On 10 October 1901, European missionaries and Fijian ministers gathered on Fiji’s Bau Island for the annual Synod of the Australasian Methodist Overseas Missions. At this meeting, symbolically held on the island that was the home of Fiji’s supreme chiefly Cakobau family, attendees addressed the challenge created by the growing Indo-Fijian community by establishing an Indo-Fijian branch. While Methodists had already been working to evangelise Indian indentured labourers, this had previously taken place under the umbrella of the Rewa circuit of the mission. The creation of the Indo-Fijian branch established a systemic segregation based on the perceived cultural differences between the two predominant non-European populations in the colony. This chapter traces the development of the institution’s structure through mission policies: the creation of separate administrative systems that categorised Methodists according to race, akin to the observations that John Kelly has made about the structure of Fiji’s secular government that simultaneously entrenched European authority.1 While the decision to split the institution resulted from practical difficulties associated with ministering to communities that spoke different languages, it was also informed by internationally accepted mission policy around acculturating economics and leadership models. The overarching goal was to establish a self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating ‘native church’: the ‘three selves’ church policy supported by international ecumenical movements. Missionaries believed that creating a ‘native’ Methodist church that included both Fijian and Indo-Fijian converts would be too problematic. This chapter describes how European missionaries addressed the presence

of the Indo-Fijian community in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the practical and theological imperatives, and theories about race and culture that informed them. Ultimately, it was through the convergence of international and local policies that missionaries devised a scheme to separate the ‘natives’ in a bid to keep order and peace.

Indian labourers arrived in Fiji from 1879 onwards to work in the sugar industry. Under the British administration’s indenture scheme, 45,000 workers came from Uttar Pradesh (including Basti, Gonda, Faizabad, Sultanpur, Azamgarh and Gorakhpur), and 15,000 from the southern areas of Madras, Arcot, Tanjore, Krishna, Goavari, Vizakhapatnam, Coimbatore and Malabar. Workers came from an array of classes, castes and religious backgrounds, but were mainly Hindu or Muslim. Fiji’s first census in 1881 counted 588 Indian labourers, whose numbers swelled as the colony’s sugar industry grew. Many remained in Fiji when their contracts expired, either because they were unable to return to India, or because they chose to renew their contracts. Others settled on farms or in the colony’s growing townships. By 1901 there were 17,105 Indians in Fiji, accounting for 14.2 per cent of the colony’s population. Despite being away from their homeland, the labourers transported their cultures, and then altered and adapted them, across the kala pani. As the Indo-Fijian community grew, missionaries began to reimagine the mission and its needs, and tried to do this in a way that suited the community as they saw it.

It took 22 years from the start of indenture for the missionaries to create this official strategy for evangelisation in the Indo-Fijian community. The potential for a mission to the Indo-Fijian population in Fiji was first spoken about at mission board meetings in Sydney in 1884, but until the 1901 synod, the mission’s efforts were haphazard, and a dedicated mission to the Indian community proved difficult to implement with only limited funds and resources available. The discussions followed a similar pattern to those described by John Kelly, when he outlined the British project of categorisation in Fiji and the desire to keep the Indian communities separate from the colony’s indigenous peoples.

3 Ibid., p. 2.
This ‘modality of colonial practice’ was incorporated into the mission’s systems, and was displayed in the way in which they recruited workers for each branch.\(^7\) The mission tried to source both Europeans and Indians to evangelise the Indo-Fijian community. An untrained Indian catechist named John Williams arrived in 1892 from Faizabad, and though the mission board did not appoint him to any official position, Williams worked alongside European missionary the Reverend Henry Worrall in the Rewa circuit.\(^8\)

Another Australian, Hannah Dudley, arrived in 1897 and was the first to be appointed by the board to work exclusively with the Indo-Fijian community, having been inspired by a speech given that year by Worrall.\(^9\) She was also the first female missionary to be formally appointed to work in Fiji, though many missionary wives had served alongside their husbands in an unofficial capacity before her. Dudley brought a wealth of experience from her time as a missionary to women with the Zenana mission movement in India.\(^10\) By the time Dudley was recruited to the Indo-Fijian mission, the board had plans to establish a ‘Fiji Coolie Mission’, and hoped that Dudley would take the lead.\(^11\) Yet Dudley worked fairly independently during her first few years in the colony, with minimal direction from the mission’s chairman.\(^12\) With limited resources, Dudley worked to her own plans and devoted most of her energies to building an orphanage.\(^13\) Her efforts with children attracted some converts, but conversion rates remained small.

The Indo-Fijian community was generally ambivalent or resistant to Christianity. Conversion placed Indo-Fijians in a complex position. When considering this we might go back to Stoler’s ideas about ‘cultural criteria’ and how they can be prescribed and attended to both in the home and in public spaces.\(^14\) Dudley noted something to this effect in a report she made in 1898:

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9 Ibid., pp. 10, 13.
10 For more information on the Zenana movement, see R Howe, ‘The Australian Christian Movement and Women’s Activism in the Asia-Pacific Region, 1890–1920s’, Australian Feminist Studies, vol. 16, no. 36, 2001, p. 312
12 Ibid., pp. 17–18.
An Indian in becoming a Christian, they believe, ceases to be an Indian; he eats meat willingly, drinks water others have been drinking, and breaks other Hindu religious laws, the doing of which is considered by them far more heinous than any violation of the moral code. They believe that Christianity is the religion for Europeans and Hinduism is for the Indians.15

Dudley had observed the deeply personal implications for Indians as they adopted their new faith. There was a widely held perception that Indians who converted to Christianity would leave their old cultural practices behind. This led to exclusion from the Indo-Fijian community, where conversion to another faith was viewed as ‘apostacy’: a regression from Islam or Hinduism. To build on Stoler’s argument, the ways in which Indo-Fijians who converted to Christianity engaged in certain practices that were attached to their national or cultural identity maintained their difference from other Christians in Fiji, but similarly their adoption of new practices set them apart from others of their ethnic background. A national identity was being carved out at the most intimate levels, both in practical ways and through spiritual engagement.

Indo-Fijian converts were not necessarily warmly embraced into the Methodist community, being simultaneously excluded from European or Fijian spaces. Divisions were created early on. There were separate churches, schools and meetings created for Indo-Fijian Methodists. Shortly after her arrival in 1897, Dudley established the first school exclusively for Indo-Fijian children in Suva.16 While in the early days of her work she conducted Christian teachings in the shared space of the Jubilee Church in Suva, an Indo-Fijian mission hall was opened on 19 December 1901 at Nausori, specifically for Indo-Fijian Methodist worship.17 Christianity might have been seen to negate Indo-Fijian culture by those who practiced Hinduism or Islam, but it did not make converts ‘less Indo-Fijian’ in the Methodist community. This adds to the argument, put forward by John Kelly, that ‘categories of difference based on custom, culture, or level of civilisation, and based on “race”, mixed with and eventually contended with, the distinction of religion in definition and maintenance of boundaries between categories of people’.18 Race, along with these other features that distinguished Fiji’s peoples as different from one another, which were often broadly defined as ‘custom’, operated as a means of defining boundaries. Indian converts acquired a new category, a liminal position between the Indian community

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17 Ibid., p. 15.

and the larger Fijian Methodist community in the new spaces created for Indo-Fijian Methodists. While excluded from Fijian and European worship and educational spaces run by the Methodists, a new social space was defined for Indo-Fijian Methodists.

The man who oversaw the racial separation of the mission was the Chairman of the Fiji District, the Reverend Arthur J Small. The mission’s leadership during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came from England or the nearby British settler colonies of Australia and New Zealand. Many mission leaders had little or no previous contact with Indian peoples or cultures before arriving in Fiji. Small was born in 1854 and had immigrated to Australia from Camden, England, in 1862 as an eight-year-old. He arrived in Fiji in 1879, at the age of 25, in the same year that the first indentured Indian labourers disembarked from the ship the *Leonidas* in Levuka, the colony’s administrative capital. Despite his limited engagement with non-European peoples, like other humanitarians and colonial administrators, Small brought his understandings of race from the Empire’s metropole to its peripheries. Small’s transnational interactions proved crucial to shaping his approach to governing the mission.

As Stoler suggested of other colonial administrators, Small’s knowledge of difference travelled with him.

Without pause, Small launched straight into his work with the Fijian community. Stationed on the chiefly island of Bau, he was geographically removed from plantations and the colony’s trading centres. Small therefore had only limited contact with Indian indentured workers during his early days in the colony. He chatted with traders and gradually learned more about Indian peoples from them and his colleagues. During the 1880s, he conducted a few baptisms for Indo-Fijian Methodists, but it was not until he became chairman of the mission in 1900 and was charged with responsibility for the Indo-Fijian circuit that he engaged more consistently and directly with Indo-Fijians. He was charged with visiting Indo-Fijian inmates at the Suva prison as part of his regular ministerial duties. He was then also responsible for managing

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23 Memories of Winifred McHugh, PMB 156, p. 17.
25 A J Small, diary, 12 July 1903, MSS 3267/1, item 3, ML.
the European staff that worked in the Indo-Fijian mission, including Hannah Dudley and the Reverends Harold Nolan and John Wear Burton — the latter two having arrived in 1901 and 1902 respectively — and so his perspectives broadened and diversified as his engagement with the Indo-Fijian community and responsibility for administering to it within the mission grew.26

Small addressed the Wesleyan general conference in Brisbane, Australia, in May 1901 about the state of Fiji’s changing society, and the result of this meeting contributed to the decision made later that year to create a separate Indian branch. Missionaries tended to explain the separation as a necessary adaption to practicalities, such as language difference. While some Fijian and Indo-Fijian people could speak Fijian and Indo-Fijian dialects, missionaries argued that the Christian message was best delivered in the convert’s own mother tongue on the principle that the message and religious experience would be diluted or misconstrued if it were not.27 The mission had, as with Williams and Dudley, endeavoured to employ Indian catechists and European missionaries who were familiar with Indo-Fijian languages and cultures. Dudley’s six years in India with the Zenana movement had equipped her with a reasonable knowledge of Hindustani.28 However, they struggled to find more people with such sound language skills at the time of segregation. The mission board’s ideal was to have a European missionary who would act as superintendent to the Indian branch, with a few Indian catechists and ministers to support the work, an arrangement that would maintain the ethnicised categories that John Kelly has written about, that demarcated social and spatial distance, as well as European authority.29

The decision to split the mission was also based on demographic trends. Though historian Harold Wood has recorded that some 60 Indian converts attended a church service at Dudley’s church in December 1901, in 1902 there were only seven people from the Indo-Fijian community who were actually

29 The estimated cost of migration (£100), settlement in Fiji (£230) and then stipends per annum (£170).
members of the Methodist mission. Yet, missionaries believed that the separate branch was necessary despite the small membership. At the same Wesleyan general conference meeting, Small informed his Australian colleagues of Fiji’s demographics according to the 1901 census, and voiced his concern about the rapid growth of the Indian community. Demographics also preoccupied colonial administrators during this period. Small pointed to the increasing Indo-Fijian birth rate, sitting at 6.18 per cent, and the death rate of 1.04 per cent for adults and 12.34 per cent for children. The Fijian population, in the same period, had decreased to 94,397. With the Indo-Fijian population now totalling 14.2 per cent of the colony’s peoples, and Fijian numbers dropping, observers believed that Indo-Fijians might one day outnumber Fijians and become the majority in Fiji.

In the background to these discussions were bigger questions, relating to land and the economy, for the mission and its members. The formation of Fiji’s land policies under British colonial rule were intrinsic to later policies which reflected a concern for indigenous rights. In 1876, Fiji’s first governor, Arthur Gordon, called on the Council of Chiefs to detail the customary systems of land ownership, which would then be used for the administration of land registration. It took several years for the council to arrive at some sort of clear decision as to how land had been organised prior to European encroachment.

The Indo-Fijian community was setting down roots: despite the 1875 ordinance that forbade the alienation of Fijian lands, some lands had been bought by Europeans; Indian farmers were renting some of these plots and settling in the colony when they finished their indenture. Eventually, just prior to the arrival of Indian labourers to the colony, legislation was established whereby land ownership was attributed to a mataqali, which would be registered by colonial administrator David Wilkinson. Each mataqali claim had to be approved by the tikina and the provincial council. The final approval was left to the governor of the colony. Land ownership thus ran according to lines of ancestral links and were inherited by families and individuals. With the signing of land legislation in this manner, land ownership became an ethnically politicised commodity.

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The ethnicised nature of Fijian land legislation was to complicate the potential sense of belonging for any other ethnic group that subsequently entered Fiji. It did not necessarily occlude access to land for non-indigenous peoples: by 1901, Small estimated that Indo-Fijian farmers had acquired 768 acres along the Rewa River for sugar cane farming. In the Navua district, 1,565 acres were under cultivation. Perhaps seeing the potential for Indo-Fijians to acquire considerable land and some wealth, Small told the Wesleyan general conference that it was essential that the mission expand their activities to cater to the ‘increasing heathen coolie population of Fiji’.36 The mission’s leadership conceded that the Indian presence in Fiji was not temporary or transient, but one with great potential for longevity.37

In 1901, the mission tried to entice more catechists or missionaries from India into the Pacific. Despite support from the Methodist leader in India, Bishop James M Thoburn, their efforts were unsuccessful. The board relied instead on fresh ministers from Australia and New Zealand who were unfamiliar with Indian cultures or languages.38 One of these was John Wear Burton. Despite having no prior experience in India, he was selected to work exclusively in the Indo-Fijian community.39 He gathered up his belongings and got on board the boat, full of enthusiasm and trepidation at the thought of leaving New Zealand for the adventure that lay ahead. But Burton received a warning from the outspoken ship’s captain during his passage in 1902: ‘The Indians have their own religion and want none of yours.’40

Burton was undeterred, and after only a short time in Fiji felt assured enough to declare himself the leader of the mission’s Indo-Fijian work.41 He studied Urdu with a man named Daniel Nizam-ul-din. Nizam-ul-din had been working on a plantation as a sirdar (the title commonly given to Indian foremen on sugar

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37 It was unclear whether these farmers were renting the land or had bought it from those who had bought the land despite the 1875 colonial ordinance. ‘Wesleyan General Conference: Sitting in Brisbane’, The Chronicle, Adelaide, South Australia, 25 May 1901, p. 15; A H Wood, Overseas Missions of the Australian Methodist Church: Fiji-Indian and Rotuma, vol. 3, Aldersgate Press, Melbourne, 1978, p. 9. Between May 1905 and April 1908, 104,142 acres of Fijian land were sold despite the 1875 ordinance. M Moynagh, ‘Land Tenure in Fiji’s Sugar Cane Districts Since the 1920s’, Journal of Pacific History, vol. 13, no. 1, 1978, p. 53.
38 Mission District Minutes, Minutes of the Annual Synod of the Fiji District, Bau, 10 October 1901, MOM 175 CY2671, 1901–1903, pp. 17–18.
39 Burton was originally from Lazenby, England, and had been living in New Zealand when he decided to join the mission. J W Burton, The Weaver’s Shuttle: Memories and Reflections of an Octogenarian, unpublished manuscript, n.d., p. 5.
40 Ibid., p. 51.
They had met when Nizam-ul-din was serving time in prison, and Burton transferred Nizam-ul-din’s indenture to his own name for £16, engaging in the indenture system in the process of trying to secure his own language tutor. He also enlisted Nizam-ul-din’s help to recruit more converts to Methodism. This complex relationship with Nizam-ul-din was in some ways mutually beneficial; while Burton was technically his employer, the balance of power passed between student and teacher as Nizam-ul-din instructed Burton in language. The process of exchange through language learning demonstrated Burton’s vulnerability and empowered Nizam-ul-din. He became a bridge between Burton and the community not only as a type of recruiter but by enabling Burton to better converse with potential Indo-Fijian converts.

While Totaram Sanadhya, a leader of Sanatani Hinduism, viewed Nizam-ul-din and Burton as a team, in private, Burton adopted mannerisms typical of the colonial elite. He did not offer Nizam-ul-din a seat at the table while he sat to learn his lessons. He also marked his prestige by building a large house for his own family, and a much smaller house for Nizam-ul-din. He was acutely aware of this and seemed somewhat ashamed in later recollections. He knew that these actions had perpetuated a sense of hierarchy based not on ministerial experience or class, but on ethnic difference. Burton’s efforts to develop his cultural and linguistic knowledge also elevated his own status within the mission, as cultural and linguistic knowledge were highly valued.


Small and Burton worked closely together during this first decade of the twentieth century to establish the infrastructure for the Indian branch. In 1902, they travelled together along the shoddy road to Baker’s Hill in Nausori, to the east of Suva, to select a site for the Indo-Fijian mission house that would act as a headquarters for its administration. This was where Davuilevu, the facility for Fijian ministerial training, was located. Small and Burton walked around the existing site, plotting where additional buildings might be placed, and decided to position the Indo-Fijian activities across the creek from the existing Fijian compound. In 1909, Burton and Small named the block that they had dedicated for the Indo-Fijian mission ‘Dilkusha’, after a colony in Lucknow, India. The name means ‘my heart is happy’ in Hindi. Through the processes of design and naming, there were sites of inclusion and exclusion constructed on the basis of race within this Methodist space.

The placement of buildings at Baker’s hill reflected the growing confidence missionaries had in creating a racialised administration. This was also evident when the missionaries met at the 1903 synod and discussed the future of a Fijian church and how it might be organised. The minutes stated:

> the special conditions of the life and work in Fiji make it impossible to govern our native Church upon the same principles that are applicable to races which have advanced so much further in civilisation.

It was unclear as to whether the Fijian community was being compared with churches in Europe or India, but this comment revealed that missionaries continued to see societies through a lens coloured by evolutionist theory: the Darwinian idea that cultures were at various hierarchical stages of civilisation, from ‘primitive’ to more modern. At this time, there was little distinction made between race and culture, with cultures generally perceived to be a reflection of a racial group’s relationship to modernity. The 1903 district synod minutes demonstrate how deeply ingrained evolutionist theories had been amongst missionaries. While missionaries such as Lorimer Fison had challenged the evolutionary theories emerging from Europe throughout the 1860s and 1870s, by the turn of the twentieth century, missionaries were less questioning.
1. FOUNDATIONS FOR AN INDO-FIJIAN METHODIST CHURCH IN FIJI

of the basic premise behind evolutionist theories. Missionaries were slow to reframe evolutionist ideas, and this in turn slowed the mission’s efforts towards establishing a native church in Fiji.49

Ideas about racial essentialism continued to inform discussions in 1907 when missionaries worked at redrafting the mission’s constitution, which needed to be changed in order to reflect the establishment of the Indo-Fijian branch in 1901. The process elicited responses from missionaries and locally trained ministers that demonstrated their commitment to developing a self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating mission. A commission was sent by the board in Sydney to check on the mission’s progress towards the ‘three selves’ church ideal.50 When discussing the degrees to which the two branches of the mission’s work would be separate, the commission concluded that Indo-Fijian and Fijian ‘habits of life and modes of thought are dissimilar; and the languages spoken have no relation to one another’.51 Again, missionaries drew on the rudimentary language of cultural difference to argue for the necessity of racial segregation. Missionaries, though implementing this segregated system according to race, referred more frequently to culture as the primary difference between peoples. All of these discussions coincided with Im Thurn’s attempts to bring the young Fijian chief born on Bau Island, Ratu Sukuna, into the colonial administration. Im Thurn was concerned that a western-styled education would upset Sukuna’s standing in the Fijian community, and he watched attentively for any signs of this.52

With the structure of the mission established in documents and deeds, efforts turned towards the work of evangelisation. Burton sought financial support from Australians with a sense of urgency, depicting Indo-Fijians as a threat to the Christian Fijian in public meetings.53 He argued that if missionaries did not make a special effort to convert the Indo-Fijian community, ‘the crescent of Mohamet’ would ‘displace the cross of Christ in the Pacific’.54 The mission board continued to seek recruits who were familiar with Indian cultural practices in

49 For details on how Methodist missionaries in Fiji were influenced by anthropology in the late nineteenth century, and her suggestion that they were more convinced of these theories by the early 1900s, see H Gardner, Gathering for God: George Brown in Oceania, Otago, Otago University Press, 2006, pp. 107–9; H Gardner, ‘Defending Friends: Robert Codrington, George Sarawia, and Edward Wogale’, in K Fullagar (ed.), Atlantic World in the Antipodes: Effects and Transformations since the Eighteenth Century, Newcastle Upon Tyne, England, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012, p. 154.
54 ‘Orientalisation of the Pacific’, Clarence and Richmond Examiner, Grafton NSW, 9 March 1907, p. 15.
the hope that they would draw more Indo-Fijians into the mission, targeting students from the renowned Bareilly College in Uttar Pradesh. Burton and the Reverend Charles Lelean travelled to India to find new workers in 1908. They did not find any catechists or ministers who could come to Fiji immediately, but the voyage was more personally rewarding for Charles Lelean, who married Constance Howell while he was there. Howell, like Dudley, had worked with other female evangelists in the interdenominational Zenana mission movement in India, and her experience and knowledge of Indian cultures, as well as medicine, would undoubtedly benefit Charles Lelean in the decades ahead. However, this meant that Europeans remained the face of Methodism to Indo-Fijians, and despite the growing tendency amongst Europeans to consider and respect the cultural protocols of Hinduism and Islam, this only served to maintain the sense of European dominance. The mission was widely perceived to be an extension of Britain’s colonial rule.

The mission board in Australia was interested in building links between Fiji and India, and decided to establish a station in India ‘from which this human tide is flowing upon its mission fields in the Pacific, so that this wave of coloured population may be touched, at its very starting point, with Christian forces’. In March 1908, the board described the differences that existed between Indian and Pacific peoples:

… mission work in India must necessarily be of another type to that which has hitherto been carried on under its direction in the South Seas. In India we are face to face with a vast population, with a highly complex civilisation, and, with

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all the problems which such a type of civilisation creates. Nowhere else in the world is society so highly organised, so sharply stratified by differences of race and speech and social condition.\textsuperscript{59}

The mission board depicted Indian society as more hierarchical than some Pacific societies, pursuing the argument that Indian civilisation was more complex and more sophisticated than those found in the Pacific, and feeding the idea of racial and cultural hierarchy. The mission board’s minutes declared that India ‘in the future will influence yet more directly, the mission fields under [the mission board’s] care in the Pacific’.\textsuperscript{60} While Britain continued to acquire labourers from India, who were referred to as ‘the most docile and industrious of all the coloured races’,\textsuperscript{61} the minutes suggested that ‘they threaten to turn Fiji into a mere fragment of India set in the Pacific’.\textsuperscript{62}

Recording only 22 Indo-Fijian Methodist members in 1906, the Indo-Fijian branch was a considerable cost to the board, as its membership could not sponsor its own programs.\textsuperscript{63} The Indo-Fijian branch relied almost entirely on the board’s grants and supplementary financial contributions from supporters in Australia. The possibility of implementing a system of self-support — one of the elements of the ‘three selves’ church idea — was untenable. The board’s secretary, the Reverend J G Wheen, commented in 1909 that the two branches were at two different stages of development as a result of the decision to separate. Reverend William E Bennett assured the mission’s General Secretary Benjamin Danks in 1909: ‘Cut off the Indian Mission from Fiji making it a charge on General Funds and we will undertake to be self-supporting.’\textsuperscript{64} Bennett implied that self-support could only be achieved if the mission branches separated, and it was better to have one branch of the mission set on a clear course towards self-governance and financial self-support than to have the whole mission project derailed. From a financial perspective, this made sense to the mission’s leadership. J G Wheen declared that the Fijian work would ‘in the near future’ be self-supporting, but the mission society would have to continue funding the Indo-Fijian work.\textsuperscript{65} The mission board in Australia and the district synod in Fiji agreed that drawing money from the collections taken from the Fijian churches through

\textsuperscript{60} Mission Board meeting, 17 March 1908, MOM Ch OM 2, 1880–1898, no. 3, 1906–1909, ML, p. 119.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{64} W E Bennett to B Danks, 2 February 1909, MOM106 Fiji In-Letters 1908–1910 (1–7).
the vakamisioneri system — an arrangement developed to suit the communal, chiefly system that remained in Fijian villages — to fund the Indo-Fijian branch would only jeopardise the Fijian mission’s transition to self-support.

Burton’s ideas about ‘native churches’ and the ‘three selves’ church concept had been influential in the mission field. He left Fiji in 1909, but his influence over mission activities only grew. He accepted a position on the mission board in Australia. This placed him at the heart of the Methodist mission enterprise in the Pacific, which suited his ambitious nature. From his desk in Melbourne and then in Sydney, he continued to write and talk through his ideas about racial difference. He believed that the distinctions between Fijian and Indo-Fijian cultures were permanent; he was convinced that they sat at two different points on the spectrum of social progress and could not easily coexist. Burton framed his predictions for Fiji’s future using theories of extinction and evolutionism, which informed his beliefs in the superiority of one race over another. He was sure that Fiji would one day be predominantly Indo-Fijian.

After arriving in Melbourne in the midst of a dry, hot summer, Burton delivered a speech at Wesley Church where he informed his audience that there were 40,000 Indo-Fijians in Fiji, their number always increasing while ‘the Fijians were dying out. In time, therefore, there would be a heathen Fiji once more, unless these people [Indo-Fijians] were won for Christ.’ From the podium he declared:

The once-savage races indigenous to these lands are silently and swiftly passing away. The remnant that may be left can play only a very secondary and subordinate part in the great drama which the Zeitgeist is about to stage. Other races, more alert and vigorous, will surely people these shores and till these fields.
Burton’s argument was based on racial theories that he used to comprehend the high death rates amongst Fijians. Missionary planning was therefore deeply informed by demographics and the depopulation debates mixed with ‘popular ruminations’, ‘anthropological and psychological theories’. Burton argued that Indo-Fijian labourers were not:

the scum of India … They have brains! They are keen logicians, much harder to win than the simple minded Fijians. The Fijian looked up to the Englishman as a superior being. The Hindu looks down on him. Why, in his eyes, it is simply preposterous for this young nation of ours, with its juvenile philosophy, to offer to teach religion or philosophy to the ancient races of India, who have been specialists in these things for thousands of years before England was thought of!

Burton’s predictions for Fijian society, in line with the thinking of many in Fiji’s colonial service, informed his ideas about mission strategy, which he published in international theology journals. It was around the time of this address that Burton’s first article on mission policy and organisation appeared in the *Hibbert Journal*, titled ‘Missions and Modernism: Christian Missions as Affected by Liberal Theology’. In this article, Burton displayed his ideas about race that were underpinned by theological and demographic debates. He claimed:

from the Modernist’s point of view of a Kingdom of God upon earth, some races are more worth saving than others. It is far more important, for instance, that Japan should be Christian in life and spirit than the whole of the South Seas should be converted. The inhabitants of these islands have evidently no function to perform in the great evolution of humanity, but he would be a bold man who would dare to outline the limits of Japan’s or China’s function … Some souls mean far more to the future than others, and this should not be lost sight of in the Missionary effort of the Church …

Burton translated his ideas about racial hierarchies into global mission strategy, using ‘racial virility’ — population increases or decreases — as a predicator for evangelisation. Burton suggested a targeted approach to evangelisation,
encouraging missions to concentrate their efforts on converting only the races that would develop the world. He argued that the mission had to be selective about the fields they chose to work in:

Common sense would seem to say that we ought first to attempt the living and progressive peoples who hold in their hand the keys of the future. But it may be asked in astonishment, ‘Are you going to allow the natives of Africa and the South Seas to perish?’ The reply might be well made ‘Are you going to allow the millions in India and China to pass away without the hope of the Gospel?’

Burton was addressing some of the ideas recently put forward by American mission leader John R Mott. Mott had inspired Burton and led him to missionary work. In 1909, Mott published *The Evangelisation of the World in this Generation*, in which he argued that missionaries had the duty of delivering the Christian message to all non-Christians throughout the world within the space of one generation, and of ensuring that the ‘three selves’ church policy was adopted in all lands. Mott and the missionaries from across the globe that he interviewed on this question focused on whether it would be possible to introduce peoples to Christianity and convert them. Mott and Burton both believed that cultures might obstruct their desired outcomes, but agreed that Christianity could penetrate cultures and bring ‘savage’ or ‘primitive’ peoples into Christianity. However, while Burton concurred fundamentally with the aim of converting all peoples from across the world, he argued that it was not necessarily worth devoting mission resources to all peoples, assuming that indigenous peoples of the South Seas and Africa had one foot in the grave. Both Mott and Burton had published their ideas on the eve of the International Missionary Council conference held in Edinburgh in 1910, where missionaries continued to discuss mission strategy. Though Burton and his Methodist colleagues from the Fijian mission field did not attend this inaugural conference, the ideas generated by the International Missionary Council were evidently already influencing the Fijian mission’s responses to the conditions in the colony.

In the years after he left Fiji, Burton continued to argue that the Indo-Fijian mission should be at the centre of the mission’s activities, despite limited evangelical success in the field. The number of Indo-Fijian Methodists remained small, and there was widespread persistent resistance to Christianity and old reactions to apostasy — Hindus who converted to Christianity were often shunned and excluded from family and community. Hilda Steadman, the wife of missionary W Rex Steadman who worked in the Indo-Fijian branch, recorded

76 Ibid., p. 411.
that some of the girls who attended the Indo-Fijian school at Navua in 1912 were ‘never allowed to return to their homes or see their mothers again’, a reason in itself for despondency.80

Regardless, Burton felt that his argument was supported by the census figures, and through 1913 there was increasing media interest in the idea that the world was witnessing the extinction of the Fijian people.81 In 1912, Henry Worrall, who had worked in the Rewa circuit amongst both Indo-Fijian and Fijian peoples, wrote a pamphlet named ‘A Racial Riddle’, printed in 1912. In it, Worrall described the Fijians as people of the past.82 He used the biblical story of Jacob and Esau to describe the relationship between Indo-Fijians and Fijians. Jacob and Esau were twins in the Book of Genesis. Before they were born, God had said to their mother, Rebekah: ‘You have two nations in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated’, one to be stronger than the other, and the older to serve the younger. The Indo-Fijians were likened to Jacob, who was plain but strong. Worrall used Esau as a metaphor for the Fijians. On Esau’s deathbed, Jacob had bought his birthright.83 Worrall not only saw one race as stronger than the other, but considered them innately separate, with the Indians poised to purchase the birthright of the indigenous population of Fiji as they passed away. Burton, appointed as Conference Secretary of Methodist Foreign Missions, described the Fijians as ‘futureless’ in 1915.84 Despite Burton’s protestations that they should do otherwise, and other missionaries in Fiji agreeing that they were witness to the decimation of Fijians, the mission’s attentions remained primarily focused on the Fijian branch. The story of Jacob and Esau would resonate with missionaries working in Fiji for years to come.

It is integral to view these discussions within the context of conversations that were occurring at the time in the corridors and courtrooms of Fiji’s colonial administration, which seeped out into the press and circulated through the islands. Fiji’s land legislation was being debated in earnest, particularly in April 1912, when the administration announced that all land grants would be restricted to leasehold.85 There had been what the press called ‘land disturbances’

83 I referred to both the New International Version (NIV) and King James Version of the Bible. Genesis 25: 19–34.
around Suva in the wake of this announcement. There was agitation from Fijians about the colonial legislation being designed to govern their land acquisition and holdings. The 1915 decision to push through a motion in the Legislative Assembly that would open land up for European settlement only contributed to the growing sense of Fijian disempowerment.

Segregation manifested not through one swift decision, but through a series of changes made in response to local factors and international ecumenical debates. Thus there was a clear transition from the mission’s initial haphazard response to the presence of Indian indentured labourers in the colony to a more coherent strategy at the turn of the twentieth century. The main practical challenges highlighted in this chapter included language and cultural differences, and the mission board addressed these through the strategic recruitment of missionaries who had experience in India. Failing that, missionaries elected to be tutored in Indian languages and cultures. The other main practical reason for segregation was financial, linked to the mission policy of establishing a self-supporting church. The mission could not rely on its tiny Indo-Fijian membership to financially support its own activities. They also did not deem it appropriate to take funds from the Fijian membership for use in the Indian community. By keeping the mission branches separate, the Fijian mission could continue to support its own programs, and could be held up as an exemplar of a successful mission, well on the way to becoming financially independent. The Indo-Fijian branch, on the other hand, relied almost entirely on the Australasian Mission Board and private investors to fund its existence.

While those tangible issues were addressed, the segregation was also informed by the way that missionaries understood racial and cultural difference, which was generally in terms of evolutionism, essentialism, and a strong belief in extinction. The influence of evolutionist thought was evident in the writings and speeches of the rising leader John Wear Burton, who argued that the future of the mission in Fiji was Indo-Fijian. His claim was problematic for mission leaders who believed that there was almost no potential for the Indo-Fijian mission to become self-supporting, self-governing or self-propagating, and who had put endless efforts into the Fijian branch. There were no serious plans made for the devolution of the Indo-Fijian mission, but self-support remained a possibility for the Fijian community. Yet, missionaries also tended to agree that they were witnessing a significant change in Fiji which they believed would lead to these islands becoming an extension of India in the Pacific. Complex practical and theoretical realities of difference shaped the institution’s strategy and organisation. Cultural difference and racial theories created the boundaries

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and provided structure in a changing colonial society. Europeans maintained control of the mission through these times of change, their rationale informed by popularised and scholarly concepts of culture. These issues were equally evident in debates particular to the Fijian branch during this period, which will be the focus of the following chapter.