Overview of Chapters 8–10
Fijian Polities in Three Areas in the Yasayasa Vakara

In previous chapters I have discussed how and why the fortunes of four matanitū or highly developed socio-political complexes which typified polities in eastern Fiji in the late period leading up to Cession waxed and waned from time to time. Each one of them maintained a certain level of stability even in times of trouble; and this level of stability enabled a polity even on the wane to survive and usually to re-assert itself as a major power or at least to command a degree of respect from its neighbours. The actual degree of stability would depend on the nature and strength of the bond (na ivau) between the component polities, which in turn would often depend on the nature and closeness of the personal relationship between their respective leaders. In the case of the major polities in the east, as these major socio-political complexes developed with increasing levels of hierarchy and expanded geographically, the situation required that more formal and lasting kinds of bonds had to be developed for administrative necessity and for stability.

Among the polities with which the paramount had relationships sealed by such bonds, were those known as the bati (military allies) and the qali (tributaries). Equally important were the bonds created by mutual respect and the continuing needs for mutual protection against a common enemy or for goods and food generally not otherwise available. The acknowledgement of such bonds was manifested by the ceremonial exchanges known as solevu. I also discussed three polities geographically between the east and the west, which are in intermediate positions in a continuum of polities of differing degrees of socio-political complexity.

Against the background typified by these four hierarchically complex polities of the east and the three intermediate polities, I turn now to that major part of my project which relates to polities in the three field areas in the northeast and west of Viti Levu and the Yasawa archipelago with a detailed exposition of the development and structure of the polities of the present six tikina of Rakiraki, Nawaka/Nadi/Vuda, and Naviti/Yasawa. In Chapter 8, I discuss the forms of polity in the north-east corner of Viti Levu. In Chapters 9–13, I consider the forms of polity in the far west of Viti Levu and the western archipelago of the Yasawas, where it will be seen that the influence of Tonga was not generally of particular significance and the people were strong, independent and proud. Here the polities tended to be of relatively simple structure, even when ambitious (and sometimes rival) chiefs demonstrated, not always particularly successfully, their schemes to expand their spheres of influence or to attain paramountcy at the expense of those who already were recognised as paramounts.

The traditional accounts detailed in Chapters 8–13 and Appendices A and B show that the polities of the west are generally less highly stratified, less formal and, at any rate until the findings of the Native Lands Commission and the consequent legislation formalised the situation, less stable. The further west one goes from the highly developed eastern polities, the less evident will be the tendency for stable forms of federation and political hierarchy. What emerges is a continuum of
complexity of socio-political structures ranging from the generally highly complex confederations of the east, through federations of generally intermediate complexity and hierarchy in Rakiraki, to less formal federations in Nadi, Nawaka and Vuda, to descent groups in the Yasawas which, when and if they associate, do so on the basis of interdependence rather than hierarchical degrees of subservience. The simplest form of polity as found in the west is the oldest form of polity in late Fijian society, and the most complex is the most recent to develop. Indeed, the case studies of all polities I have undertaken indicate a widespread tendency to start as a polity based on a simple descent group. Such a descent group in most cases might develop into an element, either leading or subsidiary, in a more complex federation of two or more levels of hierarchy, and then in the east come to develop into an element of an even more complex confederation of three or more levels of hierarchy. As in the case of Verata in the east, some polities in the west developed over the years into more complex and then subsequently degenerated into less complex ones. In a later chapter I consider why and how the eastern polities became so much more complex than the ones in the west. In particular, I suggest that the eastern polities were strongly influenced both ideologically and militarily by the neighbouring highly complex polities of Tonga (later to become developed into a unified kingdom) with which the eastern Fijian polities and their ambitious paramouts had been in social intercourse for centuries. Not only ideas and military assistance but also spouses were exchanged. One result of the latter is the important high-ranking, mixed-blood group in Tonga known as the Fale Fiti or Fiji House.

In these chapters I consider how and why western polities developed, and whether, and if so why, some did not develop beyond the stage of a descent group or yavusa. Such a yavusa may in reality have included sub-groups of people who are not descended from the original ancestor of the yavusa but nevertheless (and contrary to the principles of the Government model) are regarded as members and generally treated as such.

I also consider whether, and if so how, the nature of the bond differed in the east and in the west. I suggest that the bond between polities in the west depended not so much on such administrative formalities, formal military alliances and hierarchical relationships based on brute strength (kaukaua) as manifested in the bati and gali of the east. Rather it depended on such factors as common blood (dra vata) based on descent from a common ancestor, real or mythical; or on some common relationship, traditional or mythical, between recognised original ancestors; or on marriage; or on an acknowledged socio-political relationship based on mutual protection or benefit. In the latter case, the bond may have lasted as long as the need for mutual protection prevailed, or the relationship was found to be appropriate or convenient.

In smaller polities, the bond may be that of blood (dra). In descent groups, the theoretical bond is by definition that of common blood and the bond is accordingly referred to as ‘dra vata’. Members who are dra vata claim to be descended from a common original ancestor, usually along the male line. On a much broader scale is the mythical bond ideally created between all those Fijians who claim their original ancestors came from the Nakauvadra Mountains and who depend on such a descent as a basis for the position of their descent group in wider Fijian society. Not all Fijian groups claim ancestry based originally on the ‘U Ma’ua, as the Rakiraki people call those culture heroes such as Degei who in mythical times came on the first vessel, the Kaunitoni and went to dwell on the Nakauvadra Mountains. In the western areas, at any rate, some groups claim descent from original spirits who remained in the west, never going on to the Nakauvadra. Indeed at least one group claims to be autochthonous. Others associate themselves with a Tongan ancestor but keep the Nakauvadra connection by saying that the Tongan was made pregnant by Nakauvadra culture hero Degei. I discuss the implications of this emphasis on a mythical Nakauvadra origin, and of other origin myths and of Tongan (and Samoan) connections, both mythical and supposedly historical, in the west.
An extension of the concept of a bond based on *dra vata* is the concept of a bond of relationship based on a spiritual brother–brother or brother–sister relationship between two ancestral spirits. These two spirits came to be regarded as the original ancestors (or spouses of original ancestors) of two separate descent groups or *yavusa*. A relationship based on descent from two such related ancestral spirits is referred to as *veitauvū*. A bond created by the relationship of *veitauvū* is considered to be very strong. As well as bonds created by blood relationship or by spiritual relationship, I also consider how and why other kinds of bonds may have been created in the west, and how and why they may have been maintained. I will explore not only the questions of how and why polities developed and how and why bonds were created in the west, but will also discuss the questions of how a polity identified itself and regarded itself as a unity, and the nature of the symbols of identification and unification recognised by Fijian society. In particular, I identify not only common features but also explore and attempt to explain the anomalies and exceptions as they are found to occur across the three field areas in the west.

I examine the social structure of late western Fijian society in my three study areas, one at a time, in the east/west order of Rakiraki *tikina* and its periphery (Chapter 8); Vuda (Chapter 9); Nadi (Chapter 10), and the three adjoining *tikina* of Nawaka (Chapter 11); and the two *tikina* of Naviti (Chapter 12) and Yawasa (Chapter 13) comprising generally the Natu Yasawa or Yasawa Group.
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