

Chapter 4

The new politics of chiefly power

The more able Fijian chiefs did not need to fetch up the glory of their ancestors to maintain leadership of their people: they exploited a variety of opportunities open to them within the Fijian Administration. Ultimately colonial rule itself rested on the loyalty chosen chiefs could still command from their people, and day-to-day village governance, it has been seen, totally depended on them. Far from degenerating into a decadent elite, these chiefs devised a mode of leadership that was neither traditional, for it needed appointment from the Crown, nor purely administrative. Its material rewards came from salary and fringe benefits; its larger satisfactions from the extent to which the people rallied to their leadership and voluntarily participated in the great celebrations of Fijian life, the traditional-type festivals of dance, food and ceremony that proclaimed to all: the people and the chief and the land are one. 'Government-work' had its place, but for chiefs and people there were always 'higher' preoccupations growing out of the refined cultural legacy of the past (albeit the attenuated past) which gave them all that was still distinctively Fijian in their threatened way of life. This chapter will illuminate the ambiguous mix of constraint and opportunity for chiefly leadership in the colonial context as exercised prior to World War II by some powerful personalities from different status levels in the neotraditional order.

Thurston's enthusiastic tax gatherer, Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, was perhaps the most able of them, and in his happier days was generally esteemed as one of the finest of 'the old school' of chiefs. His father was the feared sea-marauder Ratu Mara Kapaiwai, Cakobau's cousin and greatest domestic rival. With the blessing of Wesleyan missionaries, the recently converted Vunivalu sent Ratu Mara to the gallows on Bau, 6 August 1859.¹ Legend has it that before his execution Ratu Mara pleaded for the safety of his 10-day-old son Joni, promising Cakobau that one day the child's descendants would 'bear Fiji up'. And that night Cakobau dreamed that he himself was falling with the noose around his neck when from the sea flew a huge flying-fish - the fish named in Mara's battle cry - and swept up between his legs to take his weight and prevent the noose from tightening. Then the fish flew on and looked back and there was the head of Mara Kapaiwai;

whereupon Cakobau resolved to take good care of the infant.

It is certain that Ratu Joni spent much of his youth in Cakobau's household; in later years he liked to claim to speak on Bauan affairs with special authority. After the death of Cakobau's son, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, in 1901, he was the senior of his generation and vigorously opposed the claim of Ratu Epeli's son, Ratu Kadavulevu, to inherit Cakobau's defunct title of Vunivalu of Bau. 'I am wholly of the clan Vunivalu', Ratu Joni claimed in 1913, 'the highest chief by birth in this town.'² According to the accompanying genealogy (his own version), his claims were strongest on the maternal side. His mother was Adi Lolokubou, the daughter and first born child of Tanoa Visawaqa, the former Vunivalu of Bau and father of Cakobau, by his highest-ranking wife Adi Talatoka - herself the sister of the Tui Cakau of Cakaudrove but installed on Bau, so Ratu Joni claimed, as Ranadi Levuka, one of the titles of the Vunivalu's senior wife or consort. He also claimed that before Cakobau had died the old chief had appointed him to follow Ratu Epeli Nailatikau - but not in the title of Vunivalu:

None of you will drink the cup of installation as Vunivalu when I die as I gave Fiji to the Great Queen Victoria and her heirs forever, together with the right to be consecrated and installed as Vunivalu - that is why I offered yaqona to the Governor, that he might drink the installation cup, for he is the representative of the Queen in Fiji for all time.³

The old chief would only promise that 'if the Vunivalu's children or relations were well behaved and loyal they would get government appointments and emoluments - otherwise nothing'.⁴

Ratu Joni, for one, threw in his lot with colonial government. After some years' schooling at the central Methodist training college at Navuloa, he took a job in the Audit Office where he first earned his reputation for competence, reliability and hard work. Thurston chose Ratu Joni to be his deputy in Ra in 1889. His regular Monday reports to the Governor revealed his thorough grasp of the aims and procedures of government. Authority came naturally to him. At the same time he had a shrewd eye to his own advancement, an awareness of the considerable opportunities government office gave him to consolidate his

Rewa lady = _____ BANUVE _____ = Lakeba lady

Bauan lady = TANOVA = Talatoka Lakeba lady = BUISAVULU VUIBURETA

Samanunu = SERU CAKOBAN Lolokubou = MARA KAPAIWAI

EPOLI NAILATIKAU = Nanise JONI MADRAIWI = Litiana Maopa

KADAVULEVU J.L.V. SUKUNA

GENEALOGY OF Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi (Source CSO 14/1745)

hereditary standing and the position of his descendants - as well as a clear perception of what the Governor did not need to know. Determined to give his children the best possible education, he used 'prisoners' to maintain extensive food gardens and raise cattle to sell to the sugar mill at Penang. For his eldest son Ratu Sukuna he retained as a member of his household at Nanukuloa an Anglican priest and science graduate from Melbourne, the Rev. Charles Andrew. Ratu Sukuna was proficient in English and mathematics even before he went on to secondary schooling in New Zealand to become the first Fijian to matriculate to university. A daughter, Adi Vasemaca, was sent to the Seventh Day Adventist school at Cooranbong, New South Wales, and another son, Ratu Tiale W. T. Vuiyasawa, went to Wesley College in Melbourne in 1911.⁵

Ratu Joni's reputation as Roko Tui of Ra was such that in 1904 he was given Bua to rule conjointly, holding it for four years. He was then in a better position geographically to exploit his maternal connections in Cakaudrove and somehow secured from the Somosomo chiefs in 1907 a grant of over 2000 acres at Nalovo in Cakaudrove on the Vanua Levu side.⁶ By 1912 he had spent £2000 improving the land and converted it to a Crown Grant that year. The adroit official's security was threatened however on another flank. Ratu Kadavulevu, who succeeded his father Ratu Epeli Nailatikau as Roko Tui of Tailevu in 1901, was pressing his claims to be regarded as Vunivalu of Bau.

Kadavulevu had been educated in Sydney and was greatly popular with Suva's European community as a fine cricketer and merry host. As Roko he aroused rather less enthusiasm, at least with the Native Commissioner William Sutherland who once remarked that 'it would pay the Province to allow him his full salary to stay away and play cricket all the time'.⁷ On 1 March 1907, before any of the preliminary consultations had taken place, and without summoning from Kaba, Lakeba and Koro the people who were traditionally involved in the installation ceremony of the Vunivalu of Bau, Ratu Kadavulevu was offered yaqona by his hereditary spokesman (matanivanua), Ratu Aisea Komaitai, with the intention of 'drinking him in' to Cakobau's chiefly title. Im Thurn saw the ceremony as 'pure farce, probably due to the drinking of liquor other than yaqona', and William Sutherland wrote to tell Kadavulevu that the so-called installation was 'a childish thing' and could never be recognized by the government. Kadavulevu protested that it was an old Bauan custom, and nothing to

do with the government.⁸ Ratu Joni disagreed. Normally he had preferred to keep his family affairs apart from government, but clearly in this case his defence rested as much on Cakobau's bequest of his title to the Sovereign as it did on the breach of custom. Furthermore he argued that if the title of Vunivalu was to be restored, then his own claims were better than those of Kadavulevu whose aping of western ways and ignorance of custom Ratu Joni despised.

The ill-feeling between these two chiefs was not widely known until Ratu Kadavulevu was forced to retire on half salary in 1912 because of some £300 he had taken from the Tailevu provincial funds. Ratu Joni, who had been Roko Tui of Ba since 1910, was transferred to take his cousin's place. Bau was not big enough for both of them and the island was soon split into two factions. For reasons that are not clear from the records, but probably out of jealousy of his higher born brother, Ratu Etuate Wainiu and his followers weighed in behind the new Roko.⁹ The Rokos of the other provinces feared the effects of a public humiliation of Ratu Kadavulevu and successfully appealed against his prosecution. The Bulis of Tailevu begged for his reinstatement, as did a delegation of his European friends. Ratu Joni's claims, then, were far from being universally admitted. Many Bauans would have held against him the taint of his father's rebellion and have regarded him as a usurper.

Ratu Joni's first moves on Bau were characteristically practical. The island was chronically short of food. The new Roko imported yams from his gardens in Ba and led the planting himself. He expected the Bauans to become self-supporting for the first time, while Wainiu tried to make sure that the first fruits came to the Roko, not to his predecessor:

It is right that all customary presentations should be made to Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, the Roko Tui Tailevu, since he has taken up his chiefly place in Bau, that is to say, isevu of yams or dalo or the fruits of the land: he is the eldest in our chiefly rank . . . when people bring things today they are not ordered to do so, but come voluntarily and give generously . . . he loves all the people and feeds them . . . his kindness would break a man's heart.¹⁰

Wainiu, the supporter of lost causes, was perhaps not the

best advocate Ratu Joni might have employed to answer the accusations of his enemies that he was oppressing the people and overbearing to his fellow chiefs.

Governor Sir Ernest Bickham Sweet Escott visited Bau in October 1913 expressly to support Ratu Joni's authority. The districts of Dravo and Tokatoka brought their contributions for the welcoming ceremonies directly to Kadavulevu - probably, as Sutherland suggested, relishing the opportunity 'to fly one off against the other'.¹¹ When the Roko's welcoming ceremonies for Escott were under way, Kadavulevu strolled nonchalantly across the rara, the open space where the various contingents were sitting respectfully in their hundreds not daring to lift their heads above those of the Roko and the Supreme Chief. In his remarks Escott referred once again to Kadavulevu's claims to be Vunivalu: 'You old chiefs know full well that there can be no successor to Cakobau . . . no pretensions in that direction will be recognized. The Roko is my deputy in this Province . . .'¹² The Council of Chiefs discussed the feud at their meeting in May 1914 and prevailed on the two men to bury their differences. Both signed a solemn covenant, prepared by Ratu Rabici, the Tui Cakau (highest chief of Cakaudrove), that henceforward they would be of one mind and live in friendship and love.¹³ And both kept their promises until Ratu Kadavulevu died on 12 December 1914.

Ratu Joni's preoccupation with traditional politics was by no means over. He was persuaded to lend his name to the campaign for the restoration of Bauan privileges and was implicated in an elaborate plot to maintain Bauan land rights on Ovalau.¹⁴ Thereafter G.V. Maxwell, who found in favour of Cakobau's grandson, Ratu Pope Seniloli, as Vunivalu of Bau, did much to try and discredit Ratu Joni and questioned his loyalty during World War I, even though two of his sons privately joined allied armies and were the first Fijians to experience European military combat.¹⁵ Governor Sir Cecil Rodwell was unwilling to force a bitter end to a distinguished career and apart from issuing Ratu Joni with severe warnings in private, procrastinated until at the end of 1920 he was relieved of the problem by the old chief's death. The career of Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi was soured towards its close by the absence of a man like Thurston who would have understood the difficulties a Roko faced in reconciling government objectives with the realities of Fijian politics.

Im Thurn hoped that the high chiefly style of Ratu Joni and his peers would die with them. A new class of purely civil servant Rokos was in the making, men who would have less stake in high chiefly politics. Deve Toganivalu, of a second-ranking Bauan matagali, was one such self-made man. He had begun his career at Levuka in 1880 as a boy clerk. After several minor provincial postings he served diligently in the Native Department until in 1908 he asked for and received the post of Roko Tui of Bua. At his installation ceremony, however, he made it perfectly clear that he saw himself elevated both as Roko and chief, and he was always accorded thereafter full chiefly honours.¹⁶ The personal honorific Ratu began to appear before his name and passed on to his distinguished son and grandsons in the civil service. Under Toganivalu's rule and that of his son George who succeeded him in 1928, Bua had the reputation for being the best-run province in Fiji, but also one of the most traditional.

A more striking example of an experimental 'career appointment' to head a province was that of a tough police officer, Ratu Ifereimi Qasevakatini, described by his commander as 'the most trustworthy native official' with whom he had ever had to deal.¹⁷ He had served twenty years in the Armed Native Constabulary, worked in New Guinea with Sir William MacGregor and been overseas on two other occasions. By 1908 Ratu Ifereimi was restless in the service and discontented with his annual salary of £60. He let it be known to the Governor that he wanted a Rokoship. On the very day in November 1908 he heard of the death of the Roko Tui of his home province of Kadavu, he penned an application to be considered for the position ahead of the ex-Roko, Ratu Asesala Robarobalavu, who had long been seeking reinstatement.¹⁸ The latter was chief of Tavuki, one of seven districts (vanua) of Kadavu but with some claim for a primacy of honour - Tavuki had always provided Kadavu with its Roko Tui and Ratu Ifereimi, as chief of lower-ranking Yale, was small beer indeed.

The Tavuki chiefs lost no time in rallying to Ratu Asesala's cause. They regarded the Rokoship as their private possession, the means by which they had been able to dominate the province since Cession:

Tavuki, Your Excellency, is the foundation of law; here was established the entire work of British Government in the province of Kadavu and it was the great chiefs of Tavuki who began,

established, promoted and guaranteed this work.¹⁹

At the funeral of the deceased Roko, Buli Naceva urged the appointment of Ratu Asesala on behalf of his fellow chiefs. The eight Bulis of Kadavu petitioned the Governor in writing on the same day.²⁰ As four of them were Tavuki chiefs, Ratu Ifereimi had anticipated their appeal in his letter of application:

I truly believe that you know and the government knows my long, faithful and diligent service. It is true perhaps that some of the Kadavu people will want Ratu Asesala Robarobalavu to be Roko again but that, I believe, is only true of the chiefly yavusa itself and does not represent the real desires of the bulk of the people [na lewe ni vanua]. For the [Tavuki] chiefs fear that an outsider will be appointed who will abolish or suppress their long-established exactions on the people, and it is as clear as the noonday sun to me that they have no regard at all for the real welfare of the people, their country and the needs of the modern day.²¹

The letter reveals a calculated appeal to European sensibilities; it won him the appointment. A protest delegation that came to Suva in December 1908 was firmly turned away. The jubilant people of Yale set to and built their long lost chief-turned-Roko a splendid house at Gasele where he and his highborn wife, Adi Seinimili Rokolewasau, entertained on a lavish scale. In a thinly disguised slight to Tavuki, the usurper arranged for the meeting of the Provincial Council to be held at Yale in 1910.²² In a more direct attack he then arranged with Suva to have the large chiefly district of Tavuki cut in half. The newly-created tikina of Ravitaki had been the main source of labour and food for the Tavuki chiefs' lala, and Ratu Ifereimi forbade them to make any demands on the district. The chiefs began to feel as bitter as the 'dissidents of Bau' did when their flow of goods and services had been similarly interrupted: 'Ratu Ifereimi ignores us and brings us into disrepute ... It seems as though he is trying to wipe out the true chiefly seat of Kadavu, to destroy the foundation of law in Kadavu and the true chiefly line still living in Tavuki today'.²³

The Roko was an impetuous man who brooked no opposition. On one occasion he wrote to Buli Tavuki with measured insolence: 'I am the Roko Tui. I am the only chief in Kadavu ... I do not know any man in Kadavu who counts for more than the Roko Tui. I am the only man who decides things for you.'²⁴ The outraged Tavuki chiefs drew up a list of charges to present to Native Commissioner William Sutherland at the Kadavu Provincial Council of 1911 - most of them so trivial and personal that the complainants began to be embarrassed by having to read them aloud, especially when it came to charges that he had maltreated the people. One chief said bluntly that the charges were not really meant to be taken in detail, but as general complaint against the Roko: 'The Roko treats his own people very generously and is greatly liked by them', he admitted.²⁵

Shortly after this confrontation Ratu Ifereimi fell ill with pulmonary tuberculosis and was forced to resign office in November 1912. Before he died in the hospital at Vunisea on 25 March 1913, he requested that his two young sons at the Queen Victoria School, Ratu William MacGregor and Ratu Henry Berkeley, should be found 'a chiefly work'.²⁶ One became a police officer, the other a doctor. There was certainly no chance of their continuing their father's challenge to hereditary authority on Kadavu: the Tavuki chiefs regained the Rokoship and retained it to 1960. This interlude was regarded in Tavuki as an aberration. Ratu Ifereimi's fate is a reminder that presumption (viavialevu) in the Fijian cosmos has all the connotation of hubris in the Greek; overweening pride brings a fell stroke from heaven. As one chiefly informant insisted, the minds of the protagonists in these obscure dramas were still steeped in a world that goes 'deep down to Bulu', the world of the vengeful ancestral spirits who do battle for their stock and are gratified to come forth from their rightful seats in the assemblies of the land.

The honour of their ancestors was a driving force in the lives of many chiefs who bucked against the petty legalities of colonial administration and strove to win greatness for their people. Ratu Aseri Latianara's career in Serua is a vivid example of the complexity and challenge of the purely local politics that preoccupied these men. From his father and uncle Ratu Aseri inherited the leadership of the Korolevu, a powerful and numerous people who lived in three main divisions along the southern coastline of Viti Levu. Before Cession it was one of the

least stable areas in the group - in David Wilkinson's Native Lands Commission findings the people were 'perplexingly mixed up both in their tribal and Mataqali distinctions'; their lands had been a battleground for the armies of the Korolevu and their arch-enemies from Namosi.²⁷ At the first NLC hearing at the end of the century the Korolevu were recognized as paramount only in their own immediate district, the tikina of Serua. The administrative overlordship which their chiefs had enjoyed since 1877 as Roko ruling the many fragmented groups in the whole province of Serua could only have been endorsed in customary terms by describing Serua in the official records as a matanitu, one of the large-scale federations existing before Cession. It is quite certain that Serua had never been organized in that way.

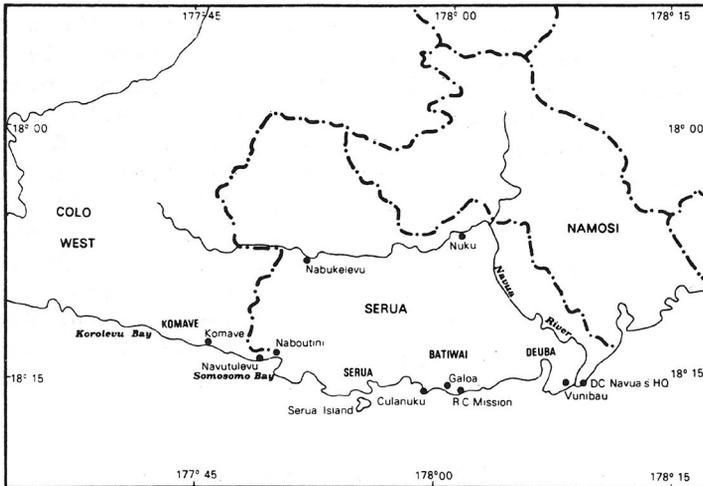
Yet three decades later when the NLC reopened its hearings in Serua, the province emerged in remarkably tidy shape as a single matanitu. Ratu Aseri Latianara is listed as Vunivalu of an enormous eleven-village 'vanua of Serua' (90 per cent of the population of the province) federated with one much smaller one and another in Colo West. Chief after chief went before the NLC headed by Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi's son Ratu Sukuna (with Ratu Aseri himself as Assessor) to acknowledge that they now 'went to' Serua acknowledging Ratu Aseri and his successors as overlord with the title Vunivalu. While Serua must provide the most extraordinary example of the lengths taken by the NLC to completely reorganize 'traditional' Fijian politics, no European in higher circles of the government seems to have appreciated at the time (nor did Ratu Sukuna choose to enlighten anyone) that the outcome was the personal victory Ratu Aseri had been trying to achieve since his installation as Vunivalu of the Korolevu in 1912.²⁸

Five years before this ceremony Ratu Aseri had been allowed to take over his ailing father's government duties as Roko Tui; he was confirmed in the post in 1909. A powerfully built, intimidating man of little education, given to ungovernable rages followed by contrite and generous compensation, the young Roko soon fell foul of a local European storekeeper, George Barrow. This neurotic ex-journalist compensated for the poverty of his operations by composing verbose memorials to the Governor, and, if that failed, to the Secretary of State in London, regarding the evils of 'the communal system' as demonstrated more particularly in the cruel excesses of chiefly power in Serua. The Korolevu chiefs despised him, and he knew it.

A few months after Ratu Aseri took office, Barrow sent Suva a lurid account of a terrible beating the Roko was said to have given his pretty young wife aboard his yacht as it was coming into Suva harbour. She jumped overboard to escape, was recaptured and trussed up with rope to prevent her jumping again. In Barrow's version Ratu Aseri had trolled her behind his yacht as shark bait until she was half drowned. Though the woman herself declined to cooperate at the inevitable inquiry (she said she had deserved the beating and still loved her lord), Ratu Aseri was found guilty of assault and the Governor angrily dismissed him from office.²⁹ The chairman of the Wesleyan mission wrote to a colleague that the chief was 'writhing in agony over the humiliation' and he was 'justly suffering'.³⁰

More likely the humiliation was for his province, for Ratu Aseri was replaced by a Bauan chief - Serua's first 'foreign' Roko. A second Bauan succeeded in 1910 and ruled until he was virtually driven out in 1913 and replaced by a local man. Ratu Aseri was finally reappointed in 1916, only to face the secession of some of his own people from Serua to Colo West.

The details of the story, insignificant perhaps in themselves, reveal some of the character of chiefly politics at village level. For when Komave district had petitioned from the turn of the century to be attached to Colo West, the inconvenience of travelling to the Roko's quarters on Serua Island or the European magistrate's at Navua was the alleged but not the real issue. Although the Komave people, the Noi Vuso, had occupied their lands for over fifty years at the time of the 1899 Native Lands Commission, the previous occupiers (the Lutuya) who were loyal Serua dependants (gali) now living just inside Komave at Navutulevu, were recognized by the Commission as the 'true owners' (itaukei dina) with joint tenancy of the Noi Vuso lands and the right of reversion. Thereafter the Noi Vuso chafed at the lala demands of the Serua chiefs. With the help of Barrow, they petitioned for either a European Commissioner in Serua or for transfer to Colo West.³¹ Finally in December 1916 Governor Sir Ernest Bickham Sweet Escott, impressed perhaps with the perseverance of the petitioners, ignored the advice of his subordinates and ordered the transfer of the whole Komave tikina to Colo West.



Map 2 Serua

This decision was hailed by the Noi Vuso as a triumph over Ratu Aseri and a body blow to the prestige of the Serua chiefs: 'for although it refers to government administration only, natives do not appreciate that distinction and take it as a complete severance of all relationships - tribal or otherwise'.³² Ratu Aseri tried hard to have the decision reversed: 'The attachment of Komave to this province is not just a recent thing but very ancient . . . and to me it seems a drastic thing that suddenly they should be cut off from our province when . . . it was approved that we should be one province in accordance with our ancient boundaries.'³³

The Komave chiefs rubbed salt in the wounds by frustrating Ratu Aseri's attempts to make traditional calls on the members of Korolevu residing in Komave. In 1921, to give an example of the petty irritations which enraged Ratu Aseri, the Buli Komave forbade the Navutulevu people to supply their chief with an oco ni vale, a customary presentation of food needed to pay off some housebuilders. 'Ratu Aseri is very indignant', commented the Provincial Commissioner of Colo West, 'and accuses Buli Komave of secretly working against him and attempting to undermine his powers as chief among his own people.'³⁴

At the second inquiry of the NLC in 1932 the Noi Vuso people appealed against the right of the Vunivalu of Serua to call himself their supreme chief: 'Rogiano Duwailea our

chief', said their spokesman, 'is known as Tanivuso. He is politically independent and owes allegiance to no one.' The Tanivuso himself wrote that they had had 'nothing to do with Serua' ever since they had been separated from the province administratively in 1916. In a highly didactic judgment Ratu Sukuna denied the possibility, except in the interior of Viti Levu, of having a vanua that was not directly under or at least protected by a Supreme Overlord; he ruled that the Vunivalu of Serua was without doubt 'that Superior Overlord or Paramount Chief' for all Komave.³⁵ (Later with the reorganization of 1944 - the issue still much alive - Nabukelevu, Naboutini and Navutulevu villages were returned to their rightful province but the rest of Komave remained outside in the new province of Nadroga and Navosa. Komave was reluctant ever afterwards to acknowledge that it owed any allegiance to Serua.) It seems then that the drawing of administrative boundaries was re-stated by the people, so to speak, as the seal of independence and dignity in traditional politics as well. In other words, by the manipulation of its decision-making processes the Fijian Administration had become a new battleground for the resolution of traditional rivalries and the pursuit of local political ascendancy.

Oral traditions give a glimpse of how hard Ratu Aseri worked to win the loyalty of the province. He is remembered above all as 'a strong chief, strong in the government, in the vanua and in his words'.³⁶ On his raikoro, village inspections, he would enter a house at random, call the family together and regale them with stories until they rocked with laughter. Starting at the topmost village on the Navua River he would progress slowly downstream staying overnight several times en route and at each stop swelling his entourage with chiefs and elders until he arrived back at Serua Island with a great crowd in festival mood. He fed the throng with fish and 'true food' for up to a week and then sent them home with more fish for their families. Sometimes, it is said, he took people to Suva on his handsome yacht (which some years consumed a quarter of the provincial revenues) and bought them beer at the Club Hotel. He gave each of them a hibiscus to produce as their liquor permit, assuring them that the mention of his name would suffice for the law. And if any became drunk he sent them home in taxis: 'Ratu Aseri was our greatest chief of all.'³⁷

Such stories, which are legion, make it clear that Ratu Aseri used his government position to create a new feeling of unity in Serua. The chiefs who declared for him at the NLC hearings in 1932 had been impressed by his years of service and hospitality and, as one informant explained, Ratu Aseri had convinced them that there was no use every little vanua district standing on its historic independence. They overlooked the legal fact that they were also signing away the share of the rents reserved for the head of the vanua. Some lived to regret their decisions. (Four decades of rising land values later, one of the surviving chiefs swore that he must have been light in the head after Ratu Aseri's alcoholic hospitality the night before the hearing.)

Much of Ratu Aseri's unifying work began to fall apart after his death in 1940. Nevertheless if successors can be installed to lead Serua again, they can take heart from Ratu Aseri's demonstration that nothing in Fiji's history can quite match the combination of chiefly power and natural leadership to build community. His achievements were not such as would impress development-minded colonial officials. Ratu Aseri belonged to a world where what mattered most was the prestige of his people, ceremonial celebrations of their corporate pride, and the functioning of his chiefly titles to secure their peace and prosperity.

From the same world came his friend on the Native Lands Commission, Ratu Josefa Lalabalavu Vanaalialia Sukuna, who in the 1920s and 1930s was emerging as the one chief who had a foot in both the colonial and neotraditional orders.³⁸ His father Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi's effort to equip him to meet the Europeans on their own terms had paid handsome dividends, not in happiness perhaps, but at least in experience and skill. From school in New Zealand Ratu Sukuna had returned to clerical work in the Colonial Secretariat and schoolteaching at the Lau Provincial School, then resumed his education at Wadham College, Oxford, in 1913. With the outbreak of war he was unable to enlist with a British regiment, for no coloured colonials, and certainly not the grandsons of cannibals, were eligible to fight alongside Englishmen. The French were glad to receive him into the French Foreign Legion, where he served nine months in the trenches. He was decorated with the Croix de Guerre and Medaille Militaire for 'superb zeal and courage' and wounded in September 1915.

Embarrassed by his success, the colonial government had him recalled to Fiji where he received a hero's welcome. As a sop to his conviction, shared universally by the chiefs and people, that Fijians would bear arms with pride and should be allowed to fight, Ratu Sukuna was allowed to drill a Fijian platoon and then accompany a labour contingent of 100 men finally allowed to serve (uneventfully) in France in 1917.

After the war, Ratu Sukuna returned to Wadham and read for the Bar at the Middle Temple, then returned in 1921 to his first major post as Native Lands Commissioner in January 1922. This position enabled him to build up an encyclopedic knowledge of Fijian traditions and customs. His conservative views of Fijian society were already established and did not change significantly for the rest of his life. Ratu Sukuna saw the individual as feeling instinctively that 'not only his services but also his life belonged to the family and ultimately to the tribe of which he was a part, and so he devoted himself to the will of custom and to the commands of the elders without so much as a thought for abstract rights'. In return a Fijian had a definite share in the life and well-being of the tribe. There was nothing in his experience to develop 'self-regarding qualities' or a sense of personal responsibility. Loyalty, obedience and respect for authority were the keystone of the Fijian ethical sense - ideas which the Communal Services Regulation had wisely kept functional. No Fijian would work for work's sake or to develop himself. 'The native mind' had not yet lost its dependence and inertia, and little had been done to broaden it. Fijians then would do best to remain within their fundamental groups, provided they were given strong and enlightened leadership by their chiefs.³⁹ Of Ratu Sukuna's personal leadership at national level much more will be seen. His faith in Fijian community life rested on a keen sense of the alternatives that had been weighed and rejected. For a long time to come, so he believed in the 1920s, and still believed in the 1950s, the quality of most Fijians' lives would depend on good village and district organization.

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