

Chapter 7

The vein of discontent

The failure of Apolosi's Viti Company to galvanize the rural economy and his own retreat into messianic delusions left something of a vacuum in ordinary village life, a loss in some places of a feeling of purpose and direction. Discontent and restlessness found several outlets: village absenteeism to escape the present, secret supernatural societies to overturn it, and modern associations to turn the existing order to greater advantage.

Colonial authorities were poorly equipped to respond to all these phenomena, but especially the underground movements they rather too easily dismissed as transient relapses into superstition. Witchcraft was of course proscribed by the Native Regulations if there was 'intent to cause fear or death', but the government trusted vaguely to the advance of education and the work of the missions to eradicate the evil gradually.¹ There was no great alarm, for instance, when a report came from Nabukelevu, Kadavu, that an occult society met regularly to prepare a special feast called the madrali, half of which was carried out to sea and offered to Dakuwaqa. And at night by the light of the mystic moon they danced naked and free - orgies of lust and abandon in the shadows of Wesley's churches though never, so far as the records allow, on Sundays.² There had always been isolated instances of individuals who openly exhibited signs of demonic possession and who attracted a devoted clientele. Ratu A. Finau, the Roko Tui of Lau, was disturbed in 1906 by the activities of a Cakaudrove man, Tevita Toga, at Vakano on Lakeba. Timing his performance by the throb of the lali drum for the people to assemble in church, Tevita would roll uci leaves between his palms and on his legs, then begin to shiver and tremble starting from his toes and convulsing upwards till his whole body shook violently while he leapt about shrieking horribly or forcing incoherent words through his teeth. His attendants meanwhile calmly chewed yaqona for mixing in the old way. When it was ready Tevita would drink three times then eat a firebrand three times: 'The women all believe in him, a good many men believe in him, and very few went to church in the evening . . . The people have been flocking to him.'³ The missionary on Lakeba, the Reverend Colin Bleazard, was shocked that there had been 'some most heathenish devil-worship . . . on the island that has done so much for Christianity in other parts of Fiji &

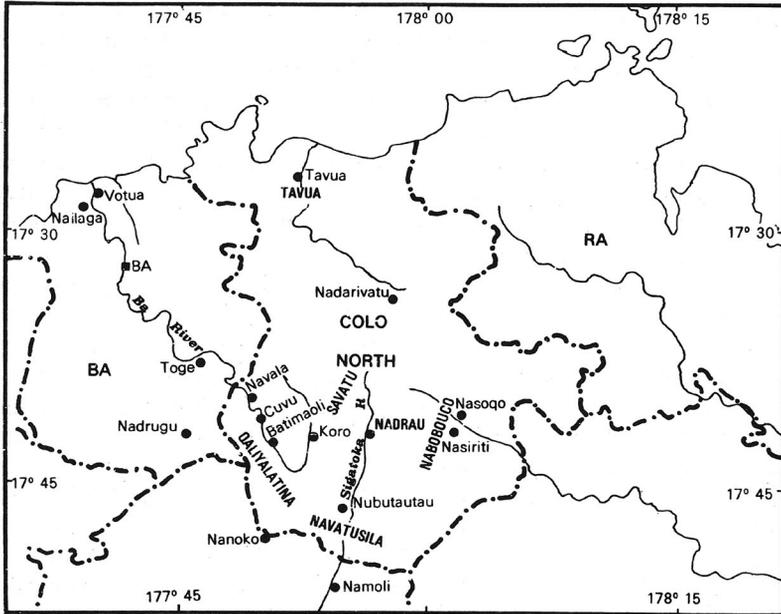
elsewhere'. Some of Bleazard's own teachers were involved.⁴

In 1914 there was a similar case of 'shaking' in Ra (Tokaimalo district) - a father and son together. Four men testified to the District Commissioner that the son bit off live embers and ate them. The men were possessed by the luweniwai, 'children of the water', said the informants.⁵ Luweniwai were the small gods who lived upon the coasts and rocky parts. Some were boisterous, some mild and gentle when they took possession. It was usually the young men in some kind of fraternity who would build a bower decked out with flowers and vines. They would dress themselves in more leaves and flowers and rub their bodies with perfumed oil. They then prepared a parcel of sweet flowers and fruits cooked on coals, and a small feast for themselves and the presiding priest or Vuniduvu. One portion was taken to the bush for the incoming luweniwai. Finally a sacred meke for the meeting with the gods was performed, a libation of yagona poured and the Vuniduvu became possessed, followed by the youths until all quivered and shook: 'Isa! Isa! Ratagane [Lord Man], Isa!' After a period of hysteria, or if the spirits were slow to leave, the Vuniduvu would feed the youths live coals or beat them with clubs or throw spears at them. Possession gave them immunity from injury - but not always it seems. There was a case at Mali, Labasa, in 1905 where a youth was seriously injured by a Vuniduvu's spear.⁶ Early observers such as Thomas Williams had taken a lenient view of luweniwai as a not quite innocent pastime, a diversion of youth. David Wilkinson had insisted it was not seditious: 'I feel sure no punishment will restrain, but probably promote, in some more clandestine way, manner, and place. A moral, general disapproval will be much more effective in putting down the practice.'⁷

Although specific details were hard to come by, it seems that up in the interior of Viti Levu luweniwai practices became mingled with aspects of the earlier Tuka cult, causing the government some alarm. The long-serving Governor's Commissioner in Colo, A.B. Joske, started cricket clubs in the villages to divert the energies of the young, only to find that they were used as a cloak for clandestine rituals involving an elaborate hierarchy of officials with fantastic titles. Usually there had to be some personal or political intrigue before the occult came before the courts. The wronged wife of a Vuniduvu near Nadrau informed on him to the Buli in 1907 who laid charges

against thirteen men and nine women for practising Tuka. They had made offerings to a Vuniduvu, giving part to the Vuki, the official who would supervise the turning upside down (vuki) of the world decreed by Navosavakadua, after which his votaries would rule the nations and live forever. There were also officers styled Sergeants and Kalasia, meaning scribes. (The government had just created three classes of scribes.) Ten men were sentenced by Joske to two months in goal. He saw it as his duty to suppress Tuka-related ceremonies as leading always to larceny, immorality and resistance to the authority of the old men and the government. He recognized that Tuka was a superstition that lent itself strongly to Fijians with its prayers to the ancestral spirits and its promise of the re-establishment of the prestige of the tribes that professed it.⁸ There was always the fear, though, in the light of the earlier disturbances, that the non-advent of Tuka would be explained by its priests as the lack of propitiation with human sacrifice and that serious revolt would ensue.⁹

It was not until 1914 that the government learned that quite apart from the isolated cases reported by Joske, Tuka had survived within a highly organized secret society embracing all the leading chiefs and nearly all the men of Qaliyalatina district with members in Toge on the Ba River and in three towns of Colo West (Namoli, Nakuilau and Vatubalavu). Ironically the high priest of the cult, Osea Tamanikoro, the turaga ni koro of Batimaoli, had obtained his commission by sending ten whales' teeth to Navosavakadua's town of Drauniivi in 1892, shortly before the whole village had been deported by Thurston to Kadavu, and the same year that the hill station at Nadarivatu had been established with a garrison of Armed Constabulary to keep Tuka from breaking out in the interior. It went underground. Little did Joske realize that Osea had quietly been recruiting the very men who cooperated so willingly in his heavy program of road building and other provincial works. The Buli of Qaliyalatina, Joseva Tube, and the turaga ni koro of the other Qaliyalatina towns (Cuvu, Navala and Nakoroboya) were Osea's accomplices.¹⁰



Map 3 Colo North

Each recruit was taken by a priest in the dead of night to present a root of yaqona to Osea and seek admission to the Bai Tabua, the sacred society of the twin gods Nacirikaumoli and Nakausabaria. On one occasion when Joseva Tube accepted the yaqona he offered the following prayer:

I accept this yaqona the yaqona of the Two Gods, the yaqona of life. Extend ye your favour to us the Bai Tabua so that our land may prosper. This land is made over to Burotukula. Let the fact be known to the Vale Dina; let it be known to Vale Kurukuruya; let it be known as far as Ului Bua; let it be known to Vale Lawa; let it be known to Cautoka, let it be known to Naiyalayala. This is the prayer of the Bai Tabua.¹¹

Burotukula is one of the spirit-lands where the twin gods are in hiding. The Bai Tabua dedicated all their lands to Burotukula as to the new heaven and the new earth. Some of the other names referred to sacred places in the Nakauvadra range, home of the gods. Normally in the yagona ritual the ceremonial names of the chiefly lines of the participants are invoked with great respect and care. Here the implication is clear: the Bai Tabua are of the gods; they will live forever; they do not belong to the ordinary run of chiefly houses. While the yagona was being chewed a chant such as the following was sung:

Me ra Yavala na Bai Tabua
Era taubale ki Ulu ni Vanua
Kele na Vale ko Nacoukula
Vakarewa na Droti ni Bula.
 [Let the Bai Tabua bestir themselves
 They walk to the Mountain
 Solid stands the house 'Nacoukula'
 Hoist the banner of Immortality.]¹²

'Nacoukula' was the name of Osea's house. It was his audacious plans in 1914 for a huge new house that led to the exposure of the whole movement. The Provincial Commissioner of Colo North, W.E. Russell, became suspicious in May and June when Joseva Tube asked the district magistrate not to hold a court circuit in those months because there were no complaints. Rumours came to Russell on a visit to Nadrau that a heathen temple was under construction. Unusual quantities of sinnet had been ordered from Namoli in Colo West. Then the Buli himself visited Russell in Nadrau to ask permission to employ the whole district on Osea's house. Russell subsequently visited Cuvu and found the turaga ni koro's house hung around with a great number of clubs and traditional bark garments with strings of flowers - in preparation for rehearsals for a missionary meeting, said the people, but Russell was not so sure.

The Buli of Navatusila meanwhile made inquiries in the town of Nanoko near the borders of his district with Qaliyalatina and there obtained a man prepared to testify in court that his neighbours were engaged in a Tuka cult. Another willing witness was found in the Wesleyan teacher at Batimaoli. With these and three other informants available, Russell charged the Buli, Osea and fifteen others with practices similar to luveniwai (the word Tuka

not actually occurring in the regulation). They were remanded in custody to allow them to retain a lawyer from Ba. The convictions obtained at the subsequent legal proceedings were quashed by the Supreme Court on technical grounds, but the trials brought further details of Osea's scheme. His house was to be entirely of vesi logs dragged, not carried, from the forest and hoisted into position by block and tackle so that no part would be touched by hands. There were to be no openings apart from two glass doors or windows through which he promised they would be able to see the twin gods when they returned to inaugurate a new era and install Osea himself as ruler of all Fiji. The whites would be their slaves; some would be killed. The church and the government would be driven out. Then all the world would contribute to a vast new house to be built above Batimaoli at Vatokoro, the place where their fathers had massacred a force of Bauans sent in 1868 to avenge the death of the Reverend Thomas Baker in the previous year.¹³

Pending the outcome of the court hearings, Joseva Tube was dismissed as Buli and the tikina of Qaliyalatina was abolished. Joseva, Osea and his followers then converted en masse to Roman Catholicism. If they sensed that the French priest at Ba would be a good advocate, their confidence was shrewdly placed. Père Picherit S.M. immediately began protesting their innocence and loyalty. When Russell reported in December 1914 that he had met with stubborn resistance in Qaliyalatina and urged the deportation of Osea, Joseva and three other ringleaders, Picherit obtained a copy of the letter and vigorously denied the various charges, mentioning in passing that 172 out of the 179 inhabitants of Cuvu, Navala and Batimaoli were devout Catholics. When the Provincial Commissioner had come to inspect their district it was no discourtesy that the villages were nearly empty - they had all been to the opening of a new church at Ba by Bishop Julian Vidal of Suva: 'I must say that in my opinion the danger of opposition to the Government of His Most Gracious Majesty by the natives of this district is imaginary and has no foundation in fact.'¹⁴

His unction and ignorance of the facts aside, the priest was surely right in questioning the need for the harsh action the government took at Russell's request. Osea was confined to Oneata for ten years, Joseva Tube and three others were confined for five years to parts of Lau and Kadavu. The people petitioned at least three times for their release and Picherit wrote on their behalf again in

1918. Finally their sentences expired in 1920 and a year later Osea also was allowed to return home. If he ever reactivated the Bai Tabua, the government did not get to hear of it. ¹⁵

One other movement at this time deserves brief notice, that of the half-mad Sailosi Nagusolevu alias Ratu, and Aisake Sivo. Sailosi told a meeting of 700-800 Fijians at Tavua on 25 March 1918 that Navosavakadua had gone from Nadarivatu to England to kill Queen Victoria. And now Britain had surrendered to Germany, the Governor was deposed and all the white magistrates were powerless. The Viti Company would take their place. There would be no taxes and no more vakamisioneri collections; as a sign of the new order they should celebrate the sabbath on Saturday. The movement spread rapidly inland down the Sigatoka and the Rewa tributaries. The new sabbath was celebrated in Nadrau and from there two men took it to Nasoqo, Nabobouco, in April. For a short period the people were openly defiant of the orders of the Provincial Commissioner of Colo North. The religion was dubbed 'Number Eight', the last religion to have come to Fiji being Seventh Day Adventism known to Fijians in short form as the 'seventh church', Lotu ikavitu. Sailosi was confined to the asylum before he could get very far and Aisake Sivo exiled to Yanuca for seven years. ¹⁶

The Number Eight movement had some lasting repercussions on the Wesleyan church in a few inland areas. Teachers and church officials who had desecrated the sabbath were publicly humiliated and expelled by meetings of their circuits. The Seventh Day Adventists stepped into the breach. Their Fijian agent, one Pauliasi, toured the interior with the Adventist formula for making Saturday Sunday. He saved the face of the 'Sailosites' and established the first significant SDA congregations on the Wainibuka, in Nadrau and some towns of Colo East, where they have remained strong ever since.

All was quiet in Colo North until in June 1934 Navosavakadua (died 1897) visited Atekini Ciobale of Nasoqo, and informed him that a council of the spirits chiefs at Bua had decided the time had come to inaugurate the New Era. Navosa's own task was to visit the country of the white man and bring back the Government Offices for their headquarters. Meanwhile would he, Atekini, take charge of the people along with Ameniasi Naqiomila, who was to be the prophet through whom messages would come, and

Kitione Koro who was to be the doctor charged with dispensing the water of life to the faithful.

That at least is the beginning as the District Commissioner of Colo North, Stuart Reay, reconstructed it five months afterwards. On 4 November 1934, one of Reay's trainee clerks at Nadarivatu asked permission to go to Nasiriti, over 20 miles away in Nabobouco. On being pressed for his reason the youth explained that his father had sent for him to drink the water of life. Surely Mr Reay knew that on the 5th, 15th, and 25th of the month people came from far and wide to drink the healing liquid? - and not only to drink it but (according to several informants) to see it change colours. Mr Reay was indeed interested to find that most of his staff had already inbibed but that none cared to share the good news with him. A trusty provincial constable was despatched forthwith to Nasiriti where in a village of five families he counted 321 people - 99 of them from Colo East and 25 from Ra. Buli Nabobouco was there and Buli Muarira from Colo East. A little dispensary had been built, reserved for the good doctor Kitione and his dresser. There were three notices, one saying that those who came from various districts or provinces in Fiji were to bring letters, another forbidding anyone to approach the spring without permission - signed 'Kitione P. Koro the Doctor of Fiji'. The third forbade spitting, smoking and speaking when the medicine was being drunk. The track to the spring had been neatly cut and bordered with shrubs. A sort of outpatients' register had been kept showing that over 9000 people had been treated - although as the clerk was later found to be unable to count past 1099 Reay thought the true number was probably less than 2000. The provincial constable (a chief of Nabutautau) ransacked the Buli's private papers and came back with one curious item, a letter from the Buli to Atekini Ciobale dated 19 April 1934 telling him that he had presided at a ceremony the previous day in memory of the blood that flowed at Vunawi - possibly the spot at Nasoqo where Thurston had flogged Rokoleba, one of Navosavakadua's lieutenants.

Was this another revival of that cult? Reay believed that it was, but he could get none of the above evidence sworn to in court. He obtained convictions on the charge of illegal assembly. It is not impossible that the whole connection with Navosavakadua was fabricated by Reay's private informant - possibly a man from Nasoqo who wanted to discredit Nasiriti, hitherto a very unimportant village

compared to its neighbours. The Buli of Nabobuoco himself, when Reay interrogated him on 11 November, was 'obviously in a funk' - there was no doubt that he had had opportunities to report the matter to Reay who was not impressed with his excuse that many women in Nabobouco were childless and that he had wanted to give Kitione a chance to prove himself. For Reay had been with the Buli in Nasoqo on 18 August and the latter had alluded to the talk of a new cure, but not in such a way that Reay would take it seriously. Reay was convinced the Buli was smarting from a public censure the chiefs and Bulis of Colo North had (at Reay's request) delivered in Nasoqo in December 1933. A list of the crimes of Nabobouco had been read out - defiance of orders, wholesale evasion of taxes, provocative behaviour to the people of Nasau tikina, and other offences. It at least seems plausible that they should revive a cult which envisioned the overthrow of the government.¹⁷ What is certain is that the Nasoqo and Nasiriti people have no apologies to make about the water of life. People were still going there to drink it in the 1970s and it was carried to the sick in distant places - a catalogue of cures was available for the asking. All the inquisitive outsider needs to know any further is that the people say prayers before and after drinking it: 'it is God's gift to us.'

These extraordinary events, while confined in the main to the interior of Viti Levu, were symptomatic perhaps of a general weakening of social discipline in the villages and of the inability of the established leaders to do much about it. The greatest threat to the integrity of village life was the number of men and women absent at any one time. Absenteeism was a running sore in Fijian society because it represented the indifference of individuals to the common good and the hallowed demands of traditional cooperation. A man had not been free in former times to come and go at will; nor was he free under the original Native Regulations to leave without permission for longer than sixty days. As the chiefs began to lose their grip on the Fijian Administration at the provincial level to English magistrates, there were frequent complaints from the Bulis of Tailevu, Rewa and Kadavu about their young men:

They come to Suva and put on no end of 'side' amongst the women and wear collars and ties and smart coats, sport crook walking sticks and turn up in great force at church - the Suva Methodist

Jubilee Church on Sundays. They all do a minimum of work and when any trouble arrives away back they go to the Mataqali or the village and so make sure of shelter and food.¹⁸

To avoid prosecution in the district courts, many returned home on the fifty-ninth day then left again a few days later.

After 1912 absenteeism was no longer an offence for men; only women needed permission of their parents or guardians to be absent more than sixty days - a provision very hard to enforce. In the same year a new Fijian Employment Ordinance abolished the main safeguards of Thurston's legislation (the Fiji Labour Ordinance of 1895 and the Masters and Servants Ordinance of 1890). Henceforward any employer could sign on a married man before any magistrate in the colony who could be satisfied that the man had 'made provision' for his dependants. If the recruit had been voluntarily absent from his village for two years, the employer could sign him on and any Fijian could renew his contract on expiry so long as the employer paid his rates and taxes. (Previously an employer had been obliged to return a man to his village.)

The way was open for recruiters to go into Fijian villages with heavy bags of 'yagona money'. After the cancellation of Indian indentures in January 1920, there was a sudden demand in the sugar industry for Fijian labour. Fijian indentured men lived under much the same wretched conditions as had the Indians, but for shorter periods. They were more tolerant of crowded conditions, especially if they were without women. CSR paid Fijian recruiters for each man they produced in Lautoka for engagement under the Masters and Servants Ordinance (under which no licences were required for recruiters).¹⁹ The men were taken without reference to the Buli of the district or the situation of the village. Communal and family obligations were easily evaded and at the end of the term of indenture, usually six months or a year, the men often returned to their villages penniless. Having planted no garden, they had no food and depended on the strained charity of relatives. Some did not return for months if in lieu of a passage home they were paid a cash sum enabling them to holiday a while in the village of their choice, meeting no obligations of any kind. For the first time in the history of Fiji there were reports of food shortages in good years, while the villages entered upon a steady

physical decline from the settlements of substantial, high-built heavily thatched houses of old Fiji towards the uninsulated, ill-drained ovens of wood and iron that later decades accepted as normal. By 1927 Islay McOwan, the Secretary for Native Affairs, noting that the government considered 'a supply of labour for agricultural purposes was of greater importance than the welfare of the natives themselves', expressed his fear that the Fijian Administration could collapse.²⁰

There were, as explained in Chapter 5, enough continuities in village and district life to prevent total collapse; erosion might be a better word for the effects of the policy the Colonial Office had rather meaninglessly prescribed as 'a careful regulation of the communal system accompanied by a gradual loosening of its bonds'.²¹ The term 'communal system' was often used as if there were some entity superimposed and separable from Fijian society which could be modified at any time without drastic modification of the groups - the households, villages and vanua - comprising that society. The semantic comfort of such phrases as 'loosening the bonds' concealed a woolly imprecision, a cliched liberalism of 'certain certainties' about the nature of man and society. One of these certainties in twentieth century colonial Fiji was that any restriction on the personal liberty of Fijians was an 'obstacle' to their becoming 'full British subjects' in the sense that Maoris were understood to be in New Zealand. Fijian society, like all others, had to evolve through a universal sequence of stages towards the superior western model of 'monogamous, individualistic, capitalistic, "democratic" man . . . the culminating product of a natural law of inevitable progress' realized most perfectly to date by the Anglo-Saxons with their civil liberties enshrined in the common law and protected by the franchise.²²

Theoretically, then, the Fijian Administration and the Native Regulations were regarded as temporary expedients subject to reform and modernization to bring Fijian society 'more into line with the modern world', as it was often put. Yet specific reforms, as it has been seen above in the context of hereditary privilege, had left the regulatory framework for Fijian life largely untouched by retaining the Communal Services Regulation and the program of work. At the same time, however, government condoned male absenteeism as a safety valve, an escape route for individuals.

The chiefs, fully aware of this intolerable dilemma, fought a spasmodic rearguard defence. Without directly challenging the ethos of the day, lest they appear disloyal, the provincial councils and the Council of Chiefs repeatedly urged specific measures to stem absenteeism, increase the control of the Bulis, regulate recruiting activities, and ensure the return of labourers on expiry of their contracts. In 1917 the chiefs urged the government to give Bulis the power to compel men to return home if they were living in European towns and not in regular employment. To this and similar requests the Governor replied that it was not policy to restrict any further the freedom of the individual. Nothing the chiefs could say would be interpreted other than as reactionary conservatism. In 1923 they asked permission to increase provincial rates for men absent from home longer than twelve months (an estimated 15 per cent of taxpayers or 3000 men, of whom 840 were in permanent employment), and repeated their request that no man be indentured without the approval of his Buli. Both resolutions were rejected. An official in the Secretariat added privately: 'I realize that the foundations of the "communal system" are being undermined, gradually but surely. Evolution is the natural and philosophic order of things.'²³

Perhaps what most exasperated these all-male councils was their powerlessness to control the movement of women. Many women simply ignored the regulations. They drifted into towns, went for rides with Indian taxi drivers, and were sheltered by European and Chinese lovers. Fijian male pride was outraged. In 1926 Ratu Sukuna proposed that the regulations be tightened to compel a woman to obtain the Buli's consent before leaving her tikina for longer than twenty-eight days. He insisted that colonial authorities should defer to Fijian practice rather than more liberated western ideals of womanhood. Fijian women, he argued, had always to be in the power of a husband, parent, or guardian: 'It is undoubtedly a grave question whether the rights of civilised women accustomed to moving in over-populated cities should be allowed to native women brought up in small villages. In Suva and Levuka the experiment is proving fatal.'²⁴

The chiefs had their way on some points. After much debate the Native Regulations Board resolved that the sugar mills and larger centres should become 'prohibited areas' to unchaperoned women unless they had a permit from a Buli for stays longer than a month. As this proved ineffective,

the period was reduced to a week in 1932, and two days in 1935. But the government rejected a suggestion from Ba Provincial Council in 1925 that women be compelled to weed the villages and similar suggestions from other councils that women be made to do some outside work. Their obligation to feed visitors was considered sufficient. In 1933 the Council of Chiefs wanted a further regulation to prohibit married women leaving their village without permission of their husbands, but here the government finally drew the line: 'the coercion of women is not in accordance with modern principles. A standard of conduct should be enforced by public opinion rather than by Government Regulations.' The chiefs had plainly despaired of public opinion. In 1940 they even requested a regulation to fine a woman 40s for leaving a child under 3 unattended for more than half a day. A year later the Colo East Provincial Council suggested that women remaining in prohibited areas should be whipped.²⁵

The missionaries had traditionally relied not only on the chiefs but on the impact of the gospel itself to preserve social discipline. In private correspondence they were often discouraged by the results: 'Thieving abounds and such fornication as would disgrace the beasts of the field', wrote one. 'Never in my life have I seen such an immoral place as this', wrote the Reverend W. Brown from Lakeba in 1913, 'and the people do not seem to care.' Fourteen years of preaching later, the Reverend A.G. Adamson wrote from the same island: 'There seems to be very little love or anything lovely in them. It makes my heart very sad when I think that the lotu had been here for nearly 100 years and yet it's mostly just on the surface.'²⁶ The chairman of the Methodist mission, the Reverend A.J. Small, used to urge his brethren not to flag: 'The cure is - religion at white heat, clothes, and the safeguards that surround the well-ordered European Christian house.' Calling for 'a deeper spiritual life in the hearts of our members', he lamented that first there had to be 'produced in them a keener sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin'.²⁷

By the end of the 1920s Methodist missionaries sensed that while their circuit organization had long been interlocked with the structures of district life to become an integral part of Fijian community life - and as such was not under threat - yet the church was losing control over personal behaviour and forms of social life. Choir practices (vuli sere) for instance, were fun, a good excuse

for a Yagona party and one of the best places to arrange a rendezvous with the opposite sex. In early 1925 a simple dance that began as a game taught to boys and girls in Nadroga, the taralala, spread like an epidemic to the farthest parts of the group. The taralala brought the sexes together for the first time in a vibrating throng, an unprecedented liberation from the strictures of both ancient etiquette and evangelical wowsersism. The Reverend Harold Chambers came back to his station at Niusawa on Taveuni one day in 1933 and was horrified to hear a great stamping and shouting and whooping from his schoolchildren. There he found

two big girls from Welagi Koro . . . wriggling, and twisting their bodies in sinuous movements, and shaking themselves in such a way, as to cause their breasts to shake from side to side and up and down, before the crowd of goggling boys and in the midst was the teacher . . . I was staggered and hurt beyond words . . . sailed into the lot, boys and girls with my qanuya cane, and whacked them right and left . . . expelled all Welagi girls over 10.²⁸

The taralala was a poison infecting Fijian moral life, the Catholic and Methodist missionaries agreed, and they urged government officers to help them stamp it out.

The District Commissioners, asked their opinions in 1931, generally agreed that the taralala was harmless in itself but often led to 'immoralities'. These they were urged to try and prevent. The missionaries knew of more than one case, though, where a DC thought it the best thing that had happened to the villages in years and actively encouraged the dancing to enliven the dreary round of his village inspections. The children's teacher in Nadroga had innocently created a minor revolution in social mores. The European missionaries could denounce it from the pulpits, but they put their canes away when they saw that the chiefs and people would adopt whatever music and customs they enjoyed.

A century of contact with Europeans, reported Ratu Sukuna from Lau, had long established new tastes - 'for clothes and corned beef, for cereals and finery, for tin and iron roofing'. Even so, with the exception of 'clothes as the symbol of Christianity and light as the effulgence of Divine Grace', these articles of the whiteman's trade

were 'still regarded as luxuries'. Not that their absence would go unmourned. The year 1932 was a good one for Lau. Crops were prolific, bananas went to waste, fish and turtles were plentiful, there were no hurricanes or storms - 'all the conditions, in fact, that only twenty or thirty years ago would have made the period a memorable one. The attitude now is the reverse!' And the reason was that copra prices were fast falling on the depressed world market: the Lauans had less money to spend on non-essentials and had come to think of their agricultural existence as impoverished.²⁹

Children were staying long enough in school - financed largely by their own parents - for Fijian leaders to speak of a rising generation who were having difficulty settling back into village life:

As a body they look down on productive labour connected with the soil. The curse that was upon Adam they mean to avoid. Their reasoning is based on experience. Looking round they see, on the one side, men of education clean and well-dressed - appearances they have been taught to respect - filling all the lucrative posts; on the other, the simple folk dirty and untidy - shortcomings for which they have been whipped - tilling the ground. They conclude that education (in the only form known to them) is a panacea for all human needs, providing for those who partake of it clean and well paid jobs.³⁰

Young Fijians had come to associate the immaculate white flannels of magistrates and District Commissioners with the prestige and power of western civilization. They looked with envy on those few of their number whose everyday dress was the villager's Sunday best, men whose hands were rarely to be seen grubbing out a yam or tying thatch. These were the ordained native ministers, the assistant masters of the better schools, the native magistrates, scribes, medical practitioners, clerks in the government offices in Suva and employees of the merchant houses - not exactly a middle class yet, nor by any means cut off from their village families, but certainly more oriented to the status-world of the Europeans, and more receptive to the appeal of individualism.

For the colonial system in Fiji as everywhere offered limited but still attractive new avenues for individual ambition. While the neotraditional status system continued to flourish, it has been seen, some individuals needed it less than others: they shifted ground away from the village and the assemblies of the land to cut a name for themselves in the church, the regular civil service, and the business houses. While they did not move completely from one life to another, they were certainly learning to be part-time operators in a world where the idiom was not that of custom. And it was a world where they could begin to measure themselves by European standards of comfort, expertise or power - and feel disadvantaged. For the fifth-class clerk on £50 a year, for the Morris Hedstrom's messenger boy, or the assistant master at the Queen Victoria School, it was not generally pleasant to be on the bottom rung, however great the pride of the wife or mother who pressed the crisp white collar.

Not surprisingly the Wesleyan church was the first institution to feel the push of upward mobility: indeed European ministers were shocked by the force with which the Native Ministers, almost from the beginning, resolved to improve their position. Me da dua vata, 'let us be one', was their platform by the late nineteenth century. With apt appeal to the Johannine text of Christ's prayer for unity amongst his disciples, the Fijian divines urged that unity was better expressed in social equality immediately than pious acknowledgments that all would be judged equally on the Last Day. 'They object to be told to wait on the verandah while we go to our meals', complained the Reverend C.O. Lelean to the mission chairman in 1904; the Fijians felt they should eat with their European colleagues at the same table and not have to endure what Lelean himself described as 'the many little ways we treat them as inferiors' - such as providing tin mugs for Fijians and glassware for whites. The missionary thought it outrageous that Fijians should notice and comment so accurately on the petty hallmarks of white prestige. If a delegation came to him, he said, he would single out for ridicule one he had 'seen that very week spitting on the floor', and then tell the group 'they must trust to us to decide as to when and how improvement in their position was to take place'.³¹ The chairman of the mission was equally scathing:

Me da dua vata. And now from Ba comes a lengthy document in which the Native Ministers put forth the modest request to be dua vata, i.e., on an

equality with the missionaries - sit on their chairs, eat at their tables, live in fine houses, draw more salary, have their travelling expenses paid. They also read a lecture to the missionaries on the way they should conduct themselves to the chiefs. With all seriousness they state that the adoption of these suggestions would tend to the promotion of the work of God!³²

The European missionaries particularly feared Fijian control of mission finances. 'The majority of Native Ministers', pleaded the chairman in 1923,

do NOT desire that they should be left to the tender mercies of their chiefs in regard to their stipends. Central [European] control is to them sure control . . . And you must take the NATIVE MIND into consideration when attempting to put responsibility on him. You cannot give him responsibility if he does not want it and refuses to accept it . . . The Fijian has all that he desires in the way of responsibility at the present time.³³

A decade later, shortly after retrenchments of Europeans had finally forced the appointment of the first Fijian to be given charge of a whole circuit (in Bua), the Reverend Harold Chambers spoke for many when he warned, 'I am not convinced that the Fijian conscience has been sufficiently educated, as yet, to the absolute sacredness of a financial trust.' There was something in that, perhaps, though a greater problem was that most of the Australian ministers uncritically identified with establishment views. Just as the Indian indenture system was long condoned, so the Fijians were seen as perpetually in a state of transition: 'They will not be ready for [responsibility] 50 years yet. They must walk first, then increase their pace.'³⁴

The Roman Catholic mission was profoundly committed to 'progressive' education in its school system but not within its own institutions. Whereas the Wesleyans had ordained forty teachers by 1870 and had sent many to evangelize the Solomons and New Guinea, Fijian participation in the Catholic endeavour was long limited to local catechetical work or to membership of a body founded by Bishop Vidal in 1891, 'Les Petits Freres Indigenes' and a similar religious association for women. Little Brothers and Little Sisters

were given no liturgical or preaching responsibilities or any area of real initiative. They took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience to their (white) superiors under whom they lived in community - never in the villages. Until the 1960s the duties of Fijian religious seem to have been to assist in the schools and to cook, wash, and garden for the priests and nuns. In 1922 Bishop Nicholas noted that over forty Little Brothers had taken vows and that some fifteen of them had died 'de la façon la plus édifiante'.³⁵ Edifying in death, perhaps, but no foundation for a truly Fijian church. The general problem of Fijian educational levels, a colonialist scepticism amongst the European clergy that they could ever be replaced, and the awesome obligation of priestly celibacy, to which a dozen or more were called but few chosen, kept the church massively dependent on expatriate staff. (In 1974 over 300 Europeans were listed in the Catholic Directory.)

Outside the churches and the Fijian Administration there was only one body of educated Fijians seeking a distinct voice in colonial affairs - the Viti Cauravou, or Young Fiji Society. R.A. Derrick, influential headmaster of the Davuilevu Technical School, sponsored an old boys' society in 1922. It expanded rapidly to include any educated Fijian engaged in 'some useful, productive work as opposed to tiko wale ga [bumming around]' and was committed to broadly progressive goals.³⁶ Government cautiously recognized in the society 'the articulate expression of this vague groping of the younger generation towards a new social system'³⁷ - most evident in their trenchant criticism of the institutional constraints on individual initiative: 'It is very difficult', one of their leaders wrote, 'for the men to be free and to decide their own work to gain prosperity and wealth.'³⁸ Apolosi had been eloquent on the same theme for over twenty years but these elegant men were too respectable to acknowledge any debt to the man from Ra.

Viti Cauravou conferences provided an orderly but freer vehicle of Fijian opinions than the decorous provincial councils and Council of Chiefs. When the Secretary for Native Affairs, Islay McOwan, agreed to open the 1927 conference, the movement gained a formal measure of respectability and a limited right of dialogue with government. Until World War II, resolutions were forwarded to McOwan's office for comments and replies. At its peak in the mid 1930s it claimed 4000 members.³⁹

In 1930 the Viti Cauravou sounded a more discordant note when it presented the Governor with a petition with 5858 signatures for laws to preserve racial purity. 'Many of our women have children by non-natives', the document read, 'and the Chinese are the worst offenders.' As a body they were fiercely nationalistic and not at all conciliatory to the rights and needs of the Indian community: 'It is our desire to remain united with the Europeans but not with the Indians.'⁴⁰ Similarly on questions of land rights they were generally opposed to the considerable concessions Fijian leaders and colonial authorities had already made in a partial effort to come to grips with the overwhelming demographic fact of the 1930s: the youthful Indian population, 85,000 in 1936, was only 12,000 fewer than the Fijian and soon to become a majority. On the Indian question the Viti Cauravou was solidly in accord with the traditional Fijian view that the colonial government had created the problem to meet European economic needs and now had to manage it in such a way that Fijian interests would always be paramount.

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