of them, Gafur, famously affirmed that “it was our religion that saved us”.¹¹⁵ Lotan remarked:

Indenture was very harsh but nonetheless Hindus and Muslims retained their religion, without it they would not have survived or retained their identity.¹¹⁶

Most girmitiya who spoke of their time of indenture recalled that religion provided them with a sense of belonging, solace, relief, purpose, and strength. In the absence of formal places of worship, some performed their religious rites in their rooms and invited others to join them. In the evenings, Muslims invited Hindus to their Koran readings and Muslims attended readings of the Ramayana. Differences in religion did not hinder worship. Rather, they seemed to enrich the spiritual lives of the labourers with different faiths feeding off each other. Speaking about how they spent their weekends Samjhawan recalled:

From mid-day Saturday and all day Sunday we had a break. Some people used to sing and dance or read their Khatas and it was in this way that we spent our leisure. We were not educated and did not have very much knowledge about these rituals which when performed made us happy. A katha was usually said by somebody amongst the group who made himself a *pundit* and was accepted as such. When the katha used to take place everybody would sit quietly and listen and then sweets would be distributed; afterwards everybody would have a meal before returning to their own lines. ... In those days nobody was a Muslim, a Hindu or a Brahmin or anything else. They were all one.¹¹⁷

Whether Muslim or Hindu, “they all used to live like one big family”, confirmed Debi: “During their Eid festivals Muslims took the view that nobody invited anyone and all were welcome to come and eat at their place.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Cited in Ali, 1979: 35.

¹¹⁶ Lotan cited in Ali, 1979: 23.

¹¹⁷ Samjhawan cited in Ali, 1979: 41.

¹¹⁸ Debi cited in Ali, 1979: 25.

Festivals: Inverting the Symbolic Order

Girmitiyas came from a land full of festivals,¹¹⁹ some of which they reproduced on arrival in Fiji. The Muslim Tazia festival¹²⁰ was particularly popular and labourers irrespective of their religion, busied themselves building tazia edifices and converged on the town. This was followed by much merry-making, wrestling for sport, and music for entertainment.¹²¹ The Hindu festival Deepawali was celebrated likewise. Remembering such occasions with fondness, Jhagru recalled, “we invited our jahaji bhais (ship-mates) and other friends, read Ramayana, distributed sweets, sent some sweets, curry and puri ... to *sahibs* whom we liked, and lit candles”.¹²²

The same festive spirit prevailed during Holi, the primary Hindu festival during indenture. Often, especially in the smaller settlements, the two festivals of Tazia and Holi were combined to produce a “Hindu-Mohammadan mixture”.¹²³ During Holi, the labourers “visited every house, sang songs, played drums, and ate delicacies offered by the head of the household. Even adversaries would forget about their enmity and join us in celebration.”¹²⁴ But Holi was not simply, as one Christian missionary assumed, “little more than a squirting of red dye over the clothes of their fellows and insulting in obscene manner the female portion of the community”.¹²⁵ Holi was also a ritual of inversion which dramatised the harsh hierarchies of the plantation world. As Kelly and Kaplan have suggested, the sprays of blood-red fluid, were also used by women to bespatter men, and by “coolie” labourers to mark the estate’s oppressive *sardars* and overseers. And as they cast their troubles into the bonfires, the labourers symbolically burned away evil and saved the virtuous.¹²⁶

Another Hindu festival with important symbolic significance was Ram Lila. The ten-day festival dramatised the story of Ram, the Hindu god and king. The staging of his

¹¹⁹ Brij Lal, “Girmit, History, Memory.” in *Bittersweet: The Indo-Fijian Experience*. Brij Lal (ed.) Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2004b. 20.

¹²⁰ The festival is also known as Mohurram and commemorates the death of Mohammed’s grandsons. Gillion estimated that 14.6% of Indian indentured labourers who came to Fiji were Muslim. Gillion, 1962: 53. The 1911 Census states that 86% of non-Christians were Hindu; 13.2 were Muslim and 0.8 were from other faiths.

¹²¹ Bujawan cited in Ali, 1979: 38.

¹²² Jhagru cited in Prasad: 28-9.

¹²³ Burton: 320.

¹²⁴ Jhagru cited in Prasad: 28.

¹²⁵ Burton: 320.

¹²⁶ Kelly and Kaplan, 2001: 129.

exile, the abduction of his wife Sita, and the re-enactment of Ram's defeat of Ravan allowed the participants to celebrate one of the great stories of the triumph of good over evil. When it started in Labasa in 1902, one Girmitiya recalled, "people from far and wide would come with their families and stay for days at the place of celebration in Bulileka".¹²⁷ Hindus had little difficulty in identifying with Ram, exiled as they were, tormented by plantation authorities, with women as the regular targets of aggression. The burning of huge effigies of Ravan brought the festival to a climax. Read in the colonial context as Kelly and Kaplan do, it is not difficult to conceive of the Ramayana as a key political metaphor, that the epic was used as a moral weapon against indenture, and that "it was the immorality of the indenture system that was burned with the demonic image".¹²⁸

Kelly has argued further that religion functioned among Fiji-Indians as the basis and tool for counter-hegemonic discourse and action.¹²⁹ There exists little evidence that labourers consciously used religious festivals to subvert and challenge the plantation order. Yet, festivals were some of the rare occasions when labourers could publicly display and affirm the historical, religious and cultural antecedence and legitimacy of their heritage. In their capacity to function as a counter-symbolic force, Tazia, Holi, and Ram Lila allowed labourers to cast their own symbolic universe against the plantation universe. They were a show of cultural and ethical strength, and religious unity in an overwhelmingly hostile environment.

Festivals were also the most popular events in the otherwise negligible social calendar of plantation life. Initially neither the companies nor the Government took any interest in these religious spectacles. With time however, and as they grew in size and frequency, these gatherings began to threaten the establishment. In 1888 an application for permission to celebrate Tazia led to the fear that the congregation "of all the Indian ruffians Mohammedan and otherwise" would, as it had in Trinidad,

¹²⁷ Cited in Prasad: 29.

¹²⁸ Kelly and Kaplan, 2001: 129. In his "Introduction" to Sanadhya's *My Twenty-One Years in the Fiji Islands*, Kelly discusses how Totaram understood his own story of exile in the same terms as he did the central figure of Ram in the epic Ramayana. Lal confirms that the epic was the most popular text in Fiji and that it gave indentured labourers hope and consolation that one day, they too would be free. Lal, 2000: 241.

¹²⁹ Kelly, 1991a: 42.

result in unrest that could endanger “public peace” and lead to loss of life.¹³⁰ The same fear was repeated the following year by C. H. Irvine in whose opinion, the festival would lead to “bloodshed and civil disturbance”. The Governor responded by allowing the celebration to carry on but he refused to let the procession through the town.¹³¹ It was this potential to destabilise that really worried the plantation and government administrations. These were after all, large autonomous gatherings in which the subordinate class took centre stage and broke the seemingly endless display of dominant power and dramatised its own spectacle.

Religious Instruction

In the everydayness of their lives, smaller religious gatherings were more important than the grand spectacles of festivals. Prayer meetings usually took place in the evenings where a *pundit* or a *maulvi*¹³² would lead scripture readings of religious books including the *Ramayana*, the *Gita*, the *Brijvilas*, and the *Dev-pooja*.¹³³ In the first decade of the new century there were six religious texts circulating in Rewa while Navua had thirty-two and Ba forty-one.¹³⁴ Sanadhya was asked to assist A. M. Brozniak, the principal storekeeper in Nausori, to help him order copies of religious books from India. When they arrived, they were sold out within two weeks.¹³⁵ A few who could read and knew a bit about religion became *pundits* or *maulvis* and led religious teaching.¹³⁶ The result of this multifarious religious hybrid often resulted in a mysticism that preached, as Lal explains, “the fundamental oneness of humanity and the principle of equality and brotherhood among all”.¹³⁷ As Kanwal explains, these small gatherings also resonated to the sound of *bhajans* (devotional songs) in which labourers would “sing out” the worries in their lives:

¹³⁰ Acting Agent-General to CS, 10 September 1888, CSO 88/2660. Reservations about the festival had already been expressed in 1886. See Carruthers to CS, 11 September 1886, CSO 86/1887.

¹³¹ Irvine to CS, 28 August 1889, CSO 89/2334.

¹³² Burton wrote of maulvis that these active Muslim missionaries were to be found in every settlement and along most highways. 324.

¹³³ Kanwal: 41.

¹³⁴ Lal, 2000: 243.

¹³⁵ Lal, 2000: 245.

¹³⁶ Lotan cited in Ali, 1979: 23.

¹³⁷ Lal, 2000: 241. Lal adds that this emotional, egalitarian and non-intellectual tradition has become an integral part of the Fiji Indian moral order.

Sometimes they used empty biscuit tins or cut hollows in soft wood from the bush and use them to produce the sound of the dholak, khanjri, and kartal. Thus the bleak and congested rooms in the coolie lines used to echo with loud musical sounds, songs, fun and laughter.¹³⁸

During this time of spiritual, religious, physical, geographical, and psychological estrangement, these regular but informal religious meetings, even if they seldom carried the insignia or authority of a trained Indian priesthood, provided labourers with the fragments to form a flexible safety shield against the dehumanising daily grind of plantation work and the ambitious designs of Christian proselytism. It was one way by which labourers resisted becoming what their masters had in mind for them, and retained their humanity. Hence, while the colonial and plantation hierarchies may have exercised overall control over labourers' bodies, their space, their time, and the laws that legalised this power, they could never quite control the symbolic capital of the Indian community as it manifested itself in their religions.

After the turn of the century, a number of visiting religious figures from India sent to “uplift” the Indian community in Fiji, saw the gradual strengthening of religious tutelage and observation and brought Indians in Fiji in closer contact with political developments in India. From this time onwards, religious and political awakening among immigrants worked more explicitly in tandem. Of the religious missions that came to Fiji, the most militant were the promoters of the Arya Samaj faith. Founded in Bombay in 1875 by Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the Arya Samaj combined spiritual guidance with an explicit commitment to worldly social and political action.¹³⁹ They moved into Fiji with ambitions to transform the soft-spoken and self-effacing labourer into a new assertive and militant Hindu.

From its humble beginnings in 1904 in Samabula, the Samaj rose to become in Kelly's words, “the most articulate and popular anti-colonial Indian force” in the 1920s riding a wave of success from school-building to newspaper publishing, and

¹³⁸ Kanwal: 41. See also Lal, 2000: 56.

¹³⁹ See among others, Dhanpati Pandey's *The Arya Samaj and Indian nationalism, 1875-1920*. New Delhi: S. Chand, 1972.

spearheading the formation of Hindu political and cultural organisations.¹⁴⁰ In the beginning, the Government had been quick to realise the subversive threat posed by the Arya Samaj and its members were soon placed under surveillance. The intensity of surveillance depended mostly on the degree of political tension in Fiji and India. For instance, following a series of political disturbances in India in 1908 and 1909, the Fiji Government became convinced that moves were afoot among Indians in Fiji to gather support for the nationalist movement in India. Then, fearing that a rising among the Lautoka immigrants was imminent, the sub-inspector of the town was instructed to send Indian constables in disguise to meetings of immigrants. In his report, he wrote:

I do not think that the meetings were specially convened. It seemed to me that they were the usual Saturday and Sunday night meetings where the “Ramaian” is read, Indian matters were discussed afterwards and the newspapers read and a collection taken up. I heard nothing of a revolutionary nature at any of the meetings I attended. ... Most of the Indians seemed ignorant of the cause of the trouble in India and wanted to know what it was.¹⁴¹

Nevertheless, the Inspector General collected a series of newspapers which were by now arriving from India on a regular basis and forwarded them to the Agent-General for Immigration to peruse for seditious articles. Indar Narayan, a prominent leader of the Arya Samaj was closely followed. All his mail was opened by the administration and carefully screened for any political content that was “likely to cause ill-feeling to the Government”.¹⁴² On this occasion, the government could not find any incriminating evidence to detain the Samaj leaders and halt their activities. Tact and subtlety were vital to the survival of the Samaj’s enterprise. The government’s inability to eliminate the Arya Samaj may also have been due to the Samaj’s preference for involvement in grassroots educational development rather than in institutional politics. The Arya Samaj politics were embedded not so much in pamphlets or overt political action but deep in their philosophy of education. Fundamental to this philosophy was enlightenment and liberation through education

¹⁴⁰ Kelly, 1991a: 237.

¹⁴¹ Minute of 15 March 1909, CSO 09/2456.

¹⁴² Agent-General for Immigration minute to CS, 22 March 1909, CSO 09/2456.

and in these early years, the Arya Samaj campaign in Fiji was dominated as much by religious projects as by educational ones.¹⁴³

Education

As Andrews and Pearson remarked in their 1915 Report, “it would be hardly an exaggeration to state that the policy of the Government of Fiji with regard to Indian education has been, up till quite recently, one of almost complete neglect”.¹⁴⁴ They highlighted the incongruous case of rates being collected from Indian ratepayers for public school purposes, without permission being given to the children of these ratepayers to enter a public school.¹⁴⁵

As it was for the education of ordinary Fijians, the education of Indian immigrants in the colony was regarded by some as a threat to public order.¹⁴⁶ The strongest opposition to any education being given to Indians came from the sugar companies. They feared that education would take labourers away from their main purpose of tilling the soil, and thus make him ‘spoilt’ for labour purposes. In a letter to the Acting Colonial Secretary, Mr Duncan the Manager of the Vancouver-Fiji Sugar Company, expressed a similar fear:

We most emphatically do not require an Indian community of highly educated labourers, with the attendant troubles which the ‘baboo’ class has brought to the Indian Government teaching and preaching sedition and looking generally for immediate treatment on a parity with educated Europeans accustomed to self government for many centuries. We require agriculturalists only and the education provided by the Colony (or planter) should for that reason be but elementary, and in as far as possible, technical on these lines.¹⁴⁷

Mr D. J. Solomon, former chairman of the Levuka School Board agreed that “to educate an Indian is to create inducement for crime”.¹⁴⁸ A debate emerged between

¹⁴³ For an in-depth analysis of the Arya Samaj presence in Fiji, see Kelly, 1991a.

¹⁴⁴ Andrews and Pearson: 42.

¹⁴⁵ Andrews and Pearson: 43.

¹⁴⁶ See Ross’s allusion in “Education Commission Report”: 78.

¹⁴⁷ See Enclosure 3, Paper 68: “Education.” in *JFLC*, 1914.

¹⁴⁸ “Education Commission Report”: 49.

the missions on one side and employers and the government on the other, about which was the more dangerous to the colony: an enlightened or an unenlightened population?¹⁴⁹

The missionaries and the government held different conceptions of the implications of education. Led by the Marist Brothers and the Wesleyan Reverend Richard Piper whose Navua school accepted all ethnic groups, the missions argued that a Christian education could neutralise the threat of disorder. Brother Claudius proposed that “it is only by education that the child can learn love of work, honesty, submission, order, etc. It is by it that he respects the law and parental authority.”¹⁵⁰ With the moral guidance of the missions, he believed that Fijians and Indians would turn into obedient subjects and “very serviceable” citizens.¹⁵¹ His superior concurred. Commenting more specifically about Indians, Bishop Vidal submitted that:

They should be educated according to Christian principles of education: unless prompt action is taken in the matter, they will become a menace, as they actually are a disgrace, to the Colony. Supreme Court statistics speak for themselves. And yet the Marist Brothers have amply demonstrated that even Indians of the class sent to Fiji can be successfully taught and are susceptible of sound education.¹⁵²

Reverend Piper’s contribution to the debate was cast in a somewhat similar vein. Commenting on the role of education in rescuing Britain from its own history of barbarism and cannibalism, he pleaded that the people of Fiji should not function as mere human machines for the production of wealth and that they too should benefit from the intellectual and moral uplifting value of education. He advised that a decidedly moral and Christian education would have the most salutary effect:

the primary object of educating Indians will be to make them better citizens and reduce their average of criminality which, at present, is alarmingly high.

The danger is that of all education a purely secular one will place sharper and

¹⁴⁹ Andrews and Pearson: 43.

¹⁵⁰ “Education Commission Report”: 96.

¹⁵¹ “Education Commission Report”: 53.

¹⁵² “Education Commission Report”: 112.

more formidable weapons in the hands of those whose moral and religious sanctions are lamentably weak, but whose predilections to theft, deceit, duplicity, conspiracy, rapine and murder are terribly real and strong.¹⁵³

In his submission the Agent-General of Immigration advised the Education Commission that education could be used to mould Indians into a group of law-abiding citizens. Keeping education from them would “through ignorance or discontent” make of them “a race of helots regarded with suspicion and a menace to the public order”.¹⁵⁴

A similar rift split supporters and opponents of educating Indian immigrants in the English language. Those who were staunchly opposed to the instruction of English to Indians, as E. W. Fenner (Manager for the CSR in Fiji) was, considered that

Indian children should be taught by teachers of Indian nationality at various centres, and, in my opinion, no attempt should be made to proselytise them or to teach them English. Professed Christianity and knowledge of English are almost invariably associated with rascality in the classes of Indians that come to Fiji.¹⁵⁵

W. A. Scott was just as contemptuous of Indian education as he was of Fijian education:

I am not in sympathy with teaching Indians English. I consider the class of Indians in this Colony to be agriculturalists, and I think they should be confined as much as possible to that sphere of usefulness.¹⁵⁶

In thirty years of indenture, Indians had generally been deprived of all formal education. Until the mid 1890s one must presume that literacy was acquired in rare

¹⁵³ “Education Commission Report”: 66. Reverend Piper distinguished himself in 1914 by visiting India and joining the ranks of other missionaries who called for the abolition of indenture.

¹⁵⁴ “Education Commission Report”: 18.

¹⁵⁵ “Education Commission Report”: 50, 91.

¹⁵⁶ “Education Commission Report”: 65.

and isolated cases in somewhat similar fashion to that described by the Girmitiya Lakhpat:

In the evenings after people had washed, those who could read did some reading. Sometimes married men who could not read or write would come with a slate to those who could, asking to be taught to read and write. We were keen to read and write because we wanted to learn to read our religious books like the Ramayana.¹⁵⁷

It was not unusual for them to learn to read and write from Fijians.¹⁵⁸ Yet, the core inspiration for early education among immigrants remained religious. Lal observes that the *Mandalis* and other small places of prayer and worship gradually grew to become small centres of learning and eventually formed the focal points for the development of a sense of community.¹⁵⁹

In 1894, the first signs of more organised attempts to establish schools among “free” immigrants became apparent in the main southern districts of Rewa, Suva and Navua.¹⁶⁰ These were probably similar to the small “backyard” schools that Andrews and Pearson found on their visit to Fiji some twenty years later. These were temporary arrangements that filled the educational void left by the negligence of the government and the sugar companies. None of these early initiatives resulted in the establishment of permanent schools but they testify to the awareness of immigrants of the power of knowledge and of their determination to make education work for them. They contributed eagerly in money and enthusiasm but were let down by the lack of suitably qualified teachers and the indifferent attitude of their employers and the administration. The lack of institutional support is well illustrated by David Ramsay’s 1896 attempt to open and conduct a school for twenty-five Indian students in Cumming Street in Suva. A man of advanced age, Ramsay pleaded with the

¹⁵⁷ Cited in Ali, 1979: 31.

¹⁵⁸ “Education Commission Report”: 127.

¹⁵⁹ Lal, 2000: 240.

¹⁶⁰ Paper 24: “Report in Indian Immigration for 1895.” in *JFLC*, 1895. 35. Few details about these early ventures have so far surfaced.

government to subsidise his project but he was turned down and the school did not eventuate.¹⁶¹

The late 1890s saw the establishment of the Marist Brothers' cosmopolitan school in Toorak to cater for all "coloured" students and Dudley's Wesleyan schools in Suva and Nausori. As we saw in the previous section, these schools were regarded with suspicion by Hindus and Muslims. They preferred to establish their own schools and wanted teachers from India who were competent in Hindi, Urdu, religious education, and English. This was articulated most clearly by Totaram Sanadhya:

In Fiji, there are missionary schools, but to send children to study in this kind of school is to make them Christian. Therefore it is necessary for some man, who is literate in Hindi and also knows English to go from India and open a school to make our brothers educated.¹⁶²

Sanadhya had been at the forefront of efforts by the immigrant community to petition the government into providing schools for the education of Indians. In 1910, his name was the first of more than 200 signatures by Indian men and women requesting the government for schools so that "all of us and our progeny may be turned into true and peaceful settlers".¹⁶³ At the time, only 9.4 % of Indians were literate compared to 52.8 % of Fijians, 54 % of Half-castes,¹⁶⁴ 58 % of Rotumans, and 86.5 % of Europeans.¹⁶⁵ Increased public interest in India about the welfare of their compatriots in the colonies put the Government of India under greater obligation to intervene and demand from governments and employers in the colonies where Indians were settled that basic education be provided.¹⁶⁶ Criticism also came from within Fiji's administrative structure, with the Education Commission pointing out that the facilities offered for

¹⁶¹ See Agent-General for Immigration to CS, 15 July 1896, CSO 96/2393; and Ramsey to CS, 21 July 1896, CSO 96/2465. His students included ten adults, three Fijians and two "Polynesians".

¹⁶² Sanadhya: 64. See also the "Memorandum by the Resident Inspector of Immigrants, Labasa" Philip Lamb in Appendix L of the "Education Commission Report". Lamb signalled that there was unanimous support for schools in Labasa and that neither Muslims nor Hindus had any objection to being taught in the same classroom. They also expressed their opposition to any Christian education in the curriculum. Thornley cites another example from 1917 when the inspector of immigrants in Ba reported that a small school set up in the area appeared to have the aim of educating Indian children "avoiding all Christian influences". Thornley, 1974: 149.

¹⁶³ Petition dated 13 July 1910 in CSO 10/5911.

¹⁶⁴ "Half-caste" was a colonial category referring to persons of mixed blood.

¹⁶⁵ "Fiji Census Report", 1911.

¹⁶⁶ "Education Commission Report": 128.

the education of Indian children compared most unfavourably with those offered to others. It recommended that employers of indentured labour provide school buildings at centres designated by the government for the education of the children of indentured labourers, and that the government assist by providing teachers and salaries.¹⁶⁷ The recommendations requiring employers to provide school buildings were passed into law in 1912, but provision for state aid to schools was not legislated until 1916.

The companies responded by negotiating with the Methodist mission to provide Christian education at the new schools. While some individuals on both sides of the partnership were opposed to these arrangements, the sugar companies and the mission had a mutual interest in providing Christian education. The companies knew that labourers would resist sending their children to such schools. Labourers would rather keep their children home than risk their conversion to Christianity. The companies could also count on the competence of the missions in recruiting the “right” teachers from India. The companies were confident that the missions would be even better placed than the government in watching Indian teachers so closely “that it would be extremely difficult if not impossible for the latter to undermine authority or preach or teach discontent or sedition”.¹⁶⁸

This arrangement permitted the mission to continue its evangelical drive among Indians in the hope to establish among them a more permanent Christian influence. This pact and the government’s complicity in it, came under severe criticism in the Andrews and Pearson Report as “a very serious infringement of the principle of religious neutrality”.¹⁶⁹ Not until 1916, when the grant-in aid scheme came into effect, were Indians able to run their own schools. By then, the roots and nature of the contest, and the organisation of power in the colony was such that it ensured children in Fiji would receive a distinctively ethnic education.

In this regard, the Arya Samaj played an important role. When it entered the fray at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Samaj quickly established itself as an

¹⁶⁷ “Education Commission Report”: 12. See also paragraphs 65-70 of the Report.

¹⁶⁸ See Enclosure 3, Paper 68: “Education.” *JFLC*, 1914.

¹⁶⁹ Andrews and Pearson: 44.

outspoken vehicle for the awakening of Indian religious and political sensitivities in Fiji. It was the first organised attempt to mobilise indentured labourers and “free” settlers around a sense of moral and human right. To educate Indian settlers into political consciousness, the Arya Samaj had recourse to three main avenues: their religious philosophy, the media and school instruction. Through their religious philosophy, the Arya Samaj contested the European monopoly on “virtue” and “civilization”. They reversed the dominant symbolic order to present colonialism as a violent, immoral and evil system set against the virtue, honour and righteousness of the higher Hindu moral order. Their imported newspapers and pamphlets, followed later by their own publication of the *Fiji Samachar*, functioned as a vital conduit by which Indians in Fiji became sensitive to the rhetoric being used in India to counter colonial rule. Finally, the Samaj mounted an effective challenge in the area of education where they competed successfully with mission schools from the late 1910s to the late 1920s, nurturing in the process, as Kelly has shown, a crop of articulate men effective in colonial legal and speech genres and favourable to the nationalist cause in India and political parity in Fiji.¹⁷⁰ With this combined approach, the Arya Samaj attacked the barriers that were placed in the way of Indian progress and replaced them with instruments of emancipation. Yet, in spite of its progressive agenda,¹⁷¹ the Samaj’s singular concern for Indians as an ethnic and religious entity caused it to participate in, rather than resist, the construction and strengthening of the colonial demarcations of race.

In the midst of these larger political manoeuvrings, ordinary indentured and ‘free’ Indians continued to seek out schooling the way they always did, in the most humble settings. In Nadi, Andrews and Pearson discovered a small school,

which was being held in a stable, behind a small store, with about a dozen small boys learning English from a Hindu woman. This woman had learned

¹⁷⁰ Kelly, 1991a: 115-116.

¹⁷¹ The Arya Samaj attacked untouchability, image worship, child marriage, and caste, and favoured widow remarriage, the education of girls and the study of the *Vedas*. See Dhanapati Pandey’s *The Arya Samaj and Indian nationalism, 1875-1920*. New Delhi: S. Chand, 1972; Madhu Kishwar’s “Arya Samaj and Women’s Education: Kanya Maha Vidyalaya, Jullandar.” in *Economic and Political Weekly*. 21: 17, 26 April 1986; and Kelly, 1991a.

English at a Mission School in the Madras Presidency before coming out to Fiji, under indenture, some 12 years ago.¹⁷²

Near Ba, they found another small school with twenty boys learning English from an aged *maulvi*. There were probably several other such “backyard” schools¹⁷³ where the seeds of future empowerment continued to be sown and where labourers cultivated the possibilities of finding occupations beyond agricultural production. In this exercise, the emphasis on literacy in English was as marked for Indians as it was for Fijians.

The perception that knowledge of English was akin to political power, was dramatically reinforced in 1912 with the introduction of a literacy law that made reading and writing in English a criterion for voting eligibility in municipal elections. This literacy test effectively excluded thousands of Indians from their only franchise. Justifying the law, the *Fiji Times* suggested that only white candidates were competent enough for formal political participation:

It is one of the elementary rules of civilization that the educated and enlightened shall represent, lead, and govern for the uneducated and entirely ignorant, in all matters requiring thought and intelligence.¹⁷⁴

It thus became politically expedient for the colonial establishment and the European community to deprive Indians from learning English, and deny them their only opportunity to participate in politics. News about the test triggered an uproar in India and prompted Andrews to warn representatives of Fiji’s business community, several of whose members were implicated in the drafting of the law, that Indian public opinion would not stand for it.¹⁷⁵ The Indian Government was forced to intervene and in 1916, the Fiji Government responded by introducing a new Letters Patent

¹⁷² Andrews and Pearson: 43.

¹⁷³ The “Education Commission Report” speaks of the existence of three to four unnamed Muslim schools and it is likely that school was conducted a similar number of Hindu establishments near the main sugar centres. It is unlikely that these schools would have been recognised as “proper schools” by the Commission. “Education Commission Report”: 127.

¹⁷⁴ *Fiji Times*, 3 November 1912. See also *Fiji Times* 7 September, 5 November, and 23 November 1912, for more on the debate.

¹⁷⁵ “Report of Mr Andrews’ Speech to the Planters’ Association Executive Committee, Fiji.” 7 December 1915. 5. NAF.

providing for the nomination of one Indian member to the Legislative Council.¹⁷⁶ Literacy in English was thus the site of pronounced contestation between those in the European establishment who sought to monopolise it, and those in the wider general populace who saw it as a means of achieving their own social, economic and political advancement.

In this respect the arrival of Manilal Doctor¹⁷⁷ in Fiji on 4 September 1912, has been described as an event of “fundamental importance”.¹⁷⁸ An in-depth discussion of the significance of Manilal in challenging the plantation and colonial establishment between 1912 and 1920 requires more space than is available here. However, a number of observations need to be made. From the beginning of the twentieth century, the plight of immigrants in Fiji had received increasing coverage in India where public pressure forced the Indian Government to demand more protective intervention from its Fijian counterpart. A London-educated lawyer, Manilal was sent to Fiji by Mahatma Gandhi in response to a request by prominent members of the Indian community.¹⁷⁹ The large crowd which congregated to welcome him at the wharf on his arrival in Fiji, attests to the value that ordinary Indians placed on his presence.¹⁸⁰ Three days after his arrival hundreds more turned up at Naselai including “a large number of Fijians” who danced *meke* in his honour and presented him with mats.¹⁸¹ Sanadhya estimated that six or seven hundred Fijians had gathered to formally welcome Manilal. In his speech to Manilal, their spokesman reportedly said: “Here there is great need for educated people like you, and may God make you and your brothers live long. You should think of us as your brothers.”¹⁸²

Manilal was admitted to the Fiji bar on 29 October 1912, breaking the monopoly of European lawyers on the legal system. Indian immigrants could now count on, speak with, and trust their own lawyer without depending, as Kelly remarks, on “the

¹⁷⁶ The Government appointed Badri Maharaj, a wealthy farmer, ahead of the more outspoken and favoured Manilal Doctor.

¹⁷⁷ He adopted the name “Doctor” in keeping with a custom of using his father’s profession as his surname. *Fiji Times*, 5 September 1912; See also the *Western Pacific Herald*, 6 September 1912.

¹⁷⁸ Kelly, 1991b: 154. For details of Manilal’s career outside Fiji, see Hugh Tinker’s “Odd Man Out: The Loneliness of the Indian Colonial Politician – The Career of Manilal Doctor.” in *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*. 2: 2, 1974. 226-43.

¹⁷⁹ *Western Pacific Herald*, 6 September 1912.

¹⁸⁰ The *Fiji Times* speaks of a crowd in excess of 500 people. *Fiji Times*, 5 September 1912.

¹⁸¹ *Western Pacific Herald*, 19 September 1912.

¹⁸² Sanadhya: 55.

uncertain vehicles of foreign language and the white lawyers' methods".¹⁸³ With Manilal's leadership, the law court was transformed from a site where plantation and colonial power enjoyed comparative advantage into one where attacks on the system could be launched.¹⁸⁴ Manilal backed up his success in court with petitions and letters to the government seeking improved conditions for Indian immigrants. His efforts also resulted in 1915 in the elimination of the state's power to imprison individuals for labour offences. New provisions were also made for the education of indentured labourers' children.¹⁸⁵ Manilal also founded *The Indian Settler* in 1917 which he used for political consciousness raising.

Manilal's popularity among immigrants grew to such an extent that in 1916, when the new Letters Patent arrived, he was widely regarded as the front-runner for the lone Indian seat on the Fiji Legislative Council. Conscious of the danger posed by Manilal, the government chose instead to appoint Badri Maharaj, a farmer from Ra. This did not deter Manilal or his Gandhi-trained wife Jaikumari from organising Fiji's first general strike in January and February 1920.¹⁸⁶ By then, the legal nature of the challenge on the colonial establishment had assumed a political character and fearful of Manilal and Jaikumari's growing power, the decision was taken by the government to deport them from Fiji.

Under Manilal's influence, resistance to plantation and colonial authorities experienced a significant shift. Aside from boycotts and an enhanced effort to initiate educational advancement, the 1920s would challenge colonial and plantation dominance, as Gillion points out, in the form of political organization and agitation, occupational diversification, and a search for an Indian identity.¹⁸⁷

Reflections

In the end, as Kelly points out, what is remarkable is not so much that girmitiyas resisted capitalism or that they organised strikes and other labour protests but that,

¹⁸³ Kelly, 199b: 206.

¹⁸⁴ For details of some of Manilal's clashes with the authorities see CSO 13/1810, 15/4241, 16/5113, and 16/5906.

¹⁸⁵ Shameem: 313.

¹⁸⁶ For a discussion of the strikes, see Gillion, 1977; Ahmed Ali, 1980; Shameem, 1990; and Lal, 1992.

¹⁸⁷ Gillion, 1977: 16.

while they were turned into “coolies” and transformed into “labour units”, they refused to become what their owners imagined them to be.¹⁸⁸ Viewed in tandem, Chapters Four and Six reveal that labourers created considerable space for themselves and actively challenged the system that oppressed them.

Labourers primarily sought survival. When they attacked the production process they did so by absenting themselves, slowing down, sabotaging, and deserting. Occasionally they retaliated against their employers by physically assaulting, maiming, and in exceptional cases, murdering them. Labourers demarcated some space within which they set limits to their own subjugation and employers were only ever able to have partial control over them. There were indisputably significant possibilities for negotiation, compromise, harmonization, and collaboration which took place within this space. These formed an essential part of the strategies so essential for survival. Resistance forms a fragment of this broad spectrum of the everyday experience of indenture but it helps to counter claims that girmitiya were all-dependent on their employers for the necessities of life,¹⁸⁹ that they were a ‘lost people’,¹⁹⁰ or victims who fatalistically accepted their fate. While they seldom exercised the right to appeal to higher authority because such actions were often futile, they were combative in other ways and survived in large measure by the strength of their own will, and by seeking and creating other avenues through which to contest their working conditions, improve their lives and in the image of the inspirational mythological figure Rama, survive their banishment. Religious symbolism and the stories of the triumph of good over evil, were ideal means by which colonialism’s own symbolic order could be confronted and where alternative visions of the world could be kept alive.

It can also be ascertained that in those early colonial days, education was generally used as a means of control by the administration. If education was largely withheld from ordinary people, the most enterprising among them continued to seek and find other means by which to acquire the knowledge, language and skills they needed for their personal advancement. This was not a conscious act of *conscientisação* as

¹⁸⁸ Kelly, 1991a: 42. See also the extract in the *Fiji Times*, 15 October 1912, depicting Indian labourers as labour units and animals.

¹⁸⁹ Durutalo, 1985a: 222.

¹⁹⁰ Naidu: 77.

proposed by Paulo Freire in his discussions of the pedagogy of the oppressed or the mental decolonisation advocated by post-colonial critics in the wake of later independence movements.¹⁹¹ Rather it was aimed at the much more modest and tangible goal of attaining a greater measure of personal choice and control over their destinies. But it was powerful enough to reflect labourers' rejection of the fate of physical labour and perpetual agricultural production which was reserved for them by the colonial elite. We can now proceed to examine the kinds of spaces that women created to contest Fiji's colonial, indigenous, and plantation patriarchies.

¹⁹¹ See Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972. See also Ngugi wa Thiongo, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1986.

Chapter Seven

Women's Resistance

In this chapter, an effort is made to find traces of the complex world of Fiji women and the aspects of their resistance that lie embedded in colonial texts. The aim is to find out if, how, and under what circumstances women created and used opportunities to question and confront colonial and patriarchal power in the various spheres of their existence. This is a difficult task because the lives of indigenous and migrant women were recorded mainly through the lenses of European and Fijian male elites. Women lived mainly around their households and their own written accounts of that experience are almost non-existent. This historiographical male bias and the lack of records written by women, make an accurate profile of their worlds particularly difficult to reconstruct. Even so, for the Pacific, Bronwen Douglas has demonstrated that it is possible to decode traces of indigenous female actions and presence even when the archives seem so intransigent.¹ In Fiji, such a decentred reading necessitates a preparedness to evoke different questions, periodisations, protagonists and narratives. It also demands a reading of past circumstances that privileges the private over the public world, reproduction over production, and the personal over the political. Two kinds of records are available for this task. The first is the seemingly haphazard intervention of women in the colonial record by way of individual acts which required the notification of the colonial secretary's office. The second is the more generalised reporting (such as the 1896 *Report of the Commission on the Decrease of the Native Population*²) in which women were discussed as a broad entity in need of special attention by the colonial state.³ This chapter juxtaposes these sources in two broad sections representing two major groups of women whose

¹ Bronwen Douglas, "Provocative Readings in Intransigent Archives: Finding Aneityumese Women." in *Oceania*. 70: 2, 1999. 111-29. My approach in this chapter shares a similar desire to decode females actions in a male-centred archive.

² *Report of the Commission on Decrease of the Native Population 1893*. Suva: Government of Fiji, 1896.

³ For detailed discussions of this important report see Vicky Luker, "Mothers of the Taukei: Fijian Women and 'the Decrease of the Race'." PhD Thesis. Canberra: Australian National University, 1997. See also Margaret Jolly, "Other Mothers: Maternal 'Insouciance' and the Depopulation Debate in Fiji and Vanuatu." in *Maternities and Modernities: Colonial and Postcolonial Experiences in Asia and the Pacific*. Kalpana Ram and Margaret Jolly (eds.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 177-212.

experience of colonialism was similar but separate. The first group of women is overwhelmingly indigenous Fijian and was largely confined to the villages while the second is overwhelmingly indentured from India and was confined to plantations.

Women in the Villages

Village women in Fiji have traditionally been represented as ‘beasts of burden’.⁴ Images of a submissive, passive, ever toiling, ignorant, duty-bound, morally vulnerable woman abound. The following description of Fijian women in the *Report of the Commission on Decrease of the Native Population* sums up the prevailing view:

Fijian women, being from ancient tradition and practice regarded as mere chattels and slaves, submit to a life of hardship and hard work. They cook, fish, gather and carry firewood, draw water, dig and carry home the food from the plantations, weed gardens, and plait mats for which they have gathered and prepared the material, make and mend nets, and manufacture pottery. They also do much work in connection with *solevus* (festivals) and *boves* (councils) in providing presents of native cloth and other native goods; and perform a score of other duties from which they have no escape and little respite.⁵

According to the report, Fijian men conceived of a good wife as “*a yalewa dau tei, dau qoli, dau cakacaka*,” which translates as “a woman who always plants, always fishes, and always works”.⁶ The household and the garden may have been the primary sites where a sense of personhood, loyalty, obedience, duty, order, morality, sexuality, and an ethic of work could be cultivated. But it was precisely in these domestic spheres that village women mounted their most important challenges and fought their main battles.

In Chapter Five, it was argued that the transfer of power after Cession created a sufficient degree of uncertainty or “abnormality” for a temporary power vacuum to

⁴ *Report on Decrease of the Native Population*: 38. See also Maxwell’s description of Colo women in Paper 27: “Native Lands Commission.” in *JFLC*, 1914. 3.

⁵ *Report on Decrease of the Native Population*: 38.

⁶ *Report on Decrease of the Native Population*: 38.

emerge and for ordinary people to avail themselves of the opportunity to seek change and their own advancement. Women were particularly prominent in this endeavour. The evidence presented below suggests that village women were especially active in matters of marriage, fertility, and movement out of villages. In these ventures they faced their fathers, husbands, and chiefs, and a formidable adversary in the shape of the *Bose Vakaturaga*.

The early meetings of the *Bose* indicate that the chiefs were keen to revoke several of the liberties that might have accrued to women from a change of Fijian customary law. Gradually women's participation in the decision-making process of the *Bose* were withdrawn,⁷ their freedom to drink *yaqona* was curbed,⁸ and their rights to land (which had been variable from place to place) were expropriated and secured 'for men only'.⁹ Strict rules about sex were also adopted and any hint of impropriety could result in severe punishment. In one extreme case, a Seaqaqa woman was attacked by the village men after a Tikina Council had decided that women who committed adultery and ran away into the bush should be pursued by men and suffer *tokatokai* (gang-rape).¹⁰ The men were sent to Suva to be publicly flogged but the administration was faced with the dilemma of punishing men who were responding to the orders and authority of a government-appointed council. Most of the time however, women who broke the colony's stringent adultery and fornication laws, served time in the vicinity of their homes plaiting mats and performing other community work, laboured on public works, or suffered the public humiliation of having their hair cut short.¹¹

Marriage

One of the most striking aspects of the early years of the *Bose Vakaturaga* is the unusually long and recurring discussions about marriage. In 1877, chiefs and native magistrates acknowledged that the new laws were helping eliminate "the evils arising

⁷ In his opening address of the 1881 *Bose*, Governor Des Voeux notified the assembled chiefs that women were now forbidden from the meeting because they increased logistical problems and because their presence was "as a rule neither good for them nor conducive to the main object of the meeting". "Proceedings of a Native Council," Nailaga, 1881. 9. At least one prominent chief protested against the decision and requested that women be allowed to attend. 29.

⁸ "Proceedings of a Native Council," Naiserelagi, 1884. 29.

⁹ "Proceedings of a Native Council, Bua, 1878. 53.

¹⁰ See Eastgate to CS, 3 May 1878, CSO 78/646; and Heffernan to CS, 16 March 1885, CSO 85/802.

¹¹ "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1878. 5.

from the bad state of marriage customs and regulations in former times".¹² This was helped in large measure by the provisions for divorce now provided by British law which some women were availing themselves of to free themselves from ill-assorted marriages.¹³ In the years that followed, however, the number of applications for divorce rose and concern grew that too many women were now using this law to live independent lives and that this was beginning to have an adverse effect on the health of the indigenous population. For instance, in 1883 a special sitting was arranged during the *Bose* to inquire into the escalating rate of divorce. The meeting resolved to increase the fee for divorce certificates in the hope that this would act as a deterrent.¹⁴ In his response to the resolution, the Governor replied that there would be less divorce if women were better treated by their husbands:

The sight which is not uncommon in Fiji, such as, that of a man carrying nothing, and a woman following with a heavy burden, is not a pleasant one to well-wishers of your race, not merely as being itself an evil, but as indicating so much as to the subjection of women.¹⁵

This highlighted the often disparate views held by government and chiefs on the rightful treatment of women. Both sought to control women but they had different views as to how it should be done.

Rosalind O'Hanlon's work on Colonial India speaks of British law extending the power of Indian men over women in the rights to divorce and remarriage and in the control of women's numbers.¹⁶ In Fiji however, this aspect of the new colonial code of law appears to have worked in women's favour. Many Fijian women seized the opportunities offered by the new laws to variously decline, refuse, undermine, or terminate marriage and thus loosen the power of customary practices that previously

¹² "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1877. 4.

¹³ "Proceedings of a Native Council," Rewa, 1877. 4.

¹⁴ "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1883. 27.

¹⁵ "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1883. 38. However, the increase in divorce fee was later enacted in Native Regulation 2 of March 1888. *Regulations of the Native Regulation Board: 1887-1895*. Suva: Government Printer, 1898.

¹⁶ Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Issues of Widowhood: Gender and Resistance in Colonial Western India." in *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*. Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash (eds.) Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991. 75.

tied them to their husbands, relatives and villages. For instance, at the 1880 *Bose*, a distressed Roko Tui Ba exclaimed:

How can the population increase when the people refuse to marry? In some towns it is reported that there is a large number of marriageable women, and that they positively refuse to be married to anybody.¹⁷

The refusal to marry was one of the ways by which women retained their independence. In some provinces, such as Nadroga, women chose to remain spinsters because their Buli objected to them marrying in other districts.¹⁸ While the chiefs wished women to marry in greater number few of them approved of women marrying outside their province. Such marriages would entail a certain degree of freedom of movement, and such movement was incompatible with their determination to keep people in their villages. The practice of women marrying outside the province was therefore judged to be “contrary to the ways of the land”.¹⁹ Two Magodro women who had left their district to marry in Dawasamu were ordered by the *Bose* to go back to their district.²⁰ On this occasion the women defied the edict and refused to leave Tailevu.

At the 1887 *Bose*, the Roko Tui Ba launched an attack on spinsters by proposing a regulation that would “put a stop to their wandering about without the consent of their relatives”.²¹ The motion was put to a vote and adopted unanimously. It read:

Our women also too often wander from their homes and fall into bad habits. ... [W]e ask Your Excellency to help us in their case and also in the case of adult spinsters or widows who desert their *mataqali* and ignore their *mataqali* obligations. We ... claim the control of them when they are able-bodied and useful to us.²²

¹⁷ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1880. 15.

¹⁸ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1883. 16.

¹⁹ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1883. 16. See also Resolution IX.

²⁰ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1883. 16.

²¹ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1887. 13.

²² “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1887. 13-14.

While some women chose to decline or to sever matrimonial ties, others simply refused their husbands' marital rights, deserted them, or abandoned their homes. Some women who were pressured into consenting to marriage by their relatives chose to refuse marital rights to their husbands. This was frequent among women in Colo North. One entry into the Supreme Court Schedule read: "The respondent Kasanita has resisted and continues to resist all attempts on the part of the Petitioner [her husband] to marital rights and in fact the marriage has never been consummated."²³

Some women left their husbands to live with European men. This was a source of recurring protest by chiefs and magistrates who pointed out that the law on adultery seemed to follow different standards when it applied to Fijians and Europeans. As early as 1876, the chiefs complained that:

Europeans are in the habit of harbouring native women who abscond from their husbands, and if the woman is sent for, the person who endeavours to bring her back is threatened by fire arms.²⁴

It was this sense of ownership that Fijian women threatened by moving in with European men. Whatever ethnic group they came from, men generally claimed ownership over "their" women and cross-ethnic liaisons were often viewed as betrayal. Such liaisons eroded claims to ownership and reversed the emerging assertion of racial difference. Miscegenic liaisons also produced biological and cultural hybridities that transgressed racial distinctions and ethnic purities of which the colonial administrators and Fijian chiefs were self-appointed guardians. Inter-racial sex was therefore seen as a threat to the establishment of a race-based colonial order.²⁵

²³ Commissioner Colo North to CS, 17 February 1903, CSO 03/929.

²⁴ "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1876. 28.

²⁵ There is a significant body of literature that documents the threat posed by miscegenation and the fear of racial degeneration in the colonial power structure. It is not my intention to review or engage this literature here because while it is useful in understanding the complexities of European masculine power, it is less helpful in reconstructing the aspects of colonized island women's resistance which are discussed in this chapter. See among others Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. London: Routledge, 1990; Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race*. London: Routledge, 1995; and Stoler, 1995.

A similar plea was repeated at the 1878 *Bose* when the delegates asked the governor to devise some measure for preventing “white men taking, carrying off, and detaining, native married women” because it caused “great vexation and trouble to the husbands, and to all the women’s relations” and because it was “a most unbecoming thing, and has the appearance to the people that the law is not the same to all”.²⁶ The issue was revisited throughout the 1880s. One prominent chief called for every woman who entered a “white man’s house” to be punished, and in addition, that her parents also be punished for permitting it. He added:

If we once allow our women to do as they please, they will become unmanageable. If we find any of our women living in a state of concubinage with Europeans, let them be punished.²⁷

Apart from mounting a direct attack on competing European men, the chiefs were also trying to halt the increasing number of women who, out of their own volition, left their homes to seek a better life outside the oppressive confines of the village and its community. While they feared losing women to European men, they also faced a fundamental policing problem. Their power was being undermined by women who refused to obey orders, to marry, or to carry out their reproductive function. These women were thus becoming “unmanageable”.

From the late 1880s the Fijian population began to decline to such an extent that its survival was called into question. Explanations other than women’s resistance to marriage and reproduction can account for the decline of the population in the late 1880s, the 1890s and the first decade of the twentieth century. Scarr has attributed the decline in the Fijian population in the 1880s and 1890s to demoralisation among indigenous Fijians who saw no point in raising children in a land that was no longer theirs.²⁸ A more plausible reason is advanced by Norma McArthur who ascribes the decline to the low number of child-bearing women in the 1880s and 1890s caused by the death of so many young girls during the 1875 measles epidemic.²⁹ Further

²⁶ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1878. 64.

²⁷ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1888. 25.

²⁸ Scarr, 1980: 298-9.

²⁹ Norma McArthur, *Island Populations of the Pacific*. Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1967. 30-1.

outbreaks of diseases in 1883, 1884, 1885, 1886, and 1891 all conspired to show a marked decline in the 1891 population census.³⁰

While census statistics indicate that the numerical depletion of women was a major cause for the decline in the Fijian population, there were other factors at play. Among them was the regularity and ease with which women refused to marry, deserted their husbands and homes, or sought and obtained a divorce. In the early 1890s, the government took measures to stop “the comparative facility with which divorces have been obtained by the native population”.³¹ This, Thurston explained, had had a most “injurious effect” on Fijians’ ability to reproduce as a race.³² In 1892, a new regulation regarding married women was enacted and imposed severe penalties for women’s marital offences and made imprisonment mandatory for women who deserted their husbands and/or abandoned their homes.³³

In 1893, a commission was appointed to inquire into the decrease in the Fijian population. The Commission found that the number of couples living apart was “seriously increasing”. It attributed this to the laxity of morals among young Fijians, the effects of the warm climate, the natural indolence of the people, and the survival of heathen customs.³⁴ But morality, climate, indolence, and heathen customs had little to do with Fijian women’s refusal to marry and their applications for divorce. They had more to do with the government’s growing desire to intervene in the lives of ordinary Fijians, and to control and order their bodies, space, and movement, as discussed in Chapter Five.

The Commission represented Fijian women’s defiance of marriage norms as driven by youthful impatience, frivolity, and sexual licence.³⁵ However it did admit to a factor of crucial importance. The young Fijian woman, it reported:

³⁰ McArthur: 26.

³¹ Despatch 41, Thurston to SS, 23 June 1891. CSO Despatches to the SS.

³² Despatch 41, Thurston to SS, 23 June 1891. See also despatch 17, Thurston to SS, 9 April 1890 for more background to the new regulation. CSO Despatches to the SS.

³³ Regulation 1 of 1892. *Regulations of the Native Regulation Board: 1887-1895*. Suva: Government Printer, 1898.

³⁴ *Report on the Decrease of the Native Population*: 61.

³⁵ *Report on the Decrease of the Native Population*: 42.

prolongs her liberty as far as possible by showing a disinclination for marriage, which would tie her to one man and transform her life from one of frivolity to one of drudgery; for, once married, she cannot abandon field-work, as the men will not undertake it, and without it she would starve.³⁶

The report does not indicate how many women prolonged their liberty by avoiding marriage. However the above passage suggests that at least until the 1890s, a significant number of Fijian women retained control over their lives by resisting marriage. This was not an organised mass movement. Rather, it appears that some women shared a desire to avoid or break out of matrimonial arrangements which offered them little more than bondage and servitude.

Abortion

The increasing incidence of abortions, still-births and barrenness in Fijian women was another major source of concern. Abortion was not a new phenomenon and had been the subject of debate at the *Bose Vakaturaga* since 1876.³⁷ In an 1880 report on the census, the Reverend Rooney (residing Wesleyan minister at Rewa) testified that abortion was common among Fijian women and could account for the low birth rate in the colony. Women, he claimed, procured abortion repeatedly and in succession.³⁸ However, if many women were seeking abortion, only few were prosecuted.³⁹ This suggests that women were apt at concealing their abortions and that the authorities, though conscious of the problem, were unable to police and punish it.

³⁶ *Report on the Decrease of the Native Population*: 42.

³⁷ "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1876. 28-9; See also "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1887. 14.

³⁸ William McGregor and Philip Solomon, "Report of a Commission Appointed to Investigate Certain Alleged Errors in the Recent Census of the Native Population and Other Matters thereto Pertaining." Levuka, 1880. Paper 44, MS 2, in Thurn Papers. 2.

³⁹ See for instance the case of a Bua woman sentenced to six months imprisonment for taking medicine to procure abortion. SM Tripp to CS, 2 August 1885, CSO 85/2135. See also the case of Limau prosecuted and jailed for 9 months for procuring abortion. SM Colo East to CS, 10 June 1891, CSO 91/1828. For the case of a woman who died as a result of complications after procuring abortion, see NSM Ba to Acting Native Commissioner, 29 June 1894, CSO 94/2521. In his response to this case, Thurston minuted that such incidents were regrettably not uncommon. Thurston to CS, 30 July 1894, CSO 94/2521. For a case which triggered a long series of correspondence about the jurisdiction of Provincial courts to try cases of abortion, see Ratu Savenaca Seniloli's report on a suspected abortion case, 15 April 1895, enclosed in CSO 95/2320. For two Labasa cases of abortion, see SM Labasa to Attorney-General, 9 August 1898, CSO 98/3565.

There were many reasons other than resistance for women to procure abortion. Foremost among them was the fear, humiliation, and ostracism that mothers of illegitimate children faced from the village pious. The *Bose* of 1896 heard that some women who became pregnant outside marriage were much ashamed and desired to conceal their condition from their relatives. Frightened of being taken to court and punished, they resorted to different methods to procure abortion, or they arranged for the child to be born secretly in the bush, with the usual result that the child died.⁴⁰ Women who had children outside marriage also automatically lost their membership of the Church.⁴¹ It was forbidden in some provinces for those who were in church fellowship to assist at the birth and in the nurturing of children born out of wedlock.⁴²

As early as December 1876, the chiefs sought to put a halt to abortion by recommending a punishment of two years imprisonment and flogging for those who assisted them. A regulation forbidding the drinking of medicine causing barrenness was also recommended.⁴³ These regulations had little effect.⁴⁴ The 1887 *Bose* heard that there was now “a great number” of still-born children and barren women in the land.⁴⁵ The chiefs also listened to the following testimony about the increasingly open and public operation by which a woman could become barren:

On a certain day she entered a house where a number of women were assembled, some of whom were fanning one of their number who was lying on her back on the floor. A vessel containing a decoction of lime juice and Chili peppers was beside her, and the contents were being poured into the vagina. On being asked why they were doing this, they said that it was to cause barrenness. The women to whom this was done have had children formerly but have had none since. A woman from Macuata, by the name of Losalini, originated this practice.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1896. 34.

⁴¹ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1892. 24.

⁴² “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1883. 14. The practice in Wesleyan villages of ostracising children born out of wedlock was first criticised in 1898 by Governor O’Brien. See Governor to CS, 7 July 1898, CSO 98/2650.

⁴³ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1876. 28.

⁴⁴ See the testimony of Rev Rooney already cited above.

⁴⁵ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1887. 14.

⁴⁶ “Proceedings of a Native Council,” 1887. 14.

The willingness to endure such pain is indicative of how sincerely the women wanted to be childfree.

In 1890, the Native Stipendiary Magistrate for Lomaiviti reported that not only were women seeking divorce more regularly, they were also choosing not to have more than one child.⁴⁷ To elude the strict laws forbidding abortion and the omnipresent surveillance of government and church officials, women organised themselves into secret societies. This made it almost impossible for anyone, including village chiefs or the Commissioners charged with inquiring into the decrease in the Fijian population, to establish the full extent of the practice:

The natives veil the practice with so much secrecy that a proper investigation of their methods has hitherto been impossible. ... There is a freemasonry among the women which conceals the practice not only from the police but even from their husbands and fathers. ... The natives of Vanualevu are generally reputed to be the most adept in procuring abortion.⁴⁸

The Commission found that the provinces of Bua, Macuata, Cakaudrove and Tailevu had very high rates of abortion and still-births. Macnaught cites evidence in some provinces, such as Bua, that as many as 30% of women were either childless or aborting.⁴⁹ This is corroborated by the Roman Catholic Bishop Julien Vidal who estimated in the late 1890s that in Bua abortion was “almost generally procured” especially among Wesleyan women.⁵⁰ Other reports speak of abortion as being “a common offence” throughout all provinces.⁵¹

The government responded to the Commission’s findings by instructing all Native Stipendiary Magistrates to report any sign of still-births in their districts. Reports flowed from the districts between 1894 and 1898 but like previous efforts, they

⁴⁷ NSM Lomaiviti to CS, 26 April 1890, CSO 90/1473.

⁴⁸ *Report on the Decrease in the Native Population*: 121-2. A similar inquiry had been conducted in the South Eastern parts of Viti Levu in 1880 by Carew and testimony from the various chiefs in the area had yielded no further clues about the nature and extent of the practice. See William McGregor and Philip Solomon, “Report of a Commission,” Paper 44, MS 2, in Thurn Papers. 35-6.

⁴⁹ Macnaught, 1982: 15.

⁵⁰ Bishop Vidal to Governor, 4 January 1899, CSO 99/109.

⁵¹ W. A. Allardyce minute to Assistant CS, 3 November 1895, CSO 95/2320.

revealed very little further information. In 1898 the penalty for abortion was raised to three years of imprisonment,⁵² reflecting the state's fear about the decline in the Fijian population and the continued contempt with which women seemed to regard the law.

By 1898, it was believed in government and religious circles that “the salvation of the Fijian race [lay], for a large part, with its women”.⁵³ To coax Fijian women into changing their behaviour, the Commission had recommended that a “Ladies’ Hygienic Mission” be instituted.⁵⁴ The mission was to consist of European women deployed in Fijian villages “for the improvement of the domestic status of the Fijian women and the practical amelioration of the numberless little ills by which their daily life is surrounded, and also for the safeguarding of the children during their critical age”.⁵⁵ Commenting on this report, Margaret Jolly suggests that the high rates of infant and maternal mortality amongst white women in the colonies should not have inspired much confidence in their maternal superiority. Yet, the assumption that native women were poor mothers was a common and powerful trope for transferring some of the blame for depopulation onto indigenous women.⁵⁶

The “Sisters’ Hygienic Mission” was in difficulty from the beginning. The administration compromised its own objectives by refusing to support the mission financially.⁵⁷ The Roman Catholic mission volunteered to conduct trials for the scheme and, believing that Fijian religious sisters were best placed to influence Fijian mothers, the idea of a European mission gradually dissipated.⁵⁸ A few “white” women demonstrated astonishing zeal in their attempts to rearrange Fijian women’s domestic space and behaviour.⁵⁹ However, the bulk of the work was done by Fijian sisters from the outset, though little evidence exists of their success at meeting the government’s initial objectives. Jolly shows that the mission had largely petered out

⁵² Native Regulation 6 of 1898, *Fiji Royal Gazette*, 13 April 1898.

⁵³ Anonymous Memorandum, undated, enclosed in CSO 98/4919. This memo was circulated among government officials and its views supported by the missions’ highest authorities. See Bishop Vidal to Governor, 22 December 1898, CSO 98/5268.

⁵⁴ *Report on the Decrease of the Native Population*: 188.

⁵⁵ *Report on the Decrease of the Native Population*: 188.

⁵⁶ Jolly: 182, 196.

⁵⁷ Assistant CS to Vidal, 2 February 1899, CSO 98/4919.

⁵⁸ Assistant CS to Vidal, 7 January 1899, CSO 99/215. See also CSO files 99/1259, 99/3920, and 99/4014.

⁵⁹ Macnaught cites Laura Spence’s efforts as particularly conspicuous. While accompanying her husband in Vanua Levu she inspected 299 houses, burnt 665 dirty mats and treated sixty cases of ringworm in one month alone. Macnaught, 1982: 18.

by 1903, partially as a result of the resistance, evasion, and ridicule with which it was met by Fijian women.⁶⁰

The gradual demographic recovery of the Fijian population in the early twentieth century suggests that the chiefs, church, and government had some success in influencing Fijian women's reproductive choices. However, writing to im Thurn in July 1904, the stipendiary magistrate for Kadavu, Dr Brough, reported that there could be "little doubt" that in every town on the island, "one or more women practise the art of procuring abortion".⁶¹ There is insufficient evidence to determine how widely this "art" was practiced in Kadavu or elsewhere in the colony in the first decade of the new century, or to account for any oscillations in the frequency of abortions during this period.

By the early 1910s, senior officials were convinced that women were the principal menace to the government's population policy. In his speech to the 1911 *Bose Vakaturaga*, the Governor commented on the reasons given for the decrease in the native population and stated: "I have studied them all, and I think you will agree with me that the fault lies entirely with the women."⁶² A year later and no longer able to hide his exasperation, the Governor issued this command to the assembled chiefs: "I order you to increase and multiply."⁶³

One must be careful not to impose a contemporary feminist agenda on these observations. The image of a freethinking, empowered, and liberated Fijian woman in late nineteenth century Fiji is anachronistic. Yet, one must not presume that many of these women could not conceive of protecting the limited freedom they enjoyed by controlling their fertility. When they did so, they were actively subverting colonial authority.

⁶⁰ Jolly: 197.

⁶¹ Brough to Governor im Thurn, 18 July 1904, Paper 25: "Private and Confidential Memo," M.S 2, im Thurn Papers.

⁶² "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1911. 4.

⁶³ Cited in France: 165.

Control of Movement

As much as colonial officials and Fijian officials sought to control Fijian women's sexuality, they also sought to control their movement. As early as May 1877 women were forbidden to abandon their homes.⁶⁴ In 1883, women were no longer permitted to work beyond their home district.⁶⁵ By 1887, any woman who was found in any place which had been proclaimed a town or its neighbourhood and who could not give a satisfactory explanation for being there, could be apprehended and taken back to her village.⁶⁶ In spite of these restrictions, women continued to run away from their villages. Some left to escape abusive husbands, others left because they were overworked and could not survive the work regimes imposed by their husband, chief, community, church, and child-rearing. Such was the reason for the mass exodus of people from the Yasawas in 1876. Yasawa women left because their husbands had gone to work on plantations and the burden of providing for Ba and for Bau fell back on them. They spent all their time plaiting with no time left for planting. They had nothing to trade, and not enough food and clothing for themselves or their children.⁶⁷

From the 1880s, some women migrated to urban centres where they lived with storekeepers or in the periphery of sugar mills where they befriended and cohabited with mechanics and overseers.⁶⁸ The presence of these women among men of other ethnicities caused authorities some concern and was deemed to be at the source of "growing immorality".⁶⁹ Thurston denounced it as vagabondage and tried to censure it, fearing that it would lead to the disintegration of the Fijian family and that Fijians were not ready for the sense of 'individualism' that this exodus was promoting.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Native Regulation 11 of 1877. *Fiji Royal Gazette*, 2 June 1877.

⁶⁵ Native Regulation 5 of 1883. *Fiji Royal Gazette*, 26 October 1883.

⁶⁶ Paper 20: "Regulations of the Native Regulation Board." in *JFLC*, 1887. See Regulation 1 about women absenting themselves from their homes.

⁶⁷ Eastgate to Gordon, 25 August 1876, in Arthur Gordon, *Records of Private and Public Life*, II: 141.

⁶⁸ Roko Tui Ba and Yasawa to CS, 19 October 1894, CSO file 94/4040; and Roko Tui Ra to CS, 27 March 1903, 03/1507.

⁶⁹ Despatch 70, Mitchell to SS, 1 June 1887. CSO Despatches to the SS. NAF.

⁷⁰ Governor to CS, 16 March 1885, CSO 88/1442. Most of the women described in this file were prostitutes. They had run away from their villages in Rewa because they would not marry the husbands chosen for them by their parents. Others simply ran away and settled in Suva to escape the drudgery of village life. Details about Moala women who ran away to Suva without seeking the permission of their Buli are contained in NSM Nemani Valucava to Native Commissioner, 21 September 1892, CSO 92/3172. CSO files 93/1595, 96/1592, 02/5247, 03/1204, 08/5597, 09/5347 contain evidence of the regularity with which women left their villages in search of a better life in urban centres. These are

What is important in these relationships is that apart from the love and affection that they may have felt for their Fijian, European, Chinese or Indian partners, the Fijian women who elected to live in concubinage in urban centres saw opportunities in these arrangements that promised a better future than that which they could expect in their villages. It is therefore inaccurate to represent miscegenation merely as the sexual exploitation of a subordinate group of Fijian (and other) women by a group of dominant European men.⁷¹ The male domination - female subordination dichotomy masks a more complex process whereby women rejected the endless toil and obligations of conjugal, domestic and communal life in their villages. Some moved because they believed that for the advancement of their personal aspirations, a relationship outside the constraints of village life was more promising. This is not to say that women who migrated to urban centres did not suffer from patriarchal exploitation. However, in the absence of evidence from their most intimate relationships, it is speculative to venture ideas about the kinds of contestations employed by women in the households of their urban lovers.

Other women were drawn by the prospect offered by education and the opportunities provided by Wesleyan and Catholic training schools. Education was a means to mobility, improvement, and independence. This was frowned upon both by the chiefs and the government. Thurston exclaimed that:

Instead of these young women being at their homes assisting their parents, or getting married they are uselessly immured under Priestly domination wasting and idling their time in the mimicry of an institution they are unable to comprehend.⁷²

In this context, as we saw in the previous two chapters, the missions played a vital educational role, and opened for Fijian girls a range of possibilities beyond domesticity. The Wesleyan girls' school at Nailega in Ba run by Reverend Slater enjoyed a good reputation and several women who passed through its doors went on

examples that were singled out among others for special mention in Stipendiary Magistrates' monthly reports and or in separate files because of their exceptional nature.

⁷¹ For such a representation see Knapman: 170.

⁷² Thurston to SS, 15 August 1896, CO 83/64. Cited in Scarr, 1980: 218.

to make successful careers. Among them, Lolohea Ratu was perhaps the most prominent. She spent three years training as a teacher in Australia and came back to take charge of the primary school at Davuilevu in 1915, and established the first kindergarten for Fijian children.⁷³

As we saw in Chapter Five, the first forty years of Fiji's colonial rule were replete with regulations intended to restrict the movement of Fijian people. These laws were largely ineffective because they were simply ignored. When a comprehensive review of Native Regulations was carried out in 1912 and the movement of Fijian men was relaxed for the first time, the restrictions on the movement of Fijian women was maintained and those who remained absent from their homes for more than sixty days without the permission of their parents could expect to be fined.⁷⁴ Yet, women continued to slip through the surveillance cordon. In 1926 Ratu Sukuna pleaded that Fijian women should always be in the power of a husband, a parent, or a guardian and another Native Regulation was put into force to demarcate sugar mills and large urban centres as "prohibited areas to unchaperoned women".⁷⁵

Disobedience

Not all women who were overworked ran away. Those who did were a conspicuous minority. Given the elaborate system of surveillance that worked against them, women who elected flight took the considerable risk of being quickly identified, arrested, repatriated and punished. The punishment usually entailed their confinement to their homes, plaiting mats, making masi, fishing, preparing and mending nets, or making pottery.⁷⁶

Of the women who stayed in their villages, those who disobeyed their husbands or the village authorities were charged under the broad offence of *talaidredre* (disobedience). However, exactly what sorts of transgressions they were committing under this rubric remains largely a matter for speculation. Most of these offences were

⁷³ Thornley, 1979: 320. For more bibliographical information about Lolohea Ratu, see the pamphlet by The Pan-Pacific and South-East Asia Women's Association "Mrs. Lolohea Akosita Waqairawai." 1968.

⁷⁴ See Clause 77 of the *Regulations of the Native Regulation Board*. Suva: Government Printer, 1926.

⁷⁵ As 1941, some provincial councils suggested that women who remained in prohibited areas should be whipped. Macnaught, 1982: 104-5.

⁷⁶ Native Regulation 4 of 1885. *Fiji Royal Gazette*, 14 August 1885.

dealt with at district level by Native Stipendiary Magistrates and their reports do not contain sufficient details to establish with any accuracy the quantity or the frequency of women's village-based transgressions.

Norman Etherington's work on gender and criminality in Fiji suggests that women seldom committed serious crimes. He writes that between 1879 and 1885 women comprised only about 20% of all Fijians brought before the Provincial Courts when about 47% of the Fijian population was estimated to be female. Most women who appeared in the lower courts were likely to be charged with sexual impropriety such as adultery and fornication.⁷⁷

Some village women rebelled by refusing to perform their allotted tasks. For instance, in 1885 a number of women working in the Roko Tui Cakaudrove's household left the house stating that they were tired of serving him.⁷⁸ In 1892, several women from Ba refused to shell corn after being instructed to do so by their chief. They successfully protested that the burden of tax work should not be transferred to them to make up for the backlog created by their husbands prolonged absence in the cane fields.⁷⁹ Similarly in 1898, several women from Bau were imprisoned for refusing an order and then refusing to pay their subsequent fine.⁸⁰

A few women chose to articulate their grievances through the medium of print. In 1894 for instance, Akosita, a woman from Matailobau, submitted an article to *Na Mata* in which she described the pain and neglect of mothers who gave birth and whose husbands were too busy working for government taxes to take care of their families. She protested that too many women in this situation were left to starve, as were their children. Carew's response was that these "stalwart peasant women" were seizing on the prevailing mood of sympathy for the plight of women and children "to demand constant and incessant petting".⁸¹ In 1901, several women from Ba petitioned

⁷⁷ Norman Etherington, "The Gendering of Indirect Rule: Criminal Law and Colonial Fiji, 1875-1900." in *Journal of Pacific History*. 31: 1, 1996. 52-3. The *Report on the Decrease of the Native Population*, cites 1,979 cases tried in district courts for fornication in eight provinces in 1892. Sixty-three resulted in convictions. *Report on the Decrease of the Native Population*: 118.

⁷⁸ SM Taveuni to CS, 5 November 1885, CSO 85/2907.

⁷⁹ Native Tax Inspector (Ba and Yasawas) to Native Commissioner, 8 January 1892, CSO 92/383.

⁸⁰ Minute by Milne to CS, 16 May 1898, CSO 98/2029.

⁸¹ Minute by Carew to CS, 18 February 1893, CSO 93/440.

their Roko to complain that they were being forced to marry.⁸² The relative absence of petitions may reflect a certain degree of contentment. However it could also be symptomatic of women's general lack of literacy or of literate men declining to assist them.

As for their participation in organised movements, women only played minor roles. They were the attendants to Navosavakadua and Apolosi Nawai, carrying and chewing *yaqona* for the former and providing sexual pleasure for the latter. There is mention of a widely feared woman priest who fought alongside men in the Colo War, but her name was never recorded and is not remembered in oral tradition. No women rose through the ranks of the Tuka or Viti Kabani movements to become leaders in their own right. Women's resistance during the early colonial period in Fiji has more in common with the petty struggles of everyday resistance. While they did not have recognizable leaders, there was no lack of organisation. Some provinces such as Bua, held women's councils every month and were encouraged in their endeavours by their chiefs.⁸³ This suggests that the nature of village authority was an important factor in influencing women's inclination to collaborate or resist. For the most part however, women organised themselves into informal networks of which insufficient records exist to ascertain their impact with any confidence.

Women on the Plantations

Discussions about indentured women in Fiji have been dominated by arguments about their morality and the extraordinary levels of violence they endured.⁸⁴ While these discussions are useful, they have tended to represent indentured women as subjected to the multiple effects of colonial, plantation and patriarchal power, and to doubly victimise them as women and as labourers. Without denying the importance of these debates or the interweaving of domination and resistance, this section searches for those moments when indentured women created space for themselves to variously subvert, defy, and resist the powers that sought to control their bodies and labour.

⁸² SM Ba to CS, 18 April 1901, CSO 01/1780.

⁸³ "Proceedings of a Native Council," 1894. 12.

⁸⁴ Ali, 1979, 1980; Naidu, 1980; Lal, 1985a, 1985b, 2000; Shameem, 1990; and Kelly, 1991a, 1991b.

The defining feature of indentured women in Fiji was their disproportionately small number. Colonies which imported Indian indentured labour were required by law to bring at least forty women to every 100 hundred men. This means that only about 30% of Indian indentured labourers in Fiji were women. Fiji's colonial administration, acting under pressure from the CSR, tried to lower the ratio to thirty-three to every 100,⁸⁵ but the minimum requirement was usually met. Meeting this quota posed a number of difficulties for the *arkati* (recruiters in India), operating as they were in a society where it was unusual for young unmarried women to leave their homes in search of work. Oral tradition speaks of many unscrupulous means by which women were lured to the recruitment depots.⁸⁶ The available data is not sufficient to determine how many women were abducted, threatened or deceived into indenture, but we can infer that a significant number of them came to Fiji against their will.

About one third of all indentured women were married and accompanied their husbands from India to Fiji. The others were single women: some were widows, some came to escape domestic quarrels, and some young women left their homes under a cloud and hoped to avoid the stigma by coming to Fiji.⁸⁷ Others sought to escape the economic hardship and dreariness of rural life, and a few came as the daughters of immigrant parents.⁸⁸ The colonial administration usually perceived them as coming from the lowest of India's social and economic rungs. In a despatch to the Secretary of State, Thurston cited from the Agent-General of Immigration's report to complain that indentured women introduced in Fiji were "of such low class that they form by no means desirable colonists ... I am disposed to think that the major part of such females belong to the lowest class. Few of them live with one man and prostitution appears the rule rather than the exception."⁸⁹ However, in his detailed reconstruction of the origins of the *girmitiya*, Brij Lal has demonstrated that about half of them came from high or middle castes. In the main therefore, indentured women who came to Fiji

⁸⁵ See Paper 25: "Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1885." and Paper 38: "Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1886." both in *JFLC*, 1887.

⁸⁶ J. S. Kanwal. *A Hundred Years of Hindi in Fiji*. Suva: Fiji Teachers Union, 1980. 33. See also Lal 2004a: 143.

⁸⁷ Lal, 2000: 197.

⁸⁸ Corney to CS, 15 October 1897, CSO 97/4801. See also Lal, 2004: 145.

⁸⁹ Despatch 114, Thurston to SS, 18 December 1888. CSO Despatches to the SS.

were not a homogenous lot. They came from diverse backgrounds and caste groups in India and had diverse reasons for emigrating to Fiji.⁹⁰

On arrival however, they were levelled off as indentured labourers. They were put on the same work regime as the men and faced the same punishments. Recounting his experience as a sardar during indenture, one old man told Naidu:

though the women worked in separate groups under the charge of sardars they did very much the same kind of work required of men. They cut grass and planted cane for example and during the busy seasons they helped in harvesting and loading trucks. Like the men, some were active and others lazy.⁹¹

Writing in the early 1910s, Totaram Sanadhya was more explicit about the extra hardships that women faced because of their additional domestic responsibilities:

Even though men are also forced to suffer many difficulties in Fiji, women are forced to bear more sorrows than the men. First of all they have to get up at half past three in the morning and cook some roti. After that for ten hours they have to do hard labour in the fields, and then, having gone back to the house, make more roti. When women return from work, there is a corpse-like shading to their faces.⁹²

Writing at the same time the Wesleyan missionary Hannah Dudley was profoundly disturbed by the indentured women she encountered. She wrote: "Some looked crushed and broken-hearted, others sullen, others hard and evil. I shall never forget the first time I saw 'indentured' women. They were returning from their day's work. The look on these women's faces haunts me."⁹³

⁹⁰ Lal, 2000: 197.

⁹¹ Testimony of Kutarkaru in Naidu: 36.

⁹² Sanadhya: 61.

⁹³ Cited in Sanadhya: 71.

Defying Violence

The imbalance of males to females on the plantations generated severe competition among men and placed extraordinary sexual pressure on women. This combination of excessively high workloads, poor living conditions, insufficient food and money, and disproportion of the sexes, produced extraordinary levels of violence against women. Commenting on her mission work among indentured women, Hannah Dudley wrote that “every few months some Indian man murders for unfaithfulness the woman whom he regards as his wife”.⁹⁴ Naidu has recorded that sixty-eight women were murdered between 1890 and 1919 against twenty-eight men. This was at a time when indentured women constituted only one third of the total number of immigrants in the colony.⁹⁵ Some women escaped from such attacks with their lives but endured horrific wounds to their bodies. Several women were wilfully disfigured by their assailants who cut off their noses.⁹⁶ Many were raped.⁹⁷

This extraordinary violence was a product of women’s vulnerable position in the plantation microcosm which made them targets of abuse both by employers and by indentured men. However, it was also a reflection of their determination to retain some control over their lives. Until recently, violence against indentured women was generally understood in terms of sexual jealousy. In this view, indentured men killed women because of their infidelities and because of their own innate violent dispositions. Stories about the murder of indentured women were reported both in the *Fiji Times* and the *Western Pacific Herald* and consistently presented indentured women as immoral and men as having naturally brutal temperaments. The official view of indentured labourers did not differ significantly. Summing up prevailing opinions, J. W. Davidson, the Agent-General for Immigration, wrote in 1902 that indentured women were “unstable” and “mercenary” and men were “revengeful and

⁹⁴ Cited in Sanadhya: 71.

⁹⁵ Naidu: 71.

⁹⁶ See for instance the attacks suffered by Perendei, an indentured woman from Vunisamaloa in Ba, described in the *Western Pacific Herald*, 20 April 1901. Both newspapers contain numerous other such reports.

⁹⁷ Among other files on overseer or sardar rape or attempted rape of indentured women, see CSO 82/2186, 87/1842, 91/606, 93/2125, 06/4850, 08/4431, 09/5050, 13/8779, 16/1846, 16/1855. For a discussion on the nature and significance of rape on Fiji’s plantations, see Shameem, 1990; Kelly 1991a and 1991b.

regardless” of life.⁹⁸ This representation of women implied that they were responsible for their own murders and absolved employers and government of any responsibility in the violence. As Lal points out, women bore the brunt of the blame for the social and moral ills of the system and shrouded their lives with “a veil of dishonour”.⁹⁹

Much recent historiography has since tended to rehabilitate the status of indentured women.¹⁰⁰ Kelly, for instance, has demonstrated in his skilful comparison of newspaper reports and court records for the year 1912, that newspapers tended to omit the sexual involvement of overseers and sardars in the crimes.¹⁰¹ The laundering of European crimes against indentured women was further aggravated by the court process which called into question the morality of the defendant or placed immense pressure on women to retract their accusations of rape, wounding, or assault. If the case went to court, defendants could always count on a sympathetic all-European jury eager to exonerate one of their own.¹⁰² On the rare occasions when these men were found guilty, they were merely transferred to other plantations where they often re-offended, or as it happened after 1907, they were allowed to leave the colony without ever serving jail terms.

Several of these studies have shown the system of indenture to be at fault for coercing men and women into situations of sexual immorality and for the violence that arose as a consequence. In this sense, indenture exploited women’s sexuality by forcing them as Dudley called it, into “a system of legalised prostitution”.¹⁰³ Without denying that women were forced into sexual promiscuity and thereby attracted the wrath of their lovers, this view tends to withhold from women their capacity to act wilfully and to turn seemingly hopeless situations into profitable ones.

⁹⁸ Paper 20: “Annual Report on Indian Immigration for the Year 1902.” in *JFLC*, 1903. 19-20.

⁹⁹ Lal, 2000: 222.

¹⁰⁰ Ali, 1979, 1980; Naidu, 1980; Lal, 1985a, 1985b, 2000; Shameem, 1990; Kelly, 1991a and 1991b.

¹⁰¹ Kelly, 1991a: 40.

¹⁰² See for instance the report from the District Medical Officer of Nadi on the assault of Naraini, an indentured woman, on Nasavusavu plantation in Sigatoka. Naraini had given birth to a child on 16 August 1910. The child died four days later. She was put to work on 22 August and severely beaten and knocked unconscious because she could not carry out her tasks. The case was dismissed by the Stipendiary Magistrate. District Medical Officer Nadi to CS, 31 August 1910, CSO 10/7395. Jane Harvey has written in detail about this case in “Naraini’s Story” in Lal, 2000: 337-348. For another example, see the description of a rape case in the *Fiji Times*, in which an overseer was found innocent of raping an indentured woman before the defence had even concluded its submission because a few young European men testified that he had been at a picture show with them at the time of the offence. *Fiji Times*, 28 September 1912.

¹⁰³ Cited in Sanadhya: 71.

Shameem's work is useful in this respect. She locates the reasons for the violence against and murder of so many women more specifically within the patriarchal framework of the plantations. Shameem contends that men killed women because they could not cope with the relative independence that indentured women gained from their status as workers.¹⁰⁴ Although they earned less than male labourers, indentured women generally earned more than women in India.¹⁰⁵ This gave them the power of choice and the possibility to acquire a greater degree of control over their lives than was possible in India. In asserting this independence they came into conflict with indentured men and their attempts to reconstruct in Fiji a domestic world which mirrored that which they had left behind in India. The killing and wounding of so many women, reflects both the intensity with which indentured men sought to do this and the determination of women to resist it. The following 1899 report cited by Lal, describes the indentured woman's obstinate yet tragic last stance:

detected, she brazens it out with defiance and recrimination – offered pardon, on amendment, she spurns the offer – threatened, she dares and defies; and the matter ends by a sudden blow, followed by blind and mad hacking and mutilation.¹⁰⁶

Kelly's work shows that many of the assaults on women took place not at the scene of "adulterous" activities but rather in the lines when women refused to be the provider of food and other domestic services.¹⁰⁷ This refusal struck at the heart of indentured men's attempts to reconstitute a traditional patriarchal "home away from home". As much as they sought sex, indentured men also desired marriage to reconstitute a household and secure for themselves the benefits that would accrue from such an arrangement. As such, conflicts between indentured men and women were as much about food as they were about sex.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Shameem: 248.

¹⁰⁵ Lal, 2000: 222; Shameem: 274.

¹⁰⁶ Cited in Lal, 2000: 205.

¹⁰⁷ Kelly, 1991b: 168.

¹⁰⁸ Kelly, 1991b: 168. See for instance the case of a woman who had her head chopped off by her lover for refusing to cook his food. *Fiji Times*, 5 July 1899.

Sexuality and Partnership

As it was for women in the villages, marriage was a contentious issue on the plantations. But if Fijian women could use the new laws to opt out of or avoid marriage, Indian women were often denied the opportunity of marriage altogether. The state in Fiji refused to recognise Indian marriages unless they had been registered by a government official or previously registered in India. Because of their relentless work programmes and the tight restrictions around their movement, few couples could ever find the time to formalise their marriage. This lack of official recognition allowed several men (including the most powerful men on the plantation) to lay claim to one woman. Some historians have interpreted the lack of recognition of such matrimonial arrangements as the source of much immorality and violence.¹⁰⁹

Shameem, on the other hand, contends that the absence of kinship and family helped to liberate women from their previous subordinate position as the property of men in India.¹¹⁰ She sees the ritual of marriage as reinforcing the position of women as property. Precisely because marriage and other principles of patriarchy were loosened by the particular circumstances of indenture, it deprived Indian men of the power to own, domesticate and confine Indian women. In the absence of marriage, women were guided in their choice of partner by pragmatic considerations and refused to stay in monogamous relationships unless the conditions were attractive. Hence when Gopi, a Navua woman left her husband in 1897, it was because he had gambled her earnings away and he was ill-treating her.¹¹¹ Similarly, when Papamma got other men to kill her husband, it was because she could not otherwise escape from his enslavement.¹¹² As Shameem explains, these women “refused to conduct their lives in terms of the rules of custom and tradition”.¹¹³ One former girmitiya told Naidu:

there were many fights between men over women which eventually resulted in suicides and murders. When men told something to their women, the latter

¹⁰⁹ See Ali, 1979, 1980; Naidu, 1980; Lal, 1985a, 1985b, 2000; and Kelly, 1991a and 1991b.

¹¹⁰ Shameem: 248.

¹¹¹ For details of this case see Dixon to Acting CS, 8 November 1897, CSO 97/4822.

¹¹² For details of this case, see CSO files 13/742, 13/3747, and 13/1416.

¹¹³ Shameem: 294.

replied that, “I am the King of my mind.” This led to beatings that were sometimes fatal.¹¹⁴

The fact that women were in short supply, that they were earning workers, that they were mostly single, and that traditional patriarchal institutions and practices were weakened, produces the profile of a woman who, exploited as she was, disposed of an unusual degree of economic and social independence and self-sufficiency. It also made her less manageable.

There is evidence that women tried to control their fertility through their extensive knowledge of methods of contraception.¹¹⁵ However, they could do little to protect themselves against venereal diseases. The spread of syphilis in the lines was not treated with any seriousness until the disease began to seriously interfere “with the efficiency of employees and financial returns of employers”.¹¹⁶ In 1897 new legislation was contemplated only when the profits of the CSR were threatened by the reduced productivity of labourers. The government and the company both held indentured women to be responsible for the spread of the disease.¹¹⁷ In the late 1890s, a debate took place in senior government circles about the desirability of introducing the compulsory genital examination of immigrant labourers, accompanying costs, and the likelihood of immigrants, especially women, resisting the examination.¹¹⁸

The government’s intention to intervene in and attempt to regulate the bodies of indentured women was met with opposition from the Home Government in London and from indentured women themselves. While indentured women did not seem to mind being examined by European female nurses, they refused to be examined by European male doctors.¹¹⁹ Reverend Burton reported that some doctors were in the habit of calling indentured women into a closed room under the pretext of examining them, “and then torture her most indecently for the gratification of their lust and even

¹¹⁴ Marda Naicker cited in Naidu: 38.

¹¹⁵ Shameem: 294.

¹¹⁶ Corney to CS, 15 October 1897, CSO 97/4801.

¹¹⁷ See in particular the Chief Medical Officer’s Report in CSO 97/4801 and Paper 32: “Annual Medical Report for 1912.” in *JFLC*, 1913.

¹¹⁸ For correspondence relating to this discussion see CSO 97/4801.

¹¹⁹ Corney to CS, 15 October 1897, CSO 97/4801. See also “Annual Medical Report for 1912.” in *JFLC*, 1913.

for getting her to swear a charge against some Indian who may have incurred their displeasure”.¹²⁰ Hence, plantation hospitals were not necessarily safe places for women and may account for the surprisingly large number of women who were charged for “refusing to go to hospital” (see Chart 1). When they were in hospital, many more were charged for disorderly conduct and other breaches of hospital regulations (see Chart 1). This may be a reflection of the strict supervision of hospitalised patients by plantation authorities in trying to get their labourers back to work at the earliest possible time. But it may also reflect the tendency for some of the patients to make the most of their time away from the hardships of the plantation frontline.

Prostitution is another point of contention in which it is often argued that indentured women were forced to surrender control of their sexuality to satisfy men’s sexual appetites and to supplement their own income. There are good reasons and some evidence to support this view. Women were more susceptible to sickness, absence from work, and non-completion of tasks because they worked longer hours than men and had a shorter recovery time at night. Some also had the added burden of childcare. In this context, women were more likely to have their pay cut and prostitution was one way of complementing lost income in the fields. In the late 1880s for instance, it became apparent to the administration that several women indentured on Rewa plantations who were committed to jail for desertion or unlawful absence from work were being bailed out by ‘free’ labourers living in the vicinity of the Capital who then employed the women during the term of their original sentence in prostitution around Suva.¹²¹ Most prostitution occurred in close proximity of the lines, with some women working as prostitutes with the consent of their partners.¹²² In such cases prostitution was a temporary measure and allowed the couple to make ends meet.

Issues of morality have often clouded other motivations which women may have had in demanding money for sexual services. Shameem for instance argues that some women prostituted themselves because they refused to become wives and provide sex

¹²⁰ Burton cited in Sanadhya: 74.

¹²¹ Paper 25: “Annual Report on Indian Immigration for the Year 1885.” in *JFLC*, 1887. 13.

¹²² Chief Medical Officer to CS, 15 October 1897, CSO 97/4801.

for free. She argues that this was another way by which women undermined male attempts to domesticate them.¹²³ While there is little direct evidence to support this claim, it is reasonable to expect that women took advantage of their sex to survive or even to envisage a better financial future. The reports about the Rewa women who extended their stay in Suva to make money as prostitutes, suggest that they only made their way back to the plantations after a considerable time had lapsed.¹²⁴ In their calculations, some indentured women labourers may have reasoned that the opportunities for income earning, better working conditions, and less brutality were greater in prostitution than in plantation work. In reality however, prostitution rarely acted as a form of resistance and few women ever became prostitutes. Most preferred other forms of resistance within the patriarchal framework of the plantation.

Violation of Labour Laws

If women used their sexuality as a weapon to resist the power of men in the domestic sphere, as workers they resorted to other subtle “everyday” forms of resistance to defy their employers in the work place. Compared to Fijian women who were more likely to be brought to the courts on charges of sexual impropriety, Indian women’s status as indentured workers multiplied their chances of coming before the courts for violation of the labour laws, and being found guilty.¹²⁵ Records from the Superintendent of Prisons show that in May of 1887, there were thirty women in Suva’s jail, only four of whom were Indian women.¹²⁶ Two years later, the number of female prisoners had grown to fifty-seven, almost all of whom were indentured women from India.¹²⁷ This can be partly explained by a 10% increase in the population of women labourers. It can also imply that they were particularly targeted because they were the most vulnerable. On the other hand, it may also mean that indentured women became increasingly combative and difficult to manage.

The statistics of the annual reports on Indian immigration provide a useful source of information in assessing the extent to which indentured women were disobedient.

¹²³ Shameem: 288, 320.

¹²⁴ Agent-General for Immigration to CS, 6 October 1887, CSO 87/3061.

¹²⁵ Etherington: 49.

¹²⁶ Milne to CS, 16 May 1887, CSO 87/1089.

¹²⁷ Suva Gaoler to CS, 21 June 1892, CSO 92/2042.

They provide data for each year from 1885 (except for 1887 and 1898) about the kind of labour laws that women broke, the frequency with which they did so, the locations where the offenders were charged, the rates of conviction, and a comparison with indentured men. When collated these figures provide the following information:

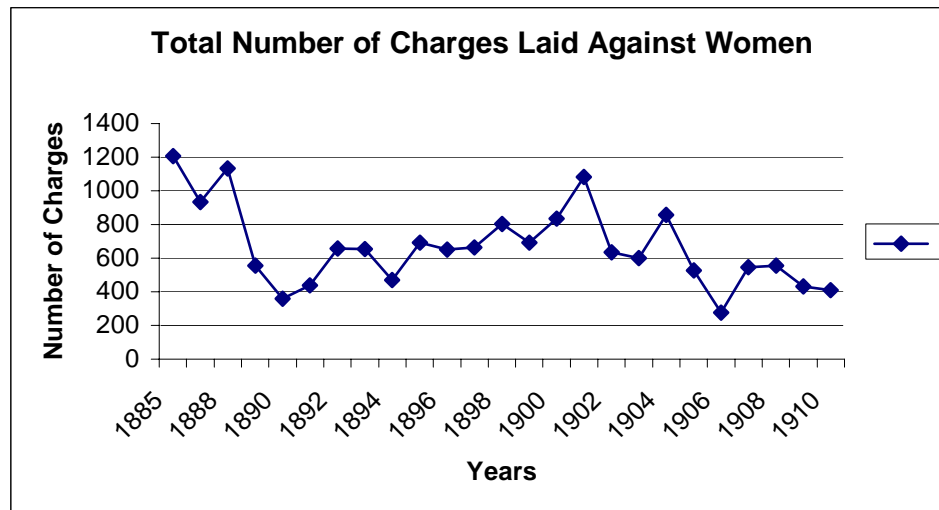


Figure 1.

This graph suggests two prominent peaks in the number of charges laid against women during this twenty-five year period. The first indicates that antagonism between women and employers was particularly strong in the mid-1880s immediately before and after Thurston's repressive laws previously discussed in Chapter Four came into force. Most of the offending took place in the Rewa region where the largest concentration of female labourers was employed. The number of charges reached a second peak in 1901 mainly due to the figures from Labasa where the level of violence sometimes threatened, as discussed in the previous chapter, to disintegrate into all out civil war.

The establishment and growth of the sugar centre in Labasa from 1892 marks the beginning of one of the most violent phases in the history of indenture. And if Labasa was particularly bad for labourers in general, it was even worse for women. Women were first employed in Labasa to clear land for planting and milling. Within the first few months, several women were charged for threatening and insulting their employer, for refusing to do their work, and for inciting others to desist from work.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Paper 24: "Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1892." in *JFLC*, 1893. 27.

Conditions in Labasa gradually worsened and women appear to have borne the brunt of the violence when it peaked at the turn of the century. Stipendiary Magistrate reports suggest that violence against women by their employers was commonplace and one inspector of immigrants in Labasa was so outraged by the frequency of assaults against women that he called for the compulsory imprisonment of repeat offenders without the option of a fine.¹²⁹

The downward trend from 1907 is similar to the combined figures of men and women and suggests that legislative changes designed to improve the working and living conditions of labourers began to take effect. Furthermore, the Government of India began to exert pressure on its Fiji counterpart regarding the welfare of Indian labourers. The presence of resident inspectors and the successful prosecution of a number of violent overseers by the immigration department may also have had a deterring and appeasing effect.¹³⁰

Figure 2 below suggests that from 1899 to 1904, the percentage of charges against women was significantly higher than those against men.

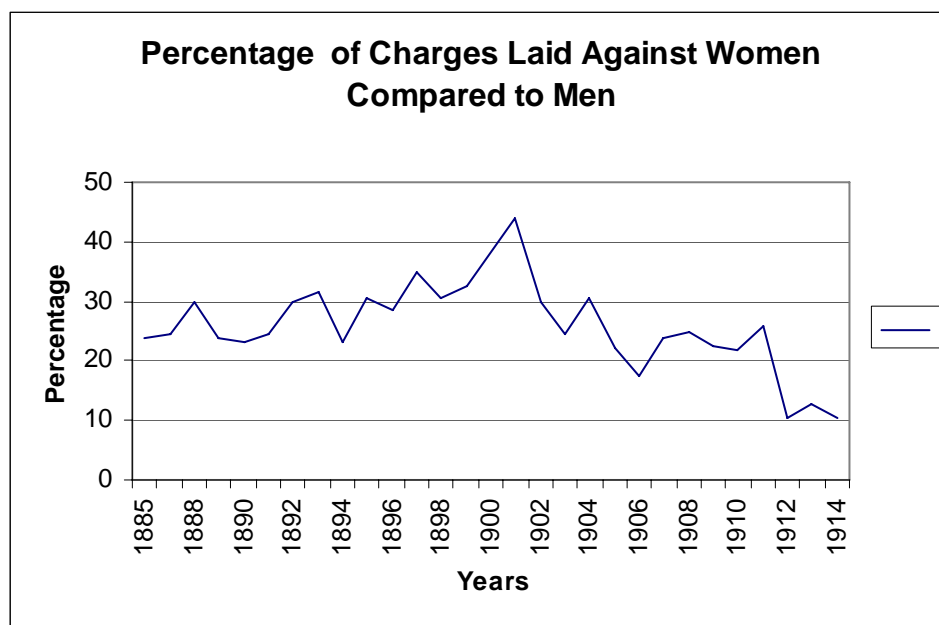


Figure 2

¹²⁹ Extract of Report of Inspection from Harper to CS, 30 September 1897, enclosed in CSO 97/4137.

¹³⁰ The Annual Reports on Indian Immigration for the years 1898 to 1905 show a correlation between the arrival of inspectors in Ba and Labasa and an increase in the successful prosecution of employers. However, the increase in prosecutions may also reflect an increase in the number of overseers. See the 1911 Census for a marked increase in the number of overseers in the ten years between 1901 and 1911.

In 1901 the number of charges against women rose to such an extent that they surpassed that of men, at a time when the percentage of indentured women was still only 29%. Women indentured in Labasa were again the main cause of this increase. However, it is difficult to ascertain whether this was due to increased suppressive activity by Labasa's overseers, or whether it reflects the existence of a culture of insubordination and militancy among the women of Labasa (or both). The graph also shows that women enjoyed a greater proportion of the decline in charges in the latter years of indenture and were therefore less likely than men to be brought before the courts. However, averaged over the entire period of indenture, the figures show that women tended to suffer the same rates of conviction as men. These fluctuated between 78% and 99% for men and 74% and 95% for women.¹³¹

When looking at the type of offences that women committed against the labour laws, the two most prominent were unlawful absence and refusal or neglect to complete a task. Chart 1 below reveals that more than three quarters of all charges were filed in these two categories.

¹³¹ Etherington: 45.

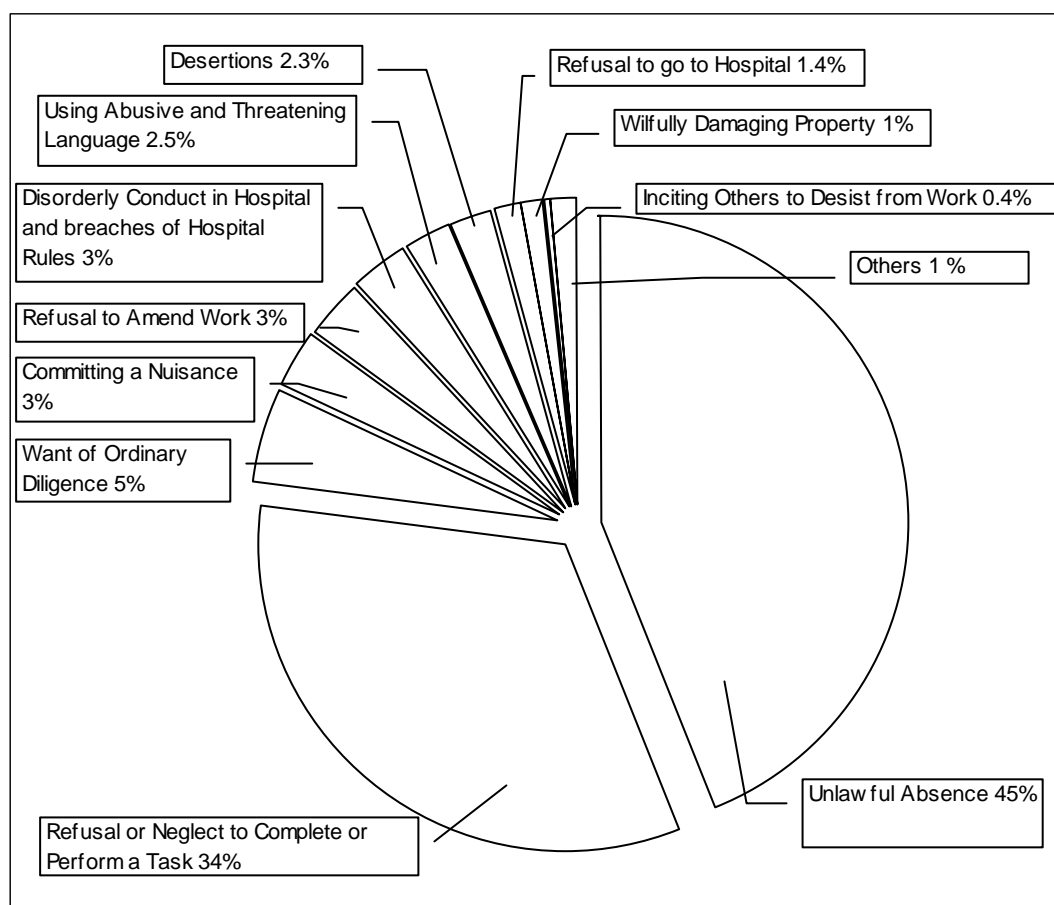


Chart 1: Percentage Number of Charges for Labour Offences Against Indentured Women from 1885 to 1909 by Type of Offence.¹³²

The comparative figures for indentured men reveal remarkable similarities between the two groups.

¹³² The category “Others” includes the following: leaving hospital without permission, unlawful use of fire, unlawfully leaving the plantation, disobeying orders, insubordination, selling rations, refusal to take a sick child to hospital, taking food to patients in hospital, damage to sugar-cane, smoking in cane fields, refusing to attend a medical inspection, causing a disturbance in the lines, ceasing from work for more than one and a half hours, unlawful use of company property, and threatening behaviour.

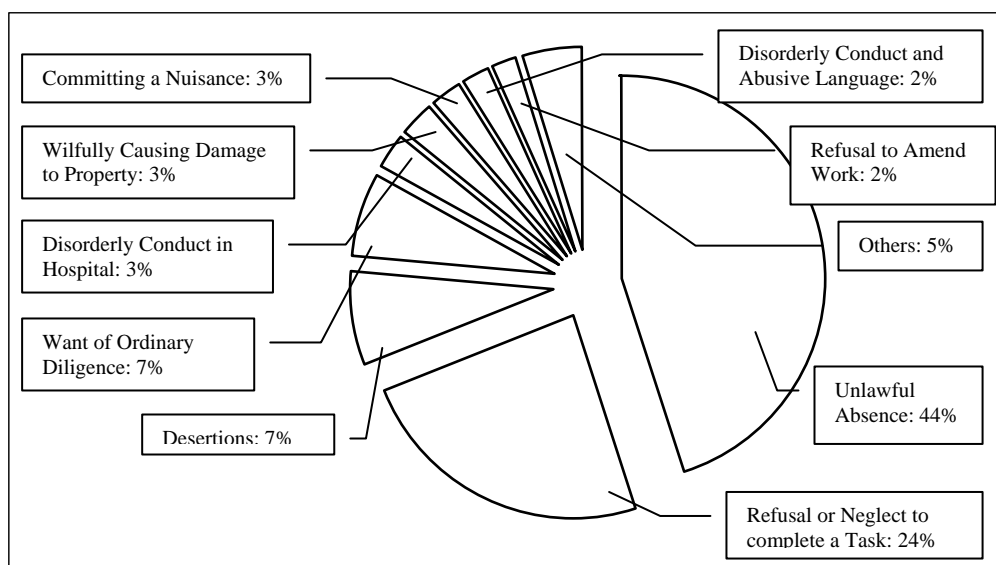


Chart 2: Percentage Number of Charges for Labour Offences Against Indentured Men from 1885 to 1909 by Type of Offence.

Absenteeism was the most common charge against women and accounted for almost half of all charges against indentured women for offences against the labour laws. In 1886 for instance, Carew reported that only 44% of women were at work on the Nausori plantation in the month of October.¹³³ This is similar to the proportion of charges for unlawful absence laid against indentured men. However, significant variations occurred in time and location.

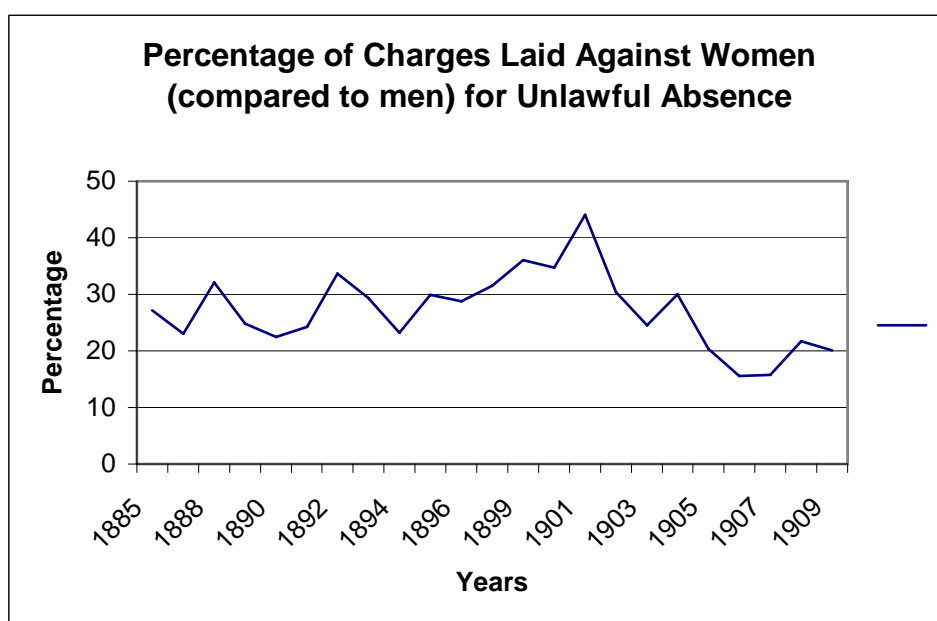


Figure 3

¹³³ Agent-General for Immigration to CS, 28 February 1887, CSO 87/443.

Figure 3 shows that in the decade between 1892 and 1902, which again corresponds with the development of the sugar centre in Labasa, women's response to the violence was to stay away and withdraw their labour. By comparison, the figures for men indicate no significant upsurge in unlawful absence in this district. On the other hand, men were more likely to take a confrontational stance, and remonstrate with the authorities in a body. There were ninety-five cases against Labasa indentured men for absenting themselves in a body during the turbulent years between 1899 and 1904, compared to only fifteen charges against women for the same offence.¹³⁴

The figures on desertion also suggest that men were more likely to escape from the plantations than women. The option of staying with "free" labourer friends or in Fijian villages appealed more to indentured men than women. Many indentured women, including those who were single, had children under their charge, and desertion entailed too much uncertainty and sacrifice to warrant the risk. Other security and cultural factors would have acted as deterrents.

Absence from work does not necessarily mean that all women who stayed away from work were resisting. As Lal and Munro point out, women absented themselves for several other reasons. They had to stay home because they were more likely to suffer from debilitating ailments such as anaemia.¹³⁵ Lal sees such conditions as pregnancy, childrearing, and excessive domestic work as impediments that further weakened the position of women and made them more prone to stay home and face a charge of unlawful absence.¹³⁶ In other words, they were complained against more because they constituted a more vulnerable segment of the workforce. Absence from work could therefore be more reflective of the system's oppressive nature than women's resistance to it.

On the other hand, Shameem conceives of indentured women as more militant and their absenteeism as evidence of their implacable spirit and their resistance to various

¹³⁴ See Annual Reports on Indian Immigration from 1899-1904.

¹³⁵ Munro, 1993: 9.

¹³⁶ Lal, 2000: 184.

attempts to control their bodies and wrest from them the products of their labour.¹³⁷ She reads in women's ailments the opportunity for them to withdraw their labour from the violent plantation frontline and to use pregnancy and nursing as opportunities to stay home. While this is certainly conceivable, only few examples of this strategy have so far surfaced. For instance, there is evidence that different women would come to court with the same child to plead for a reduction of work or for leniency.¹³⁸ Shameem's conclusion that indentured women defied authority by selectively resurrecting motherhood and wifehood, or denying them altogether is essentially justified, although questions about when, how and why, remain unanswered.¹³⁹ A more thorough excavation of the archive is now required and should yield important results.

Other data also suggests that proportionate to their number, women were as likely as men to be charged for "refusal or neglect to perform or complete a task". "Refusal" implies resistance while neglect implies inability. The conflation of the two makes it impossible to distinguish what proportion of women refused to perform their task and what number were simply unable to complete them. What can be established is that more than a third of the offences (34%) that women committed against labour laws were in this category. We can assume that a substantial number of these women refused to perform the tasks assigned to them and that many of them did so by wilfully absenting themselves from the fields¹⁴⁰ or, as Gill experienced, by organising go-slow work protests.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Shameem: 282.

¹³⁸ Taylor to CS, 15 February 1886, CSO 86/375.

¹³⁹ Shameem: 298.

¹⁴⁰ See for instance Paper 28: "Annual Report on Indian Immigration for 1900." in *JFLC*, 1901. 39.

¹⁴¹ Gill: 35.

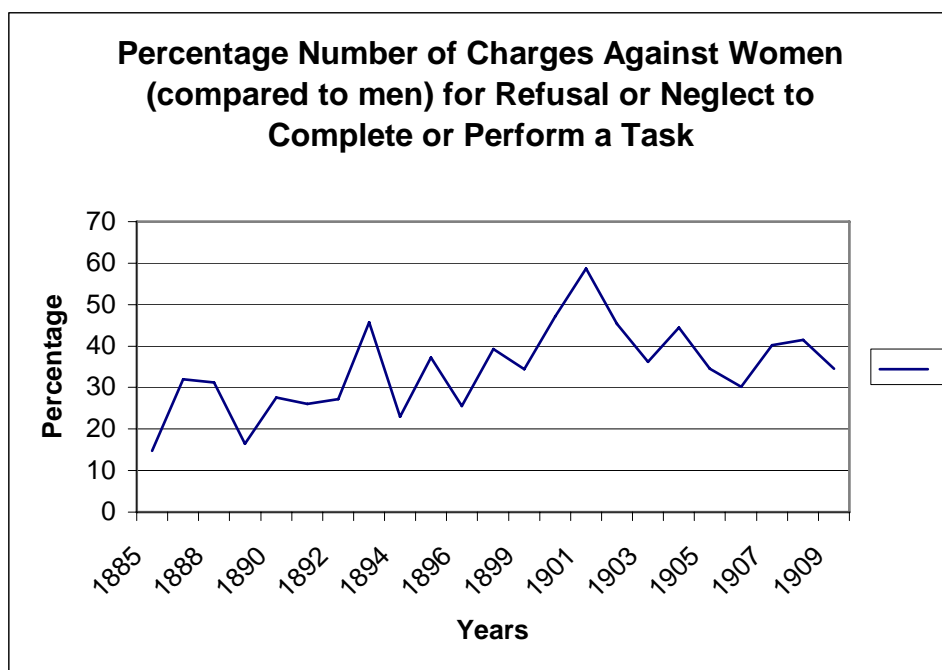


Figure 4

Fluctuations from year to year and region to region suggest that antagonism depended on individual circumstances. Some plantations enjoyed good management during certain periods and labourers had less difficulty completing their tasks and consequently harboured fewer grievances. Others, like those in Labasa, operated in the midst of a culture of violence fuelled by ruthless sardars and overseers.¹⁴² In such circumstances it is arguable that the higher proportion of women who failed to complete their tasks (compared to men) did so out of sheer exhaustion rather than covert resistance. Hence, while a basic level of antagonism remained constant, the figures signal many grey areas in the interplay between power and resistance with many competing and contrasting variables combining to make the plantation experience inherently violent and exploitative, but also intrinsically unpredictable.

Hence, charges against individuals do not necessarily reflect resistance. They may in fact represent severe repression. A high number of charges can reveal employers' propensity to intimidate their workers or to seek extensions to their indenture. Extensions were quite lucrative and many employers used this proviso to extract work from their labourers well beyond their period of indenture. In 1896, 58% of women

¹⁴² See Agent-General to CS, 29 September 1902, CSO 02/4411. See also the discussion in Chapter Six regarding the specific dynamics of the Wailevu plantation.

had their indentures extended.¹⁴³ The number of charges laid against indentured women can therefore suggest a degree of resistance but it cannot establish with any certainty the full extent of this contestation.

Striking Back

Like their male counterparts, women labourers filed relatively few complaints. Some did not know how. A woman, Mahadai, who was raped by the chief warden of the Suva jail while serving a six weeks term for unlawful absence from work, explained she did not complain about the rape “because I did not know how to make a complaint” and “because we get no redress”.¹⁴⁴ Seeking redress was fraught with difficulties. Making a report involved the risk of further violence and jeopardising the few things that were going well for them. Allegations could compound their misery and make life unbearable. A complainant could get her money cut, heavier tasks, possibly another thrashing, or be raped.¹⁴⁵ Those who dared to lodge complaints usually did so at night under the cover of darkness so as not to arouse the suspicions of overseers and sardars. Sergeant Mason in Labasa complained that he was busy almost every night from nine to twelve midnight attending to the complaints of women too afraid to come during day time.¹⁴⁶

Knowing that the court system was stacked against them, few women sought redress through legal avenues.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, on one occasion several women made a run for it and escaped from the Ba jail.¹⁴⁸ There were a few spectacular instances when women ganged up against their employer and beat them and/or urinated on him. One woman who was nearly raped explained how she only escaped because of the vigilance and intervention of her women co-workers:

¹⁴³ Paper 22: “Annual Report of Indian Immigration for 1896.” in *JFLC*, 1897.

¹⁴⁴ Superintendent of Prisons to CS, 12 August 1887, CSO 87/1842. The complaint was made for her by a Fijian inmate.

¹⁴⁵ See testimony from Burton, 1910. See also girmitiya accounts in Prasad, 1975; Ali, 1979; and Naidu, 1980.

¹⁴⁶ Sergeant Mason to CS, 21 March 1897, CSO 97/1315.

¹⁴⁷ Few victims of rape for instance, ever won their cases.

¹⁴⁸ Heffernan to CS, 15 July 1887, CSO 87/1646.

At about 11.30 a.m. I went out of the cane-field to the mangrove to take a rest on the raised bank under the shade. As I sat down and got rid of the knife and guava-hook, with which I had been collecting grass, I saw the para grass about ten yards from me move and make a rustling sound. Before I realized what it was, a huge figure pealed at me and grabbed me. I screamed, he reached for my mouth, I bit his hand, he uttered “Bastard”, I screamed again and smacked him on the face. Now we were face to face. I tried to reach for the knife but could not do it. He tore my blouse. I pleaded with him not to do that, but he was furious. He tried to reach for my skirt, I kicked him, tore his face with my fingers, and got hold of his hair. He became red and slapped me. We struggled only for some minutes before I realized that a part of my skirt was torn off. But by then a number of women had arrived. We all beat the *kulambar* properly – tore parts of his trousers and then let him go. ... When the men heard this, they swore about the *kulambar* and made arrangements to kill him. However ... they decided to inform the *bara kulambar* (big *sahib*). The report was not accepted as trivial news. It compelled the big *sahib* to transfer the aggressor.¹⁴⁹

This incident emphasises the importance of interdependence on plantations. Women did not have recognisable leaders to organise protests or resistance, but they made collective arrangements to secure the spaces within which they operated. Recounting his days as an overseer, Walter Gill recalled one of his peers leaving Fiji in shame after being overpowered by a group of women who then held him down and took turns urinating on him.¹⁵⁰ Another overseer landed in a sewer pit after another group of women took up their hoes and advanced against him. “The women then threw shit on him.”¹⁵¹ In other anecdotal evidence provided by former girmitiyas, Basir recalls the day his mother-in-law hit back at a new overseer who whipped his labourers:

One day my wife, who was pregnant, and was hoeing the field was whipped by the *kulambar*. Guljariya who made herself my mother and my wife her

¹⁴⁹ Cited in Prasad: 22.

¹⁵⁰ Gill: 34 and 37. This is supported by the oral testimony of former girmitiyas. See Sidhaya in Naidu: 66.

¹⁵¹ Hussein cited in Ali, 1979: 55.

daughter pulled the *kulumbar* from his horse and gave him a hiding – he ran for his *kotte*.¹⁵²

Such stories rarely made it into official documents but they survived in popular consciousness through the medium of songs.¹⁵³ For the most part however, women dealt with the perennial threat of brutality by using strategies which prevented situations arising in which they could be attacked or raped.

Forging Alliances with Men

They also depended on their male counterparts for their protection. Women acted against men in certain situations but they also aligned themselves with men on other occasions. It is therefore not useful to see indentured men and women as being in perpetual opposition to each other in their engagement of authority. Indentured men often accused women of being cold calculators who exhausted one man's wealth only to leave him for another.¹⁵⁴ But for the most part, indentured men and women were interdependent. Some women avoided lengthy extensions of their terms of indenture by having men assist them in the completion of their tasks.¹⁵⁵

Indentured men mostly came to the aid of women to defend or protect them against sexual assault. Such incidents could provoke riots when the aggressor was a Fijian co-worker as happened on two occasions in Rewa in the mid-1880s.¹⁵⁶ When the aggressor was European, the retaliation took the form of revenge attacks such as the assault in October 1906 of Mr Creig in Rewa by indentured men after he and a sardar took a woman from the lines and attempted to rape her.¹⁵⁷ Many other such conspiracies were hatched. Some were found out and the plotters punished,¹⁵⁸ others succeeded and some overseers paid the ultimate price for their sexual abuse. Some

¹⁵² Cited in Naidu: 46.

¹⁵³ See Kanwal: 35.

¹⁵⁴ Kelly, 1991b: 176.

¹⁵⁵ Basil Thomson cites the unusual case of a Nepalese woman indentured in Sigatoka who was reputed to have a roster of men to do her work. *South Sea Yarns*. Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1894. 53.

¹⁵⁶ See CSO 83/2141 and CSO 84/1405 about separate affrays between Indian and Fijian workers after attempted rapes on indentured women.

¹⁵⁷ For the full account see SM Rewa to CS, 16 October 1906, CSO 06/4850.

¹⁵⁸ Paper 24: "Annual Report for Indian Immigration for 1899." in *JFLC*, 1900. 23.

sardars met with the same fate. In one typical case, Parandai, a woman indentured near Lobau in Navua, was told by her sardar to make her way to an isolated banana patch because he wanted to talk to her. After having his sexual advances refused the sardar seized hold of her but her screams alerted men working nearby and they came to her aid. They assaulted the sardar and then proceeded in a group to the government station in Naitonitoni to inform the resident magistrate of the incident adding that they would refuse to continue working under his control.¹⁵⁹

These incidents reflected different perceptions among men about who “owned” indentured women. These contrasting perceptions are well captured in a petition sent to the government by Indar Singh, formerly indentured to Veisaru plantation in Ba, who on his return to India complained that “the Government should see that the Indian Females are for Indian coolies not for sahibs”.¹⁶⁰ Employers and supervisors on the other hand, generally perceived indentured women as sexually available.¹⁶¹ One former Girmitiya was told in no uncertain terms by his sardar that the women belonged to the company, not to the men.¹⁶² This led the most powerful men on the plantations to claim indentured women even when they were in stable relationships. Hence, as Shameem contends, “for European men, they were property twice over, as women and as bonded workers”.¹⁶³ As black women too, they suffered from their position on the lowest rung of Fiji’s racially compartmentalised society.

As such, sexual relations between European men and indentured women were particularly fraught.¹⁶⁴ In 1909, the administration’s policy was to oppose sex between European employers and indentured women on the grounds that “improper interference with women” would be “subversive of discipline and likely to cause jealousy and ill-feeling between immigrant and employer”.¹⁶⁵ In public discourse too,

¹⁵⁹ For the full account, see SM Navua to CS, 18 September 1908, CSO 08/4431.

¹⁶⁰ Indar Singh to Government of India, undated, enclosed in CSO 09/5050.

¹⁶¹ Etherington: 52.

¹⁶² Sarju in Naidu: 38.

¹⁶³ Shameem: 238.

¹⁶⁴ For historiography on miscegenation in colonial settings see among others Knapman, 1986; Young, 1995; Stoler, 1995 and Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather; Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York: Routledge, 1995; Manderson, Lenore and Margaret Jolly (eds.) *Sites of Desire/Economies of Pleasure: Sexualities in Asia and the Pacific*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

¹⁶⁵ CS to Secretary to the Government of India, 29 June 1909, CSO 09/5050.

a severe censure of such relations defined sex between Europeans and native and immigrant as transgressions that threatened the colonial order. They were threatening because they crossed racial boundaries in the private sphere that were forbidden in the public sphere. As Stoler has argued in relation to Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia, inter-racial sex and the potential biological offspring from such unions were thought to be a dangerous source of subversion of “white prestige” with the potential to cause European degeneration and moral decay.¹⁶⁶ Such arguments were of course designed to uphold the colonial, bourgeois, racial edifice.

Clearly however, indentured women did not set out to have sex with European men in order to deliberately subvert the colonial order and its racial taxonomy. Neither was their sexuality simply there to be controlled by European employers. Not all liaisons between male employers and female employees were adversarial or antithetical. Not all employers or overseers were sexual predators. Some relations were quite consensual. This suggests that apart from sex and emotional attachment, women sought alliances from which they could gain material and other advantages. Many practical considerations guided the decisions of women to variously resist and embrace sexual rapport with European men.¹⁶⁷

Although such relations were frowned upon by the establishment, the law provided no power to prohibit them and in spite of public efforts by officials and newspapers to hide or ignore them, such unions appear to have been quite common.¹⁶⁸ In a context where European men vastly outnumbered European women on the plantation, public discourse was not particularly effective at the management of colonial inter-racial sex. Commenting on this, an old girmitiya remarked that “if a woman bore a white man’s child then he or she was accepted as the child of that woman’s husband. There were several cases of Indian women having children fathered by Europeans.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Stoler, 1995: 46.

¹⁶⁷ For further reading about relations between slave women of colour and their white overseers see Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

¹⁶⁸ See Gill’s testimony in *Turn North-East at the Tombstone*. See also the comment by Dr Fox, member of the legislative Council, that “there are a great number of different races here and one race cannot be associated with the other”. *Journal of the Fiji Legislative Council*. 1909. Debates: Second Session, 1909. For a discussion of official and press disapproval of sexual relations between overseers and indentured women see Kelly, 1991a: 35-40.

¹⁶⁹ Jagan cited in Ali, 1979: 51.

Notwithstanding that some of these children were conceived from sexual assault rather than consensual sex, as racial hybrids they were not wanted in European society because they represented the transgression of public boundaries in the private sphere.¹⁷⁰

Girmit Women and the End of Indenture

In Chapters Four and Six, it was shown that internal forces of resistance were often complemented by external forces. This was particularly so in the lead up to the end of indenture, in which girmit women featured prominently. Several commentators (Kelly, Lal and Shameem in particular) cite one remarkable event as the catalyst for a groundswell of agitation and Satyagraha resistance in India which propelled the end of indenture. Kunti was indentured to Nadewa in Rewa and on 10 April 1913, she was sent to an isolated banana patch well away from other indentured men and women. Soon after, the overseer Cobcroft arrived and attacked her. Kunti managed to free herself and ran towards the Wainibokasi River where she seemingly jumped to her death. As fate would have it, Jagdeo, a young boy happened to be paddling his dinghy down the river at that moment and pulled her out to safety. When Kunti told the plantation manager about her ordeal he was reported to have replied: “Go away. I don’t want to hear about field things.” When she failed to turn up to work the next day “she was given the task of weeding twenty chains of grass, and her husband was beaten so much that the poor man was half dead”.¹⁷¹

Her story found its way into the Indian newspaper *Bharat Mitra*,¹⁷² and immediately triggered a major public outcry. Under strong censure from the Indian Government, the Fiji administration was asked to investigate, explain, and hopefully report that the whole incident had been fabricated.¹⁷³ The Acting Agent-General for Immigration, Montgomerie, reported that the story was indeed a “fabrication” and that it was

¹⁷⁰ For literature on the threat of racial hybrids to white prestige, see Young, 1995, McClintock, 1995; Stoler, 1995 and 2002.

¹⁷¹ For a complete account of Kunti’s story, read from CSO 13/8779 and 14/6609 and Sanadhya, 1991: 44. Kunti’s letter of protest was drafted in Sanadhya’s home in Wainibokasi. Backhouse to Agent-General for Immigration, 6 November 1913, CSO 13/8779. See also Lal’s reconstruction of the event in his article “Kunti’s Cry,” 2000: 195-6.

¹⁷² See “Kunti’s Story” in *Bharat Mitra*, 8 May 1914, enclosed in CSO 14/6609.

¹⁷³ Secretary to the Government of India to CS, 17 September 1913, enclosed in CSO 13/8779.

“absolutely untrue” that female indentured immigrants were violated or received cruel treatments at the hands of their overseers.¹⁷⁴ However, in India, the incident confirmed popular belief that indentured women in Fiji were regular victims of violent sexual abuse and that they were regularly denied basic justice. Kunti was celebrated as a heroine for courageously protecting her virtue, for her strength of mind, and was likened to other “honourable and brave ladies” in Indian history.¹⁷⁵

Kelly has identified three key elements in Kunti’s story which gave it critical political power: The issue of chastity, resistance to evil, and the denial of justice.¹⁷⁶ They brought together the essential elements of Satyagraha and helped expose the immorality that reigned on Fiji’s plantations. Fiji’s reputation was permanently damaged and with the momentum provided by the Nationalist movement in India and the anti-indenture lobby led by C. F. Andrews and Mahatma Gandhi’s colleague Mrs Sarojini Naidu, the movement to end indenture took root in India.¹⁷⁷ A speech in Allahabad by Mrs Naidu, also known as “the nightingale of India”, illustrates the flavour of the movement:

Citizens of India,

Words from me tonight! No, tears from me tonight because I am a woman and though you may not feel dishonour offered to your mothers and sisters, I feel the dishonour offered to me in the dishonour of my sex.

I have travelled far, gentlemen, to come to you tonight only to raise my voice, not for the men but for those women whose proudest memory is that Sita would not stand the challenge to her honour but called Mother Earth to avenge her and the earth opened up to avenge her.

¹⁷⁴ Minute by Montgomerie to CS, 8 January 1914, CSO 13/8779.

¹⁷⁵ “Kunti’s Story” in *Bharat Mitra*, 8 May 1914, enclosed in CSO 14/6609. See also Sanadhya: 44, and Lal, 2000: 196. See also a poem celebrating Kunti’s courage and dignity in Kanwal: 43-4.

¹⁷⁶ Kelly, 1991a: 48.

¹⁷⁷ Between 1914 and 1920 when indenture finally ended, Gillian and Kelly both argue that the abolition of the indenture system formed a significant part of the rise of nationalism in India. Gillian, 1962: 182-3; Kelly, 1991a: 62.

I come to speak on behalf of those women who like Savitri, have followed their men to the gates of death and have won back by their indomitable love, the dehumanised soul of their men in the colonies abroad ...

If after tonight, men of India, if after tonight, I say, it is possible for the most selfish interests to use the humanity of India to enrich almost as a manure, the sugar plantations of the colonies, if it is possible, I say let the forces of the greatest evil to daunt you in this campaign, you are not only unworthy and degenerate sons of our Mother whose name stood for glory in the past but we are the murderers, the suicides of national honour and national progress ...

... Let the blood of your hearts blot out the shame that your women have suffered abroad. The words (of other speakers) that you have heard tonight must have kindled within you a raging fire. Men of India, let that be the funeral pyre of the indenture system.¹⁷⁸

The reference to Sita is not accidental. Sita was the devoted wife of Ram who remained chaste and true to him in the epic battle between good and evil in the *Ramayana*. Many labourers likened their experience of indenture to a banishment, like Ram's, but found in the epic a powerful political metaphor for their struggle against the evil of indenture. The casting of an indentured woman like Kunti in the shape of Sita, allowed anti-indenture forces to produce and articulate a discursive counter-offensive which simultaneously depicted the colonial order as immoral and decadent, and indentured women as the virtuous and valiant heroines in urgent need of protection and liberation. Hence, even if Kunti did not openly challenge British colonial rule or the indenture system in Fiji, the story of her preference for protest, even death, over a life of suffering and humiliation served to boost the moral ascendancy of the anti-indenture movement and galvanise the Indian public to call more forcefully for the abolition of the system. Kunti's cry of protest was a moment in history when the conditions were ripe for one individual act of resistance to help trigger a much larger conflagration.

¹⁷⁸ Cited in Kanwal: 20.

Gillion has concluded that it was agitation in India that brought indenture down.¹⁷⁹ However, it can also be argued that indentured women's petty acts of resistance were just as important as the wider forces of nationalism in India in precipitating the demise of the system. They gave resistance leaders the ammunition to extend the battlefield from the cane-fields of Rewa, Navua, Labasa and Ba into the political arena of Suva, Delhi, and London. In the end, and in spite of the acute shortage of labour in the colony, neither the Fiji government nor the CSR were able or willing to meet the basic working and living standards demanded by the senior governments in London and India and indenture was abolished.

However, the portrayal of indentured women as virtuous and dutiful wives was not without consequence. Earlier we saw that indenture allowed many Indian women to break free of the cultural constraints and controls that they might have otherwise endured in India. In this respect, they appear to have been markedly different from the women in Guyana whom Poynting has described as being "the main preservers of Indian domestic culture".¹⁸⁰ In Fiji, the opposite seems to have occurred. Lamenting on Indian women's abandonment of traditional Hindu religion in Fiji, C. F. Andrews and Pearson reported:

The moral ruin is most pitiful on this side. Though there are beautiful and stately rivers in Fiji no women are seen making their morning offerings: no temples rise on their banks; there are no household shrines. The outward life which the Hindu women in the 'lines' lead in Fiji, appears to be without love and worship, a sordid round of mean and joyless occupations.¹⁸¹

If indentured women in Fiji had little incentive to preserve Indian domestic culture and much to gain from challenging it, the idea of independent women doing "just what they pleased" and living "just as they liked"¹⁸² did not sit well with the missionaries or the political and religious figures who led the nationalist movement in India. As Shameem has remarked, girmit women's "opposition to the CSR was

¹⁷⁹ Gillion, 1977: 7.

¹⁸⁰ Jeremy Poynting cited in Lal, 2000: 55.

¹⁸¹ C. F. Andrews and W. W. Pearson, *Indian Indentured Labour in Fiji: An Independent Enquiry*. Calcutta, 1916. 36.

¹⁸² Andrews and Pearson: 32.

celebrated and supported with passion, but their resistance to Indian men was being curtailed”.¹⁸³ Both the McNeill and Chimman Lal Report (1913)¹⁸⁴ and the Andrews and Pearson Report (1916) identified the absence of family life as the cause of much of the evil on the plantations. If women could return to their roles of mothers and wives, families reconstructed and patriarchy restored, then much of the evil would be eliminated. Hence, when Andrews, Pearson, Manilal, Naidu, and Gandhi condemned the indenture system for its treatment of women, as Shameem points out, they condemned it on the grounds that women were not allowed to ‘keep their chastity’ on the plantations, and because they did not have the protective power of men to watch over them.¹⁸⁵

As such this discourse aimed at their secure confinement in the domestic sphere and sought to roll back the errant years that had transformed women from maidens into self-reliant workers in the waged sector. This intervention was conservative in the sense that it was premised on middle class, upper caste Christian and Indian values and sought to recuperate for patriarchy the wayward girit women who had strayed too far from their model of ideal Indian womanhood.¹⁸⁶ Paradoxically then, the end of indenture deprived women of their only source of direct income and threw them back on the farms that leased plots of land where they slowly faded from centre stage and in the words of Shameem, went from being “an active, vibrant and colourful working group of women” to a “colourless and invisible” silent mass.¹⁸⁷ A discussion of the challenge posed by women after indenture lies outside the scope of this thesis. However, the formation of women’s organisations in the 1930s and evidence from other post-indenture contexts¹⁸⁸ suggests that Shameem may be overstating her case.

In spite of efforts to domesticate them, many indentured women continued their fight not so much against abstract issues such as indenture or colonialism or capitalism but

¹⁸³ Shameem: 316.

¹⁸⁴ James McNeill and Chimman Lal, *Report to the government of India on the conditions of Indian immigrants in four British colonies and Surinam*. London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1915.

¹⁸⁵ Shameem: 316.

¹⁸⁶ The dominant model of Indian Hindu womanhood is articulated by Andrews in a paper on Hinduism addressed to the Acting Governor of Fiji and appended to the *Report on Indentured Labour in Fiji*. 2.

¹⁸⁷ Shameem: 351.

¹⁸⁸ See Rhoda Reddock, “Freedom Denied: Indian Women and Indentureship in Trinidad and Tobago, 1845-1917.” in *Economic and Political Weekly, Review of Women Studies*. 26 October 1985. 85-86; and *Women, Labour and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago: A History*. London: Zed Books, 1994.

for the more immediate and tangible issues of high food prices and low wages. In 1920, under the leadership of Jaikumari Manilal, they led the first general strike in Fiji on the Gandhian principles of non-violent resistance.¹⁸⁹ Astounded by their militancy, Andrews remarked of Indian women that in terms of militancy they eclipsed their male counterparts:

[They] shamed the men again and again into holding out for higher wages and not betraying the cause. They organised themselves into “Strike Committees” and would not let their men surrender. ... They used the moral force of openly and publicly disgracing the men, in their own eyes, if they dared to play the coward where women were so brave.¹⁹⁰

Reflections

Knapman remarked in her study about white women in Fiji that “the empire was rooted in the home” and home was “the empire’s first line of defence”.¹⁹¹ But the empire only ever achieved a variable degree of visibility in the homes of village and plantation women. Empire was visible in the sense that village women produced tax and reproduced labour for free and thus helped to fund the colony’s administration. Plantation women were brought as a complement to indentured men to make the economy viable. But their respective homes were also the sites of ordinary and extraordinary struggles against indigenous Fijian and Indian patriarchies. In this domestic sphere, the lines of offence and defence, of empire and indigeneity, of power and resistance were often blurred. Indentured women like their counterparts in the villages could not do ‘just as they liked’, but many sought and obtained space within the shifting and uneven terrain of dominant private and public colonial and indigenous structures to attain a greater degree of autonomy. While these fractures created greater powerlessness in some instances, they allowed opportunities to emerge in others where women could leap out and dare to rebel. It is essentially with the latter that this chapter has been concerned.

¹⁸⁹ Shameem’s PhD dissertation contains a valuable reconstruction of the strike and women’s participation in it. See 311-51.

¹⁹⁰ Andrews cited in Shameem: 386.

¹⁹¹ Knapman: 176.

In the process, it has been found that women do not constitute a homogenous group and did not act like one. As colonized women, indigenous and migrant women in Fiji shared a common condition of domestic subjugation at the hands of colonial and indigenous Fijian and Indian patriarchies. However, their respective experience of colonialism differed markedly in that one group experienced colonialism through the prism of indirect rule in a village based rural setting, while the other comprised almost exclusively bonded labourers who experienced colonialism almost exclusively in the realm of plantation-based capitalist production. They lived in separate worlds and occupied different economic and geographical spaces. Their interaction was restricted to the brief moments when their paths crossed to trade goods at Saturday afternoon markets.¹⁹² Consequently, they did not come into contact with each other with sufficient regularity to forge cross-ethnic ties. Both groups emerged from this period with little knowledge of each other.

Women's experiences of authority differed across space and time and so did their responses. Of these responses, only a portion consisted of resistance.¹⁹³ Contestation was varied and occasionally ambiguous and contradictory. Women did not all resist at the same time, in the same places or in the same way. Some did not resist or did so in ways yet to be discernable to posterity. Some resistance was expressed privately within the domestic sphere and shows that if the home was a primary site for the imposition of patriarchal power (colonial, indigenous, and Indian), women also turned it into a principal site of contestation. Other battles were fought in the public sphere. Language, geography, religion, economic function, legal, ethnic and physical confinement all constituted obstacles that made it practically impossible for women of different localities and cultural backgrounds to ever make common cause.

There were however, important points of convergence and patterns that suggest a common thread linking Fiji's colonised women. The first is that they were actively engaged in and responsive to the power relations that permeated their world. They were not Amazons, but neither were they perpetual feeble victims of the intrusive and

¹⁹² There were very few occasions when Fijian and Indian women worked together as labourers. One example is the Wainunu tea plantation in Bua, Vanua Levu, where they were employed in picking tea leaves. See Paper 20: "Annual Report on Agriculture for 1904." in *JFLC*, 1905. 16.

¹⁹³ For example, chiefly women did not have any incentive to rebel or support resistance for they enjoyed the privileges that inherently flowed to their families.

oppressive effects of colonialism and patriarchy. Non-resistance may have prevailed in most situations, as Lal has argued,¹⁹⁴ but there were always some women who created space to challenge the complex structures that sought to bind them. For instance, some women sought to retain control over their sexuality and fertility. Some used their sexuality to get in and out of relationships as the conditions allowed. While recent scholarship has shown interest in the ambivalent embrace of miscegenation and the threat it posed to the colonial order of things,¹⁹⁵ only a small proportion of women sought the opportunities for advancement that lay in union with European men. Colonised women in Fiji were much more likely to have a relationship with men of their own ethnicity. Resistance in these relationships took various forms including rejecting the institution of marriage. Women who chose this path variously used, avoided, postponed, or ended their marriage to acquire greater control of their destinies. They were also likely to adopt covert forms of everyday resistance to alternately undermine and circumvent their respective authorities. Absenteeism from villages and from plantation work was particularly prevalent but so were other petty acts of disobedience.

Many questions remain unanswered and much work is yet to be done in this important area of Fiji's history. How much, for instance, was 'discourse' a part of women's resistance in comparison with their 'actions' and 'activisms' or lack of them? While evidence can corroborate some women's resistance, several arguments presented here remain tentative and inconclusive. This is inevitable given the particular nature of women's history, the paucity of evidence, and the inherent opacity of such parts of our past. A more profound excavation of the documents is now required from a perspective that is informed by the complications and specificities posed by writing a history of colonised women.

¹⁹⁴ See "Kunti's Cry" in Lal, 2000.

¹⁹⁵ McClintock, 1995; Stoler, 1995, 2002; Young, 1995; and Evelyn Wareham, *Race and Realpolitik: The Politics of Colonisation in German Samoa*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002.

Conclusion

Although several conclusions specific to each chapter have already been presented, a number of other propositions relating to the overall study remain to be made. These have been categorised as answers to the following question: what does this study reveal about the history and nature of resistance in Fiji? What kinds of continuities and discontinuities emerge from this study? What kinds of deductions can be made about people's colonial experience in Fiji based on their resistant behaviours? What kinds of periodisations appear in this study and what causes them to surface or fade? What does this study suggest about the possibility and value of writing subaltern history and of reading Fiji's history against the grain? And finally, how can this study contribute to present and future history-writing in Fiji?

Firstly, the study suggests that resistance in Fiji is best understood in terms of a plurality of forms. Clearly, there was no singular unitary monolithic anti-colonial resistance in Fiji. Resistance features as a constant but partial component of an untidy mixture of other constituents such as collaboration, consent, appropriation and opportunism which together form the colonial landscape. The continuity of resistance through this period becomes apparent when individual events are placed alongside each other on a chronological timeline. The Colo War of 1876, the Tuka Movement of 1878, 1885, and 1891, the plantation strikes of 1886 and 1887, the dockworkers strike of 1890, the Seaqaqa War of 1894, the Movement for Federation of 1901 to 1903, the Labasa strike in 1907, the Sawakasa rising between 1909 and 1912, the Tokatoka agitation of 1912, and the Viti Kabani of 1913 to 1917 show that large conflagrations were few and relatively far in between but regular enough to show some continuity.

When the ceaseless forms of everyday resistance are placed alongside these larger conflagrations, resistance is shown to have run almost uninterrupted for the first forty years of colonial rule. The murmurings of the people in the 1870s and 1880s, the regular flaunting of regulations against village absenteeism, the struggle against taxes culminating in the Movement for Federation, the long and uninterrupted boycott of the Native Lands Commission, the outbreak of *luveniwai* between 1885 and 1887, the state of quasi civil war in Labasa from 1895-1907, the potential for and actual

retributive attacks on employers by plantation labourers, the evasion of work, the desertions and sabotage, the numerous petitions and letters of complaint, all fill the gaps in between larger upheavals. In this light, resistance appears to be a permanent feature of the colonial terrain. Therein lies the value of a broad survey. It shows resistance occurring in a wide range of places at varying levels and in multiple forms. There was violent and non-violent resistance, personal and collective contestations, organised and undeclared movements, and overt and covert defiance.

At best, however, the continuity indicates that the people were constantly engaged in the shaping of their lives and in the form that colonial rule took in their localities. It also shows that various colonial and indigenous authorities had their hands full. However, it cannot be concluded that all people rebelled all the time. They did not. There is no continuous straight line connecting all forms of resistance to form a neat linear history of resistance in Fiji. Rather, one should speak of resistances and look for the multiple points of resistance where people engaged the multiple deployments of power.

Secondly, the study thus shows that points of engagement were diverse and widely dispersed. For instance, resistance movements were likely to arise in places that were historically independent of or opposed to Bauan, eastern, and other coastal chiefdoms. They were also likely to arise in places where Christianity was regarded as synonymous with the ravages of war, the enslavement of populations, and the alienation of lands. They also occurred in places where European and Bauan administrators were placed in charge of local affairs including the extraction of taxes, ahead of more favoured local men. This was the shared experience of people in Colo and the western and northern parts of Viti Levu. It is in these areas that one finds the leadership for the movements, the greatest support for Tuka, the strongest political strands of *luveniwai*, the greatest concentration of converts to rivals of the Wesleyan mission, the core support for the latter phases of the Movement for Federation, and the greatest backing for the Viti Kabani.

However, in each of these cases specific local conditions combined to produce important variations that break the appearance of a grand narrative of resistance. For instance, the religious evocation of the Nakauvadra gods in the Tuka Movement, was

a significant change from the call to arms used in Colo. However, the *mana* derived from its Nakauvadra identity made Tuka simultaneously less appealing for populations who derived their identity from other sources of legitimacy. The life of Tuka could therefore only be continuous within the domain of the Vatukaloko polity and its extended kinship ties. This limitation is well illustrated in the case of the Seaqaqa War of 1894 in Vanua Levu which showed no influence from Tuka or Navosavakadua in spite of its occurrence a mere three years after the third phase of the Ra movement. This suggests that twenty years after Cession, many parts of the colony remained insular, disconnected from each other, and that resistance continued in such cases to reflect power struggles in local politics rather than conflict on the wider colonial stage.

The Seaqaqa War also serves as a reminder that discontent was not confined to Viti Levu. The Movement for Federation at the turn of the century marks a significant shift in this respect. It showed that a large number of Fijians spread across the country were sufficiently dissatisfied with their administration to join a settler driven initiative to petition for a change of government.

In the following decade, conflicts continued to be fought at local levels. The mood of discontent in the early twentieth century was fuelled by a fear born out of the experience of im Thurn's new land laws which had triggered the selling of large tracts of prime land. This had been aggravated later by the participation of senior Bauan officials particularly in Tailevu and in Bua in pressuring landowners into leasing prime land at under-priced rentals. Adding to this climate of disgruntlement was grumbling about maladministration, the inequitable distribution of work burdens and rent monies, the continued tax burden, and frustration about the general lack of opportunities for self-advancement.

When Apolosi Nawai devised his plan for a company that would yield direct financial returns to them as individual shareholders, he found a mass of villagers eagerly disposed and prepared to respond to his organisational ability. It would put them (members of the Viti Kabani) in control of their own resources, thereby by-passing chiefly and European middlemen. Nawai's style of leadership ensured that previously muted voices and grievances were publicly presented as Fijian demands to control the

economic benefits of their land and its produce. In thus challenging notions of Fijian submissiveness, he gave numerous disconnected local grievances a countrywide unified expression.

Yet, if Nawai and his scheme had united a large body of villagers across the entire colony, he had no influence among Indian immigrant labourers. Neither had Tuka or the Movement for Federation. Because ethnic groups were compartmentalised into separate geographic and economic spaces, with little potential for interaction, the two main ethnic groups developed distinct strategies of resistance. Herein lies another reason to reject resistance as encompassing a total response to colonial rule.

Resistance was therefore fashioned in people's immediate environments such as their homes, villages, plantations, and was usually manifested against particular individuals such as husbands, elders, chiefs, *sardars*, overseers, planters, clergymen, surveyors, and other officials of the administration. These struggles rarely arose out of a broad anti-colonial feeling. Rather they came out of very specific immediate experiences of oppression, disempowerment, exploitation, suppression, intimidation, violence, fear, disrespect, and humiliation. This was not a permanent state of affairs and resistance was certainly not the only coping mechanism.

Not all who joined the movements were necessarily discontented. Many chose to follow out of desperation for a break from the suffocating reality of village life and a simultaneous sense of the opportunities for a different world that lay in such movements as Tuka, Federation, and the Viti Kabani. These responses were often as much about opportunities for betterment as they were about resentment and discontent.

Thirdly, in this maze of relationships, the lines of domination and resistance were drawn in diffuse and complex ways. In the process, many of the colonial power's cultural forms were appropriated in the act of resisting. Resistance was a constituent of a wider and dynamic array of practices that were partly independent of and partly produced by colonialism.

Several examples from the study can be used to illustrate this point. The initial wave of Tuka in 1878 was against Bauan chiefs in the area and sought to reaffirm Rakiraki chiefs' right to rule. Yet, fused with elements of Christianity and colonial soldiery, the second wave was much more complex. In appropriating aspects of foreign religion and culture, Tuka was never totally about expressing antagonism, nor was it wholly about resistance. In this way, Tuka was never one thing for everyone. It carried different meanings in each of the three phases, and for the multiple protagonists who took part in them in their distinctive geographical and cultural contexts. It was anti-chiefs in some parts, anti-European in others, and anti-Bauan in others still. In most cases, it was about invoking a proud past to combat an unsatisfactory present in a search for a better future.

Aside from religious syncretism, there were other forms of borrowing. The Movement for Federation shows people's willingness to adopt an initiative sponsored by renegade Europeans even though both sides had very different motivations for seeking change. The promise of being free from the obligations of the *vanua*, levies of the *lotu*, and taxes of the *matanitu* was appealing enough for thousands of ordinary Fijians to sign a petition addressed to the King of England, asking for a change of administration. As we saw in Chapter Four, the petition as an instrument to express grievances, to seek redress, and ask for change, was not new to Fijians. Many labourers had resorted to it in seeking the intervention of higher authorities against the abuses of plantation managers. Yet, this nationwide campaign saw an unprecedented number of Fijians (4000 petitioners) place their trust in a legal document which they believed could be used to secure long-term political change. In the past, Fijians had had ample opportunity to regard colonial law with suspicion, especially in the way that it was interpreted by European lawyers and administered by European stipendiary magistrates. Yet when they were approached by European lawyers who, with the backing of Seddon's New Zealand administration, offered a tangible way out of the state of wretchedness in which they found themselves, many believed that the colonial legal framework could be used to strategic effect.

Many other Fijians chose to use colonial law for their benefit. In the early years of colonial rule, some village women used it to escape from marriage or to terminate ill-assorted ones. Other Fijians used the law to maximise periods of absence from

villages, effectively nullifying their chief's attempts to restrict their movement. In a different context and after a long boycott of the Native Lands Commission, some Fijians decided that the NLC could be used as an instrument to protect, indeed to engrave permanently their rights to land. As for indentured immigrants, after thirty years of experience, they had little reason to trust in the law. Yet, when Manilal Doctor arrived, he gave them the opportunity to move their challenge of the CSR from the fields to the courts.¹

Education was another area which subaltern groups identified as holding the key to mobility beyond the restricted confines of domesticity, village drudgery, and agricultural labour. While many Fijian villagers used Christian education as a stepping-stone for self-advancement, the response of Indian labourers was more ambivalent. They feared being dominated by a foreign form of ready-made thought but they also feared losing out on the opportunity for self-improvement. In the end, they resolved to educate themselves by forming their own schools.

The Viti Kabani was another opportunity to resist by appropriation. Capitalising on the spirit and ideals of free enterprise and the rationale of individualism promoted by certain sections of the administration (including governors in Thurn and May), Apolosi Nawai articulated demands for an end to chiefly exactions, a stop to land alienation, and a spirit of indigenous enterprise in which ordinary villages could aspire to improve and keep returns on their labour and resources. Under his organisational ability however, a movement of indigenous capitalist enterprise took on a political character and resulted in the formation of a rival administration which, in some places, effectively overtook the government. In all these examples, resistance cannot be reduced to a simple set of opposites. It must be understood as behaviour within a wider context in which appropriation, consent, and opportunism were equally important motives.

Hence, not all who joined popular movements were necessarily discontented. Many chose to follow out of desperation for a break from the suffocating reality of village life and a simultaneous sense of the opportunities for a different world that lay in such

¹ The extent to which Manilal was directly responsible for this is yet to be determined. A detailed study of his career in Fiji is necessary to establish this but lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

movements as Tuka, Federation, and the Viti Kabani. These responses again were often as much about opportunity as they were about resentment and discontent. The study thus reinforces current views in Pacific historiography which argue that indigenous people behave in colonial domains in degrees of resistance, degrees of accommodation and appropriation, and a host of complications in between.²

One must therefore guard against imposing too much order and coherence on occasions of resistance. This may conceal what was in fact an untidy state of affairs where the intentions and rewards to participants were quite divergent. For instance, Viti Kabani farmers may have made a choice for ideological reasons over economic sense when they were deciding not to sell their bananas to Europeans offering higher prices. Yet, these same resisters could have been oppressors in their own homes. By the same token, it is impossible to establish with certainty the role that women played in the Viti Kabani (or any other mass movement) or their views about how the Kabani might have acted as an avenue for their own personal advancement “as women”.

Fourthly, although much of the resistance of ordinary Fijians and Indian labourers had an anti-colonial dimension, it did not take place only in response to European actions or to colonialism as such. Such a view overstates the central importance of Europeans in the lives of ordinary people. For the most part, Fijians interacted with other Fijians, including times when the struggle was over the power to control. Unless they were working on plantations, in the sugar mills or living in Suva, ordinary villagers seldom came into direct contact with Europeans. They were thus more likely to encounter repression from within the village structure and to express resistance against the primary enforcer of that structure: their chief. Constructing Europeans as a “race” that could be rebelled against simultaneously produces homogenised races masquerading as dominant and subordinate groups. The evidence confirms that there were several group relations which produced insider and outsider relations within subordinate groups. Power structures inside indigenous and subordinated immigrant groups produced all sorts of inequalities which prompted multiple and unequal struggles.

² Borofsky: 182.

In addition, Europeans did not constitute a homogenous group and neither could they exercise power in anything other than a tentative and fragmented manner. For instance, Europeans in Colo were not attacked because they were white. Rather, they were attacked when they threatened the independence and livelihood of Colo communities. They could also expect reprisals if they were perceived to be in alliance with Colo enemies. The killing of the seven *vuli* alongside Thomas Baker, shows that the character of Colo's enemy went well beyond race. Similarly, on the plantations labourers were just as likely to attack an Indian *sardar* as they were a European overseer. Race was thus only one of several factors that affected the exercise of domination and resistance.

There is also a danger in projecting "European" institutions such as "the missions" and "the administration" as fixed transhistorical entities. The prominence in resistance movements of such misfits as Henry Anson, Reverend Slade, Humphrey Berkeley, Hannah Dudley, J. W. Burton, C. F. Andrews, and Stella Spencer undermines race-based binary analyses of domination and resistance. Similarly, the actions of such high chiefs as Ratu Matanitobua, Ratu Rodomodomo, Ratu Tuivuya, Ratu Wainiu, and Ratu Manoa highlight the dangers of treating chiefs as a unified class.

It is clear therefore that intermediate group and relational strata existed at all levels of domination and resistance. One is thus better served by looking for complex dynamics of engagement in each individual case rather than being satisfied with one-dimensional formulae for an entire category. This is not meant to absolve European colonialism and capitalism of their oppressive features in the operations of colonial rule. On the contrary, it is an attempt to acknowledge their greater intricacy.

That the colonial administration was heavily dependent on Fijian chiefs to deploy, enforce and maintain power, is not a new proposition.³ Yet chiefs were not always united. In immediate post-Cession days, they were impaired from acting as a class by existing enmity and rivalry. Chiefs of the 1880s were different from the chiefs of the early 1900s who were well aware of the rewards of ruling class solidarity and action. The chiefly "system" did not become such till much later after years of refinement

³ See among many others, Macnaught, 1982; Durutalo, 1985a and 1985b; and Sutherland, 1992.

and reinforcement. Chiefs' ability to act as a unified class was compromised by internal and external criticism. Chiefly rule was contestable and contested from within their own ranks and by the general populace.

Yet, chiefs rarely initiated or led forms of resistance. Most of them formed part of the edifice on which was constructed the Fijian Administration. They depended on it for their power and wealth. In voicing their grievances therefore, people were more likely to be led by fringe leaders such as Navosavakadua and Apolosi Nawai. Those chiefs who participated in popular movements of disaffection were not members of the administration. As we saw, the chiefs who supported change could expect to be disciplined, dismissed, or even deported.

The ambivalence and uncertainty of groups who were allied with the dominant culture is also noticeable on the plantations, with the role played by *sardars*. Dependent on management for their position of relative privilege, it was in their interest to enforce the management's ruthless regime of work. Yet, while most *sardars* chose to preserve this position, some chose to side with their fellow countrymen. In both cases, this was a dangerous position to be in. If they were perceived to be too violent they would often suffer tragic consequences from the hand of offended labourers. When they sympathised and occasionally led protests, they could expect to be thrown back in the lines. While they do not fall within the scope of this thesis, the tensions and ambivalences within powerful groups are aspects of Fiji's history that deserve more attention from historians.

The evidence presented in this study provides unequivocal support for the view that colonial power in Fiji was shaped in struggle, that it was fragmented and often fragile, and its application in the daily lives of ordinary people imperfect and susceptible to subversion. This is not a new proposition⁴ but merely serves to reinforce what Guha meant by domination without hegemony in a South Asian context.⁵

⁴ Thomas, 1994.

⁵ Ranajit Guha, *Domination Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

The idea therefore that colonialism succeeded in imposing itself as a Panoptic monolith, stamping out opposition and that it then established a long and prosperous period of peace, order and stability, is a fallacy.⁶ Colonialism, never was a formidable autonomous and impervious force that spread itself completely over subordinate groups. Neither were other large systems of power that operated through the state, capitalist relations or patriarchy. They were never so absolute that they could control everything within their realm of operation. Aside from the internal contradictions that constantly weakened them, their principles and practices were regularly tempered with, challenged, and altered by the multitude of actions and reactions of those they sought to dominate.

The evidence also emphatically supports the view that the active agency of subordinate groups can never be left out of the equation of the colonial experience. The subaltern were always active participants in the making of their own destinies. As such, they were always less “wretched” than Fanon’s “wretched of the earth”.⁷ They were enterprising, engaging and combative agents who managed to carve out relatively impervious social and cultural spaces from which to evade the control and surveillance of powerful groups. They broke the physical, legal, customary, and personal boundaries and restrictions that bound them to people and places and impeded their personal development.

Yet, these individuals and their numerous acts of protest should not be romanticised. Most plotted an existence which minimised the risks of confrontation with authority. They were well aware that open defiance would result in imprisonment and possible deportation. They therefore sought to cope with oppression as best they could without resorting to rebellion. In this way, Fiji’s subaltern groups resembled the African-American slaves who, as Eugene Genovese has argued, adopted alternative strategies for survival when they found the odds for insurrection too long and uncertain.⁸ In this context, it is better to look for the unspectacular acts of everyday subversion rather than the cataclysmic events born out of collective transformational goals.

⁶ This is not a new proposition and has been made before notably by Thomas, 1994 and Stoler, 1995.

⁷ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967.

⁸ Eugene Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World*. Baton-Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979. 7.

This survey also shows that Fiji's colonised people did not constitute one homogenous block. They did not share one consciousness, one grievance, or one strategy to engage oppression. They were not consistently united in what they experienced and what they did. On the contrary, popular consciousness was characterised by fluidity, malleability, ambivalence, contradiction, occasional furtiveness and intermittent assertiveness. Although all people experienced some degree of disempowerment, their experience of and response to oppression differed from time to time, group to group and place to place.

Other fractures that caused the fragmentation of Fiji's masses consist of ethnic, geographic, and gender divisions. In the villages and on the plantations, Fijian, Indian and "Polynesian" men and women shared an experience of oppression and a history of resistance. Yet, there was little collaboration or cross-ethnic solidarity. This is because ethnic groups and the different sexes were kept compartmentalised in spatial and economic zones. In these insular worlds the kind of communication needed to transcend ethnic division was virtually impossible. Cultural prejudices also militated against a broader 'grass-roots' coalition. Splintered into different inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic clusters, the subaltern fought their own battles within their own immediate spheres of existence. Restrictions on movement between geographic entities also deterred communication between villages and between plantations. This is also true of gender relations. While men and women both shared the experience of resistance to domination, the patriarchal relations in both colonial and intra-ethnic power relations ensured that women faced an extra layer of subjugation.

History does not therefore proceed inevitably from the momentum provided by the powerful. Rather, revisiting history from below reveals dates, protagonists, and events that disrupt conventional demarcations of the past. For example, in the interior of Viti Levu, the measles epidemic of 1875 had far greater repercussions than the Cession of 1874. In other parts of the new colony, the post-Cession period was a time to take advantage of the new possibilities offered by a power vacuum associated with the transfer of power and to exploit the indecisiveness of chiefs and administrators. During this period the murmurings of the people received prominent attention from the highest echelons of the administration.

By the mid-1880s a significant shift took place. In response to numerous strikes and the spirit of insubordination that prevailed in Rewa in 1885 and 1886, the administration hardened its position and legislated draconian laws to stop gatherings of more than five labourers. The closure of channels for the expression of dissatisfaction and grievances would drive plantation resistance underground for the next few years.

The government's intransigence is reflected in its response to the second wave of Tuka which occurred at the same time as the labour unrest. The passing of the ordinance to deport Fijians who were dangerous and disaffected marks an important turning point in the management of resistance by dissenters. Yet, in Ra, the periodisation of dissent began as early as 1873 with the battle of Nakorowaiwai underwent several mutations that continued beyond the time frame of this study. Within this Tuka period however, the year 1891 takes on a particular significance with the burning of Drauniivi and the onset of a long period of exile for several of the tribes of Vatukaloko. Such local periodisations are often lost in the larger narratives of colonial administrative and economic history. To acknowledge them is to recognise that in reconstructing moments of importance, larger colonial demarcations must not override local history.

The publication of the 1896 "Report on Decrease of the Native Population" marks another important intersection in Fiji's history. On the one hand, it justified the intervention of the administration into the domestic lives of ordinary villagers and supported the regimentation of village activities and space. On the other, the report on the cultural and demographic demise of Fijians can also be reread, to borrow Vincente Diaz's phrase, as a moment of survival and vitality among Fiji's indigenous women.⁹ Read against the grain, the report signals the effects of an earlier period during which women participated in an undeclared movement that undermined village patriarchy by variously avoiding marriage, seeking divorce, procuring abortion, withholding marital rights from their husbands, or escaping village patriarchy and finding sanctity in religious orders and institutions.

⁹ See Vincente Diaz's "Simply Chamorro: Telling Tales of Demise and Survival in Guam." in *Remembrance of Pacific Pasts: An Invitation to Remake History*. Robert Borofsky (ed.) Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000. 362-82.

Another epochal shift is visible at the turn of the century through the Movement for Federation. This movement helps to account for a major popular upheaval by tracing the confluence over time of numerous acts of everyday resistance. The persistent opposition to taxes through the late nineteenth century created a climate conducive for a large number of Fijians to petition the King for a change of government. How much weight was given to the petition in the ultimate decision to retain the status quo is difficult to establish. However, the importance of the petition is that Fijians across the colony formally expressed dislike for the way they were being governed. It also represents their ability and willingness to seize opportunities which they thought would improve their political status.

These everyday forms of resistance did not originate in any revolutionary purpose nor did they deliver revolutionary outcomes. Yet, as covert forms of individual dissent, they were not inconsequential. For instance, the undeclared boycott of land registration from 1876 until im Thurn's term of office had lasting consequences. The non-cooperation of landowners in the registration of their lands in the previous thirty years ensured that in 1905, only a small quantity of registered native land was available for sale when im Thurn relaxed the colony's land laws. Previous administrations' failure to convince Fijians to register their lands meant that im Thurn could only access a small pool of registered native land. This slowed the process of alienation sufficiently long enough for other forces to intervene and reverse the new land laws before any more alienation could take place.

Another example of a petty act of everyday resistance which provoked an epochal shift is the process by which Kunti's ordinary act of self-defence spurred an extraordinary movement of national and international significance. When the manager of her plantation ignored her complaint about the overseer's attempted rape, he had little idea that the story of her remarkable escape would spread so far and so quickly. In deciding to run and jump in the river, Kunti may have acted out of sheer fear and desperation. Her initial motivation probably had little to do with the wilful contest of power or of resistance to the plantation authorities, let alone the indenture system. But the subsequent transmission of the incident by word of mouth, its recording in a letter of complaint, and its report in the Indian press, sent shock waves through India.

Public outrage precipitated mass movements to end indenture, and fresh calls were made for independence. In this case, the regular and largely unpunished occurrence of overseer violence triggered a confluence of events which acquired extraordinary proportions. Admittedly, a complex array of forces was already leading to the abandonment of indenture before Kunti's act of defiance. Yet, it is the conjuncture of ideas and events which were brought together in this act that makes this case uniquely prominent in the way that other similar previous tragic cases were not.

In the annals of indenture history, the 1910s thus mark the point when outside agency including missionaries, Manilal, the Arya Samaj, the Indian and British governments, and public opinion, began to play a major role in support of labourers and in campaigning and securing the final demise of the system.

Apart from allowing alternate periodisations to emerge, reading and writing against the grain also warns of the dangers of accepting uncritically the memory of dominant groups as one's own. Dipesh Chakrabarty has suggested that colonial archives can be regarded as at once indispensable and inadequate. This recognition works to facilitate the emergence of other sources and the alternative histories they hold.¹⁰ Writing in the Pacific context, David Hanlon has suggested that in addition to content, the medium by which history is recorded and transmitted also needs revising and decolonising.¹¹ This has opened an exciting new field of cross-disciplinary historical investigation into indigenous ways of knowing, remembering, and representing. Local history, women's histories, and peoples' histories lend themselves particularly well to this enterprise. The vital point, as Gyan Prakash puts it, is that whatever form or content they adopt, historians must continue "to push at the edges, to unsettle the calmness with which colonial categories and knowledges were instituted as the facts of history ... [and] shake colonialism loose from the stillness of the past".¹²

In this light, I reiterate that the aim in this study has not been to tell the whole story. The whole story can only ever be told in short episodes and in a multi-vocal mode.

¹⁰ See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

¹¹ Hanlon, 2003.

¹² Gyan Prakash, "Introduction." in *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*. Gyan Prakash. (ed.) Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995. 6.

Mine is a deliberately partial history. In the process of revisiting, revising and reconstructing the first forty years of colonial rule in Fiji, I have sought the stories and voices that interrupt the chorus of dominant cultural and historical worldviews. I have tried to shake colonialism loose from the stillness of its Fijian past. Much shaking remains to be done and many gaps and silences remain to be found and recovered. But if I have succeeded in disturbing some received ways of knowing Fiji's past; if I have presented an alternate way of reconstructing Fiji's past; if I have identified previously muted voices and let them speak through these pages; and if the stories that I draw from them are credible and believable, I will have fulfilled my main objectives.

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