CHAPTER TWO

A National Church Built in ‘Primitive’ Culture: Communalism, Chiefs and Coins

Establishing a structure for the mission that separated it into ethnically defined spheres on 1 October 1901 had important implications for the Fijian branch of the church. As noted in the previous chapter, the decision was made on the chiefly island of Bau, where the mission’s chairman, the Reverend Arthur J Small, was stationed. Holding the synod in this place highlighted the pre-eminence of Fijians in the institution. As noted earlier, the church had been separated on the premise that the two cultural groups in the colony were too different to be housed in the same mission. The separation allowed the ‘three selves’ church policy — a broad concept pushed through global mission networks — to be adopted in a homogenised shaping of Fijian identity: the Fijian branch was constructed in the ‘Fijian way’. This was not dissimilar to the system established by the colonial administration, which had implemented distinct governance systems for the Fijian and Indo-Fijian communities. Both the mission and the administration translated the systems of Empire to hyper-local conditions, yet they were not always complementary. The colonial administration’s policies were aimed at protectionism and sometimes stalled transformative processes that missionaries believed would help shape the ‘native church’. Through the early decades of the twentieth century, missionaries also confronted the conceptual and practical challenges of progress, expecting that social change for the Fijian community would follow a linear trajectory through the stages of development towards ‘modernity’.¹ This chapter highlights ways in which missionaries,

informed by anthropological writings, responded to what they considered to be classic leaders of ‘primitive’ society — chiefs, communalism and subsistence economy — while constructing a distinctively Fijian ‘native church’.2

Chiefs were central to the colonial administration’s system of indirect rule and had for an even longer time been important to efforts at evangelisation. From Small’s first day in the mission field in 1879, he had been stationed in Fiji’s eastern islands, home to the highest-ranking chiefs. Here, Small was made aware of the complexities of chiefly hierarchies and the ways in which they continued to shape daily interactions between people. He met with missionary Lorimer Fison soon after his arrival in Fiji, and Fison introduced Small and his wife to the chiefs and people of Bau. Small’s daughter, Winifred McHugh, later writing down her father’s recollections, recorded that Ratu Tevita Uluilakeba II was away at the time of Small’s arrival at Bau, but, in fact, by then Ratu Tevita, who was intended to be the Tui Nayau (paramount chief of the Lau islands) had already passed away.3 That Small had noted Ratu Tevita’s absence to his daughter indicated an awareness of the importance of this chief on Bau, despite the distorted way it has been recorded in McHugh’s notes.4 Small continued to notice interactions between chiefs and commoners through his career. In 1902, Small — an avid cricketer — was introducing some young Fijian men to the game, remarking that ‘they were very enthusiastic, until the young chiefs had to bowl to the ordinary men, then they walked off the field and said it was not Fijian custom for chiefs to do that sort of thing’.5 Historian David Wetherell described cricket as a game that levelled social hierarchies and boundaries in Papua New Guinea, but in the east of Fiji, deference to customary leaders remained intact.6 Cricket provided a space where chiefly power might have been subverted, but the chiefs regained control of the situation by removing themselves from the game. Though a sporting incident might be considered trivial, the tensions that played out through the game of cricket demonstrated that while the contexts of engagement between chiefs and others were changing, the role of chief — a leadership model that had been solidified and made somewhat static through the systems of indirect rule — was challenged by new forms of leadership.7

2  Kuper has traced the development of the term ‘primitive’ throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see A Kuper, The Reinvention of Primitive Society: Transformation of a Myth, New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 5.
4  Memories of Winifred McHugh, PMB 156, p. 5.
5  Ibid., p. 10.
Small’s ability to witness the maintenance of chiefly authority first-hand shaped his opinions, but missionaries in the field were also influenced by the debates occurring amongst anthropologists in Europe and America. His mentor, Fison, was also an avid anthropologist, corresponding with the leaders of the discipline and discussing his ideas with colleagues. Missionaries believed that chiefs were a mark of a less-modern society, an idea that Fison discussed with anthropologist E B Tylor during the early 1880s. Fison had engaged with anthropology while working in the Fijian mission field, particularly since reading American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan’s kinship schedule in 1869. From that time onwards, Fison entered readily into anthropological debates about race and culture. He was particularly interested in the work of E B Tylor, who in his seminal work *Primitive Culture*, published in 1871, had described cultures as being at various stages of evolution, and defined them according to certain characteristics as either ‘savage’, ‘barbaric’ or ‘civilised’. He utilised Fison and his knowledge of the Fijian chiefly and communal systems. Fison, writing to Tylor in 1879 as he started to mentor A J Small, was sceptical of evolutionist theories emerging in Europe, particularly those put forward by John Lubbock, but in letters to Tylor he did try provide classifications of cultures relative to his experience in Fiji. In 1879 he suggested that the relationship between chiefs and commoners demonstrated that Fijian society was ‘savage’. These were ideas that were taken up within the colonial administration, especially by Governor Arthur Gordon, who positioned himself as an expert in Fijian customs and engaged with ideas about social evolution, and whether social development was uni-linear or otherwise.

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Yet, despite the perceived ‘savage’ nature of chiefly rule, missionaries generally conceded that they needed to incorporate chiefs into the mission’s systems of governance. Chiefly support helped to legitimise the mission’s position in the community in the eyes of non-chiefly Fijians and colonists. The colonial administration had ensured a measured continuation of chiefly predominance through establishing the Great Council of Chiefs. In the mission, deference to chiefs, the practice of vakaturaga protocols, was shown through personal daily interactions rather than the establishment of a committee of chiefs. They were included in the regular events of the mission, and whether consciously or not, became part of what characterised the church as Fijian, or at least what marked the difference between Fijian and Indo-Fijian work. The relationships between chiefs and the mission staff became important when negotiating matters between villages and the colonial administration. For instance, Small had amicable relationships with the colony’s governors as well as the chiefs, and governors often relied on his comprehension of Fijian language and history. On one occasion, Small acted as intermediary when the colonial administration were trying to find the best possible location for new water tanks on Bau. Small helped to ensure that they would not be placed on a burial site. Chiefs were so much a part of Fiji’s culture that the Methodist missionaries worked alongside them and integrated vakaturaga practice into their everyday procedures.

The mission’s long-term aspirations to establish a financially self-sufficient church conflicted with the colonial administration’s protectionist policies that sought to minimise wherever possible the transformative influence of colonialism. The colonial administration’s 1890 Labour Ordinance and Masters and Servants Ordinance excluded Fijian workers from the market economy in a bid to guard indigenous culture. Fijians still operated in what anthropologists of the time, particularly those belonging to E B Tylor’s school of thought, would then have classified as a ‘primitive’ economic system. The mission’s duty was

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16 By the time Governor O’Brien became governor in Fiji in 1901, Small had been in the colony for 18 years and was an invaluable resource. Memories of Winifred McHugh, PMB 156, p. 46.


to ensure that its communities moved towards financial self-support, and was able to continue without the need for overseas financial aid, but the cost of running the Fijian branch was calculated in 1901 as £4,762 3s 11d — an almost impossible target for the Fijian Methodist membership to generate. Despite some involvement in the colony’s industries, most remained village-bound subsistence farmers. This was slowly changing, with Fijians increasingly involved in the barter or cash economy that had developed in the early 1900s, and others had been drawn either willingly or unwillingly into the cotton and sugar industries. Others worked independently of their villages on their own plots of land. In places where this had occurred, the mission often received greater contributions. However, the mission’s income was constrained by the colonial administration’s labour policies.

While the colonial administration had endeavoured to keep Fijian society in a ‘primitive’ state, the goals of self-support required shifts away from the communal system. By carefully weaving Fijian traditions into the mission’s identity and programs, missionaries hoped that the old and the new would be bridged, and that Fijian society would progress. Chiefly rule was acceptable, but the mission required that its members be allowed to earn wages in order to ensure regular financial contributions were made to the mission’s coffers, and so this issue of money became central to discussions. The concept of self-support challenged the notion that a church could be built in Fiji without alteration to customary social structures, as the institution relied on western systems of finance. A tithe collection system created throughout the nineteenth century, called vakamisioneri, had made circuit incomes dependent on the whim of chiefs as much as Fijian involvement in the cash economy. Collections were taken at an annual rally. Small recalled sitting at a table with a Fijian minister (then referred to as ‘Native Minister’) while a meke (dance) was performed ‘and as the performers marched past they would give their offering for the year.’ Chiefs supervised the vakamisioneri collection, and their support was essential to successful fundraising. Historian Bruce Knapman, discussing the system as it...
was between 1873 and 1905, has argued that *vakamisioneri* placed pressure on Fijian villagers, who might dedicate up to one third of their wage to the church, sometimes contributing an amount that exceeded the set tax rate in the Lau island group, in Fiji’s eastern province. However, the mission persisted, driven not only by the need to fund its activities but by a determination to demonstrate that the mission had potential to become financially self-supporting. 27 Thornley argued that, theoretically, *vakamisioneri* was designed to indicate the extent to which the community was moving towards autonomy and fulfilment of self-support, and was not, therefore, an oppressive system. 28 *Vakamisioneri* drew together the tension between the ideals of creating a church that reflected a national character, and the perceived need to modify traditional Fijian society if these aims were to be achieved. 29 It was no surprise that the Reverend William Slade, working in the Fijian branch, argued in 1901 that the income was inconsistent, and that making the mission autonomous from Australia when its revenue was so unpredictable would be pure ‘folly’. 30

Missionaries also struggled to institute indigenous self-governance at the turn of the twentieth century. The mission failed to attract high-ranking chiefs into its ministry, with many instead opting to work in the colonial administration. 31 Many chiefs took part in the Council of Chiefs and were employed as *rokos* (district governors) and *bulis* (local administrators), for example. 32 This disappointed missionaries who seemed unsure about the capacity of non-chiefly people to lead the Fijian mission members. 33 This was not a view shared by Fijian men who were working as lay representatives and vied for a greater say in mission affairs. Money was central to missionaries’ justifications for excluding Fijians from financial decision-making, arguing that they had no experience in managing their own finances, let alone those of a large organisation. The 1901 District Synod minutes illustrate conflicting positions adopted by the missionaries on this question:

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30 Slade to B Danks, 27 February 1901, F/1/1901, NAF.
The Synod regards with very grave apprehension the immediate introduction into its councils of a number of native Lay Representatives who have no knowledge of finance, not to speak of the very intricate finance of a large Mission District. The Synod is not opposed to the principle of Lay Representation, but it feels very strongly that Fiji cannot, and ought not to be dealt with as are more advanced and intelligent communities, and that at the present time our Circuit Stewards are so unfitted for the responsibilities of Synodical representation, that their immediate introduction will cause very serious difficulties in the Financial and General affairs of the District.34

The Reverend Howard Nolan summarised his concerns, writing: ‘It is altogether too Utopian to suppose that the Fijian in one generation is fit to sit side by side with equal vote on financial questions as ourselves.’35 Despite village involvement in local sugar, copra and sandalwood industries, few missionaries believed that western economic practices would be fully adopted in Fiji when customary obligations — such as solevu — were still so prevalent, and were particularly sceptical about involving laymen who were considered of a lower class than ordained Fijians (talatala).36 Yet the ideal of self-support required that they start educating Fijians in financial management, and it was also the opinion of the colony’s governor, Henry Moore Jackson, that Fijians enter more firmly into the colony’s commercial operations.37

European missionaries allowed talatala into the financial session of synod for the first time in 1902, while retaining almost complete control of the institution’s funds.38 Laymen were also included, but were carefully chosen. Small commented that Tomasi Naceba, Joeli Kete and Matiasi Vave would be able to learn the intricacies of the financial systems, though ‘at times it was amusing to note the look of surprise on their innocent faces as they saw pile after pile of money disappear down the throat of the mission’.39 Small saw the inclusion of Naceba, Kete and Vave in the meetings as an important step towards preparing the Fijian ministry for self-governance, recounting:

... after sitting with the considering cap on ... another of their number rose to say that tho’ they could not see a way out of the difficulty they quite believed that we could see it alright, so they left the question with us.40

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34 Mission District Minutes, Minutes of the Annual Synod of the Fiji District, Bau, 10 October 1901, MOM 175 CY2671, 1901–1903, screen 14, ML.
35 H H Nolan to B Danks 12 January 1901, MOM 628, ML.
39 A J Small to G Brown, 4 November 1902, F/1/1902, NAF.
40 Ibid.
Small seemed confident about opening the financial synod to Fijian laymen, but sought the counsel of two of Fiji’s pre-eminent missionaries on the matter. These were Frederick Langham and George Brown, who had since left the mission field but retained strong opinions on the matter of increasing Fijian responsibility. Brown favoured the idea of allowing lay representation in synod, as long as it did not diminish the authority of European missionaries. The presence of lay representatives at synod, he felt, could be managed because missionaries could sway the vote of talatala.\(^{41}\) Langham, on the other hand, considered the prospect of any increase of Fijian power in the financial synod to be ‘suicidal’.\(^{42}\) Though there were variations in their perspectives, the elder statesmen of the mission agreed: Fijian power in the synod should be limited, and European control was required.

Small continued to correspond with Langham on the topic of Fijian self-governance. Two years later, in 1903, Langham suggested that enhancing the status of talatala would lead to social tensions and clashes with chiefs, and in turn reduce financial support for the mission. He wrote that native ministers:

> cannot resist the attraction of gold coin, against the English missionaries. It will wake the chiefs and people envious of the NMs [native ministers] — who will try and get larger and better houses — glass doors and windows etc. I pointed out to them that if they got these, the chiefs who hadn’t got them would be envious of them and would lessen their gift to them. The Natives are good Christians, but they are not good financiers!\(^{43}\)

Unconvinced by Langham’s argument, Small contested that ‘it is absolute necessity for the safety of the district that some power of self-governance should be given to the Fijian people who contribute to the funds sent year by year’.\(^{44}\) Small was committed to self-support as a means of assuaging the discontent about missionaries’ efforts to institute European hegemony that he sensed was growing amongst talatala and their congregations. He felt that steps had to be made to promote Fijian authority, despite facing opposition from other European missionaries.\(^{45}\) He established trials for financial self-support in what he considered to be the three most affluent circuits — Lau, Macuata and Bua.\(^{46}\) Small responded to demands for Fijian autonomy by advancing

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\(^{42}\) A J Small to G Brown, 18 December 1901, F/1/1901, NAF.

\(^{43}\) Langham to Nolan, cited in Nolan to A J Small, 28 November 1903, F/1/1903, NAF; Anxieties on tensions between chiefs and Indigenous ministers also evident in Heighway to A J Small, 5 February 1904, F/1/1904, NAF.

\(^{44}\) A J Small to G Brown, 10 February 1903, F/1/1903, NAF.

\(^{45}\) Correspondence of CO Lelean 1905–1918, FF/6, M/25, ML; W Bennett to CO Lelean, 18 March 1905, FF/7, M/25, ML; W Bennett to CO Lelean, 6 May 1905, FF/8, M/25, ML.

\(^{46}\) Small to Danks 22 June 1900, MOM 625; B Danks, diary, 1900, 1913–14 [Visit to Fiji], MOM 627.
it in areas he considered to be stable, which happened to be in areas known to be strict in adherence to chiefly rule. There was thus a tension over the instillation of a hegemonic dominant culture within the mission — there was a constant process of negotiation, of accommodating the hegemonic cultures that had prevailed in Fiji prior to colonial rule, but also efforts to secure European power and authority. This was done by constructing particular discourses around indigenous engagement with capitalism. To return to the argument put forward by Jean and John Comaroff, hegemony was established through habitual activity, and European missionaries constructed the habit of dismissing indigenous peoples as unable to successfully engage in a capitalist system. These were habits that Small attempted to break, but against some stiff opposition.47

Some European missionaries were concerned about affording greater leadership responsibility to indigenous mission workers when there were so few chiefs amongst them; others saw the absence of chiefs as essential to ensuring a democratic leadership in synod.48 The Reverend Charles Oswald Lelean, a missionary from Victoria who had arrived in Fiji in 1902 and was stationed at Nailaga in north-west Viti Levu,49 commented:

I think a Synod of big chiefs, NMs [native ministers] and missionaries means that what the chiefs set their minds on they will get, for their NMs will vote with them and where do we come in who have come here to rule and if we don’t we will be ruled.50

Lelean’s words show the performativity of colonial culture — discussions about rule and European dominance, and its necessity. He was clear about the intentions of the mission, clearly buying into the discourses of colonial governance and authority. His words suggest that while his intentions were clear, there needed to be a constant checking of systems to ensure that European power was not disrupted; it was never entirely guaranteed. Colonialist discourses were also laced with considerations for class and church. Small, who was perhaps influenced by his time in the New South Wales Methodist community, where the church tended to reflect more of the hierarchical Anglican tradition than it did in Victoria, responded:

50 C O Lelean to A J Small, 10 April 1904, F/1/1904, NAF.
I do not much fear the double native vote[. A]s for ‘ruling’, we shall rule by our superior knowledge and ability … there will be little fear that we shall get many high chiefs elected to Synod we shall get the middle-class chiefs who are the best kind …51

Small projected his experiences of class and church in Britain and New South Wales on to the chiefly system, which informed his vision of the mission’s organisational structure. He had sought ‘middle class chiefs’ to lead the mission, or ‘minor chiefs’ as historian Colin Newbury has described them. Small’s articulated desires to attract middle-class chiefs to the ministry reflected a conscious effort to relate the chiefly leadership system to their own perceptions of class, and use this to inform the formation of a strong indigenous leadership.52

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Australasian Mission Board sent a commission to Fiji in 1907 to investigate the state of the mission’s progress towards self-support. Missionaries raised the same concerns, expressed earlier in the decade, about Fijian self-support and governance.53 Reservations were again expressed, for example, about the inclusion of Fijians in the financial synod, despite Fijians remaining in a tutorage position. Missionaries were concerned that this had signified the ‘balance of power being entrusted to native representatives’.54 They still held ‘doubts as to the capacity of the Fijians to understand and administer financial matters, especially on a large scale’.55 Concerns remained about trying to establish a native church in an economically ‘primitive’ society, where chiefs led communal labour programs. Discussions occurring within the mission were part of a much larger debate occurring in the colony about the position of chiefs, and whether the existing system, established by Governor Arthur Gordon and Governor John Bates Thurston, was a mode through which chiefs could exploit those for whom they were responsible.56

The commission reports give us valuable insight into the response of talatala to the structural design that embedded European authority. The commissioners interviewed talatala, who took the opportunity to speak out against the missionaries’ paternalism and the unequal wage scheme the mission had instituted. Talatala wages were considerably lower than those awarded to their European counterparts.57 In 1907, a fully qualified talatala, having completed probation, was paid at graduated rates between £8 8s and £18 per annum,

51 A J Small to C O Lelean, 25 April 1904, F/1/1904, NAF.
54 Commission to Fiji 1907, CY3465, MOM 238, ML, p. 16.
55 Ibid.
57 Ibid., p. 8.
the former for those just starting, and the latter rate for those who had worked 16 years or more. The mission paid for ministers’ government taxes, and 25 shillings per quarter was given to each minister from moneys raised by the Methodist membership. They were given ‘gifts of food and a residence’. By way of contrast, around this time, European missionaries were paid a rate of £200 per annum. The Reverend Daniel Lotu requested that there be only two rates of pay for talatala — one for probationers, and a rate of £18 per annum for fully qualified ministers. Talatala wages remained low due to the expectation that talatala would receive support — food, clothing and housing — from the communities where they were stationed. The mission relied on the communal system of reciprocity and the expectation that Fijians would continue to live a ‘Fijian’ lifestyle. The European wage, on the other hand, supported a ‘European’ lifestyle: European missionaries lived in European-style houses usually owned by the mission, consumed imported foods from Australia and New Zealand, and often sent their children to overseas boarding schools, as well as receiving gifts from local communities. The different wage rates were considered to be an extension of missionary efforts to accommodate cultural difference, but it entrenched a racialised system of pay as well as a class system translated into the Fijian context.

The commissioners did not interrogate the structural inequities that were made visible through their reporting. Their report merely reminded missionaries of their obligation to move towards self-support, and did not reproach them for the lack of progress that had been made towards that goal. The commission’s delegates endorsed the continued authority of European missionaries, stating that European circuit superintendents still held the balance of power. Talatala were, the commission concluded, ‘efficient, and are held by the people in very great respect, but they require supervision’. The report declared that the mission was confronted with ‘the world-wide problem as to the wisest methods of governing a native race’, and decided not to force a faster transition to Fijian self-governance, determining that adequate steps were being taken to ensure self-support. The commission’s findings reflected the paradox of mission

58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
60 Other indigenous ministers present included Felix Kalou, Jonah Uluinaceba, Kemuel Ulukavoro, Arminius Bale, Caleb Naba, Paelus Muavesi, Samuel Chikaitoga, Peter Tuidela, Daniel Lotu, Alick Raloka, Timothy Salaca, Matthias Vave, Joel Cama, Enoch Buadromo (the scribe), Commission to Fiji 1907, CY3465, MOM 238, ML, pp. 10–11.
61 NB: Indian catechists were earning between £3 and £4 per month depending on their level of educational achievement. District meeting minutes, 1908, PMB 1138, p. 27.
62 Commission to Fiji 1907, CY3465, MOM 238, pp. 2, 4.
63 Ibid., p. 8.
64 Ibid., p. 17.
65 Ibid., p. 18.
strategy informed by ideas that placed Europeans at the top of a racial hierarchy, while simultaneously encouraging the ‘three selves’ policy that was supposed to diminish European control.

The communal system presented a challenge to the colonial administration as well as the mission. Small recorded a meeting he had with the colony’s governor, Everard Im Thurn, on this topic in 1909.66 The governor was intent on dismantling the communal system.67 As Deryck Scarr put it, Im Thurn wanted to ‘inculcate individualism while curtailing chiefly power’.68 Small suggested to the governor that it be done ‘slowly … let a man earn his liberty … and let him hold it conditionally’.69 Both men revealed their uncertainty about how to govern the communal society and the resultant collaboration and consultation between missionaries and colonial administrators. These two men of the British Empire drew on humanitarian discourse and terms tightly bound to democratic ideals, believing that liberty would be afforded to the Fijian if the chiefly system were slowly dismantled, or that it would be ‘earned’. They may not have truly hoped for social upheaval, but they were both clearly frustrated by the system as it was and the limitations that they believed it placed on indigenous people.

Others were more confident than Small in their assessment of what was required to govern indigenous peoples, and a lot of discussion centred on indigenous lands and how to utilise it. Most missionaries and colonial administrators agreed that the ‘commoner’ class of Fiji was best equipped for life as agriculturalists — they were not seen as future members of the colony’s intellectual or spiritual elite.70 Im Thurn was working on the presumption that indigenous Fijians were passing away and would not need their lands for much longer, and on this premise instituted a system that more easily allowed for their alienation.71 John W Burton heard all of this and, still working in the Indo-Fijian mission, swayed ‘between concepts of universal human potential’ while believing in ‘images of racial limitations and characters, “lower races” with vices and a backward national spirit’.72 In 1909, Burton suggested matter-of-factly: ‘None would look upon the Fijian as an intellectual type. Charming and naïve as he may be in his manners, he belongs to the category of the “lower races”’.73 He suggested that

66 A J Small, diary, 10 November 1909, ML MSS 3267/1, item 5.
67 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
73 Burton, cited in ibid., pp. 82–83.
the ‘brain work’ in Fiji would be the domain of the European community: ‘but the native has land — land that he should be encouraged to use; he has labour stored away in his splendid physique — labour that he must call forth or die’.74 Burton’s perceptions of linear trajectories of human progress induced him to advocate industrial missions in the Pacific.75 In his text Fiji of To-day, published in 1910 while he was superintendent of the mission’s industrial institute, Burton postulated that it was ‘far better’ for the Fijian to ‘master the prose of land manuring and swamp draining than the poetry of Milton’.76 Land and labour were interconnected in discussions about the governance of indigenous peoples, and this intertwining of the two would form the foundations of mission policies in following decades. Encouraging labour was a way of ensuring that indigenous peoples retained their land while safeguarding their own survival — not just a way of filling the mission’s coffers.

Both Burton and Small considered their promotion of indigenous engagement in agriculture to be progressive. Small read African American Booker T Washington’s Working with the Hands in 1907 and was evidently influenced by Washington’s other publication Up from Slavery, which seems to have informed his ideas about social progress in Fiji. Washington had been a slave and created the Tuskegee Institute to encourage others with the same background into more autonomous agricultural work.77 Burton also seems to have been influenced by Washington’s work and argued that in addition to their new faith, Fijians ‘needed industrial and technical education in order that they might survive in the new conditions of the strange world that was closing in upon them’.78 Thus, in 1914, Burton recommended industrial training for Fijians as a means of promoting ‘purpose and accuracy’ in their outlook in life:

74 Ibid.
Like some sections of Western nations having all they want, the natives ask why should we work? And it is difficult to get them to understand why consecutive work is essential to their physical and spiritual welfare. This has given rise to the great problem of the alien population, and produced the crowded Indian coolies in Fiji, Chinese in Samoa, and Japanese in New Caledonia.79

Burton drew on the debates of the day relating to indigenous health and wellbeing to support his argument for increasing industrial missions in the Pacific, reflecting his concern about indigenous depopulation. He was simultaneously engaging with debates about mission practice espoused by delegates at the Edinburgh International Missionary Council conference. Several mission societies submitted reports to the conferences’ commission on industrial education that resembled Burton’s argument.80 Though believing that Fijians were doomed, Burton felt that industrial work would help to prolong their existence.81 He also intended to instil some conformity to western styles of commerce, which he argued would in turn aid evangelisation: ‘The gold of commerce is stained with the red blood of brown people. If we could Christianise our commerce, there would be more hope of Christianising both native and alien.’82 Indeed, as the Comaroffs have argued, Christianity and commerce were seen as the antidote to ‘primitive’ communal systems, and would have a civilising effect.83

In 1917, Burton continued to air his doubts over the intellectual capacity of Fijian peoples, and linked this to his doubts of the legitimacy of their conversion to Christianity. He had perhaps started to doubt the ability of missions to evangelise the world within one generation, as Mott had suggested.84 Similar to thinkers of the Victorian era as described by George Stocking, Burton was pessimistic about the potential for indigenous peoples to progress through the stages of development and ‘acquire’ civilisation.85 ‘It would be folly to expect deep rooting of faith among the child races’, he told the audience at the ‘Laymen’s Missionary Lecture’ at Wesley Church in Melbourne, ‘who not only receive the seed from our hands, but who are dependent upon us for the very

intellectual soil in which it must grow’. However, while Burton was pessimistic about Fijian potential for progress up the evolutionary ladder, he did not see indigenous peoples as static in their imagined place on the scale of civilisation. He believed that people were constantly moving and progressing through stages of change, as evidenced when he quoted his favourite poet, Robert Browning:

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\begin{align*}
\text{man is hurled} \\
\text{From change to change unceasingly,} \\
\text{His soul’s wings never furled.}
\end{align*}
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Burton constantly reflected on the process of social change over the following decades. Browning’s depiction of it as an almost violent event resonated with him. Change, he suggested, was not something that could or ought be resisted, as it was inevitable, but it was not necessarily easily engaged with. Burton spoke of progress as a series of temporal phases that included Christianity. He suggested that ‘western civilisation has opened the door of the non-Christian world. Christianity must enter and take possession else the last state of that world will be worse than the first’.

This chapter has touched on the ideas of several missionaries about the purpose and method of constructing the Fijian Methodist mission, with particular focus on the ideas held by key leaders Arthur J Small and John W Burton. These two men worked to implement the self-supporting church strategy, despite being absent from the 1910 Edinburgh International Missionary Conference at which these ideas were discussed. Anthropological theories about primitive cultures helped to shape both Burton and Small’s responses to the ideal of the ‘three selves’ church policy. The self-support strategy in Fiji brought tensions between concepts of the ‘past’ and ‘present’, tradition and modernity to the fore. In particular, debates about self-support centred on the role of chiefs. The decision to train ministers from the non-chiefsy ‘class’ challenged customary leadership, but consultation with chiefs continued as a means of gaining legitimacy, ensuring financial self-support and ensuring that the colony’s ‘national character’ was reflected in the mission. Chiefly power could not be easily undermined while the colonial administration continued to employ chiefs. Small and Everard Im Thurn expected that chiefly power would eventually diminish, but that change would be slow. Missionaries saw

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86 J W Burton, ‘Laymen’s Missionary Lecture: Inaugural lecture delivered at Wesley Church, Melbourne, May 22nd 1917, before the members of the General Conference of the Methodist Church of Australasia’, Layman’s missionary movement of Victoria, (Methodist Branch), Melbourne, Spectator Publishing, 1917, p. 43.
87 Ibid., p. 9.
88 Ibid., p. 30.
themselves as overseers and instigators of very slow social transformation, believers in evolutionism, and attached this understanding of society to the ‘three selves’ church policy. Change, through ‘progress’ towards civilisation, was considered necessary for church devolution to occur.

The mission was also defined by the colonial administration’s approach to indigenous labour. Burton’s and Small’s attitudes and arguments, and those of their colleagues, support historian Brian Stanley’s assertion that ‘neither the missionary societies nor their individual agents set out with the intention of challenging the structures of colonial society’. In the Fijian context, where the colonial administration was resistant to implementing change to customary practices, the missionaries were the more typical imperialists; to them, their institution’s progress necessitated change, and by 1917, as Burton continued to work with the mission board, he was defining the role that missionaries would take in facilitating social change in the Pacific. The approach that they took, including the creation of ethnically divided administrative structures, had important impacts.

In this chapter we have already identified signs of resistance to European authority and its assertion through the mission’s structure. Debates around wages illustrated this most clearly. Fijian ministers, talatala, were conscious of European hegemony and took opportunities where possible to call for wages to be levelled out and critique colonial authority. There were signs that the formidable front held by the European missionaries acted to forge a unified response from talatala in synod. The processes of categorisation and organisation devised by missionaries at the turn of the twentieth century helped to solidify existing identities in this Pacific centre.

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