CHAPTER SEVEN

Defining the Path to Independence

Missionaries realised that the post-war period provided opportunities to break down racial barriers within the mission, but culture, which was used to shape the mission’s identity and organise its membership, remained a preoccupation. Both Fijian and Indo-Fijian ‘cultures’ had been co-opted into the mission, albeit in idealised and essentialised ways, and this process of acculturating Christianity had accentuated the differences between the colony’s ethnic communities. At the end of World War II, there was mounting discontent among Fiji’s Methodists, and a sense of impending conflict in the mission.¹ Missionaries increased their efforts to diffuse hostilities between the Fijians and Indo-Fijians and promote reconciliation. These efforts were often hampered by missionaries’ concurrent interest in protecting Fijian rights, as the Indo-Fijian population officially became the colony’s majority. By the late 1940s, European missionaries tended to support Fijian paramountcy in the mission, due to the need to maintain a friendly alliance with Fijians and to protect the majority of their membership.

Members of both the colonial administration and the Methodist mission seemed to feel the need to ‘repair’ Fijian society in the wake of World War II, and the rationale was racial. There was considerable tension in the west of Viti Levu, especially as Indo-Fijian farmers had been displaced. Indo-Fijians were derided because only small numbers had enlisted to fight in the war, despite the fact that this would have led to many losing their farms.² The 1946 census showed

that the Indo-Fijian community numbered 120,414 people, outnumbering the 118,070 of the Fijian community. In that same year, there were 102,567 Fijians who regularly attended the Methodist church, and 102 talatala overseen by eight European missionaries. Missionaries and colonial administrators alike were concerned about which community would constitute Fiji’s majority in the future. Many wondered what implications a growing Indo-Fijian population might have for protecting Fijian rights. They also wondered how the colony’s new majority should be represented in governance systems. Aware that these political issues needed to be dealt with, and with the strain of the war now over, the colonial administration turned its attention to ‘reconstruction’ in the colony. The Reverend Wesley Pidgeon, who had returned to Australia on deputation work in 1946, described the mission’s concurrent ‘rehabilitation’ work, in response to the perception that increased contact between cultures during the war had been detrimental for the Fijian community. He believed that Fijians had been through a drastic period of change. They had taken up their gardening tools, but ‘then the army came along and taught them to beat their pruning hooks not into spears, but into tommy guns, and sent them out to fight’. To Pidgeon, the military had promoted an advanced method of warfare that pushed Fijian culture to move rapidly through stages of social transition that he felt it was not yet ready for.

More than the exposure to new technologies, though, Pidgeon was concerned about the four years of close association between Fijian and European soldiers. Fijian troops had ‘lived in officers’ messes, enjoyed all the privileges of white people, and learned their vices. It is going to be hard to rehabilitate them’. Pidgeon seemed to believe that a type of cultural reversal was possible, that Fijian soldiers could be reconditioned for village life after they had been exposed to a style of life that he believed was reserved for Europeans. Pidgeon had possibly been influenced by Elkin’s instructions to missionaries, published in 1934, in which he spoke of culture contact, but these offered little clarity on the approach missionaries should take when working in a complex nexus of multiple races and cultures. Gillian Cowlishaw has argued that Elkin’s

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8 Ibid.
9 A P Elkin, Missionary Policy for Primitive Peoples, Morpeth, NSW, St Johns College Press, 1934.
theories provided a confused sense of the connection between race and culture, which stemmed from the temptation to see indigenous cultures as being in a static state.\textsuperscript{10} Missionaries who had been under Elkin's instruction struggled to comprehend this post-war environment and changes to colonial society, adopting a protectionist position.

As in previous decades, missionaries were applying theories of functional anthropology in order to understand concepts of culture, considering this process essential to stemming the tide of nationalism.\textsuperscript{11} In 1946, the Reverend Cyril Cato, now principal of the Davuilevu theological school, told a congregation in Tasmania that Fijian nationalism was on the rise. He encouraged mission workers in Fiji to have 'some conception of the native tradition and outlook'.\textsuperscript{12} If they did so, they would realise that they were 'dealing with a people emerging from child-like trust in, and obedience to, certain classes of Europeans into a sensitive and doubting adolescence'.\textsuperscript{13} His paternalism was palpable. Like Pidgeon, Cato commented on the close association between Fijians and American and New Zealand forces during the war: 'Tens of thousands of soldiers were in Fiji, sometimes presenting aspects of behaviour and familiarity of approach which were new to the Fijians.'\textsuperscript{14} Contrary to Pidgeon's theorising, however, Cato used the process of individual human development to describe what he believed was occurring in Fiji: progress that could not be reversed but was constantly moving forward. Cato's vision for the post-war period would not involve a reversal of the war's changes but rather an effort to embrace and promote 'progress', even when this did not 'enhance white prestige'.\textsuperscript{15} Missionaries such as Doug Telfer continued to engage in the same ceremonies and protocols in Fiji's villages as they had done before the war, all the while contemplating broader issues of change and development.

By this time, Cato was engaging with ideas about the indigenisation of Christianity. In 1947, he published an article in the anthropological journal \textit{Oceania} about the Fijian attempts to merge Christianity with 'animistic' and 'ancestral' belief systems.\textsuperscript{16} While he pointed to the need to prepare missionaries for working in 'primitive societies', he also noted the problems in the government's approach to persecuting traditional medicine men, suggesting that this would not diminish their power but force the traditional practices 'underground'. Cato was engaging

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\textsuperscript{12} 'Fiji Faces New Problems', \textit{The Examiner}, Launceston, Tasmania, 16 May 1946, p. 3. \\
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. \\
\end{flushleft}
with anthropological ideas to think through the complexities he witnessed while working in the islands, and was contributing to anthropological discussions about the Pacific in the process.\(^{17}\)

As anthropological theories incorporated ideas about cultural transmission and integration, missionaries were able to creatively engage with ideas about how culture might be incorporated into mission programs. Pidgeon alluded to several staff who hoped to establish a ‘distinctly Fijian society based on some Fijian tradition or custom’.\(^{18}\) However, he admitted to having no ‘clear vision of a possible basis or form’, for how the Fijian church might develop.\(^{19}\) He was concerned that the mission had not been established on a ‘Fijian basis’:\(^{20}\)

Rather, we have adapted our Church organisation to the needs of the Fijian people, and thus we have kept them in definite fellowship with the ‘Mother’ church and through her with world Methodism and the World Church. The organisation of a distinctly Fijian society may tend toward nationalism within the Church.\(^{21}\)

Pidgeon tapped into the International Missionary Council debates, hoping to ‘give to our youth the “World Church” vision’.\(^{22}\) But the process of drawing a Fijian church into the world church would be difficult if they were not able to use the literature produced by the ecumenical community, as he felt a Fijian church would have to create its own body of literature: ‘We would not be able to draw on the experience of other places, or use their literature to any great extent, if we launched something purely Fijian.’\(^{23}\) He was also apprehensive about launching a project in the post-war period. He asked: ‘Can we afford to experiment at this stage of transition in Fiji?’\(^{24}\) Pidgeon felt the responsibility of guiding the society through what he viewed as a crucial transitional phase.

Potential for the mission to transition to self-governance remained high on the agenda within the Fijian branch. Cato took Sukuna’s appointment as Director of Native Affairs as a sign that ‘positions previously occupied only by white men would be held by native ministers’.\(^{25}\) Cato recommended revisions to the mission’s constitution that would allow talatala into roles previously held by European ministers.\(^{26}\) That year, the Reverend Apisai Bavadra replaced the Reverend

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17 Ibid., p. 153.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
Henry Bock as Ra District Superintendent, the first *talatala* to superintend that circuit.\(^{27}\) It had taken 26 years after Robarobalevu’s appointment at Bua for indigenous superintendency to be normalised within the mission.

Overall, in the post-war period there was a growing sense that changes were necessary. In the colonial administration, A A Ragg stated, as part of the Legislative Council’s deliberations about the potential needs to change the ‘Deed of Cession’ to accommodate Indo-Fijians in 1946, that it was necessary for Fijians to move outside of the communal system to cease their becoming ‘a placid race of mental and moral invertebrates’.\(^{28}\) Even those not entirely convinced by A A Ragg’s efforts to denounce all Fijian customary practices were willing to abide by the need for Fijians to find ‘salvation’ in the ‘gospel of work’, through ‘thrift, industry and enterprise’.\(^{29}\) While Fijians such as Ratu George Toganivalu requested continued allegiance with Europeans through deferential requests, leading Indo-Fijian politicians A D Patel and Vishnu Deo denounced the administration’s rhetoric. It was, they contended, evident that the whole debate about the Deed of Cession was a slight against Indo-Fijians, deployed to stir antagonism, and it was a problem that the British had conjured through the introduction of Indian labourers anyway. Indo-Fijians were having to defend their ongoing presence in the colony at the highest possible places of government.\(^{30}\)

Amidst the debate about social change, the missionaries’ leadership also changed with a new general secretary, the Reverend A R Gardner, replacing Burton in 1946. W Rex Steadman, still chairman of the Indo-Fijian branch, saw Burton’s departure as an opportunity to promote Deoki’s status within the mission. By 1946, Deoki had worked as a superintendent in Suva, but there were lingering reservations about appointing him to work independently in the west of Viti Levu, where he would be more isolated and less easily supervised. He was 40 years old, efficient and experienced. Steadman argued that ‘Methodist precedent’ dictated that Deoki should be appointed superintendent, ‘unless racial discrimination be observed’.\(^{31}\) He appealed to Gardner for support in giving Deoki greater responsibility, pointing to the work that both Deoki and his wife had carried out within the mission, spending ‘generously of their own money to get young people together and awaken their interest in the things for

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\(^{27}\) Ministerial Index, accessed at Uniting Church Archives, Elsternwick.


\(^{29}\) Ibid.

\(^{30}\) Ibid., p. 142.

\(^{31}\) To A Gardner, 10 January 1946, HO/1946, NAF.
which our church stands’. Steadman hoped the mission would demonstrate its commitment to self-governance in the Indo-Fijian church by giving Deoki greater autonomy as the institution embarked in a new direction.

Gardner had limited opportunity to act on Steadman’s request. After three years as general secretary, he left and the Reverend Cecil Gribble filled the position in 1948. Gribble remained in the job for 23 years. He was not entirely dissimilar from Burton — both had been influenced by the League of Nations between the world wars, and were attuned to debates within the ecumenical movement relating to indigenous churches. Originally from a middle-class family in Ballarat, he had completed his honours year in history in Melbourne under the supervision of Professor Ernest Scott. After completing his Master of Arts in 1928 at the University of Melbourne, he toured Australia’s remote communities as a singing evangelist and witnessed the results of settler colonialism first-hand. He travelled from Alice Springs to Katherine, Darwin, Camooweal, Cloncurry, and finally to Charters Towers. He visited a Methodist mission in Arnhem Land and said that the community had ‘been unspoiled by contact with the white civilisation’. There was no doubting the impact of this trip on his opinions regarding indigenous governance and mission strategy. Probably the greatest factor in the decline of the native race, he argued in 1936, was ‘that killing sense of inferiority and hopelessness which comes over a primitive

32 Ibid.
people when it comes into contact with a great civilisation. It is all something too big for it to understand, and it dies under its spell.\textsuperscript{39} He described the Aboriginal men and women as:

a strong, virile race, many of them being almost perfect physique, and the Christian message is leading them to a life of industry and honesty which has surprised those who have regarded the natives as incapable of showing any traits of character.\textsuperscript{40}

Gribble admired Theodor Webb's efforts to encourage Aboriginal Australians at the Arnhem Land mission into agricultural industry, suggesting that taking up farming work had brought out the best in Aboriginal farmers.\textsuperscript{41} Racial and cultural evolutionism loomed large in Gribble's consciousness. He spoke easily of introducing indigenous communities to industry, taking it for granted that this would encourage an inevitable and essential step in human progress.\textsuperscript{42} Gribble did not necessarily equate industry with western civilisation, but rather as a natural progression in social evolution.\textsuperscript{43}

Gribble endorsed the protectionist approach adopted by Theodor Webb in Arnhem Land as chairman of the Methodist North Australian District, believing that the mission's physical separation from the European community provided space to maintain indigenous culture.\textsuperscript{44} In 1937, he wrote:

Scientists and missionaries alike believe that the only possible way to save this primitive race, once the possessors of the continent, is to grant them large areas of land and to allow them there to live their own native life and to develop their own tribal social organisation. Here they can be free from the disintegrating influences of the white civilisation, with its vices, its diseases, and its generally demoralising effect upon the more primitive culture.\textsuperscript{45}

Gribble’s ideas were similar to Burton’s and Elkin’s. Gribble was nominated to work in the Tongan Methodist mission, where he remained from 1939 until 1945 as Principal of Tupou College and then Director of Education for Tonga’s government. Gribble had straddled the divide between mission and colonial government in the Pacific, and had long considered questions of race and culture.

When Gribble moved in to the position as General Secretary for Methodist Overseas Missions, protectionist policies that had been used to justify the isolation of Aboriginal communities from the broader Australian public were being abandoned in favour of assimilation. In 1948, Gribble met with Elkin and representatives from other denominations at a conference to discuss the future mission policies for indigenous peoples. This conference advocated a change from protectionist to assimilationist policies. Gribble and his colleagues were not entirely convinced by Elkin’s arguments for assimilation, as they believed that the Methodist mission’s long history of segregation had allowed culture to be sustained rather than diluted or diminished, through encouraging early education in indigenous vernacular, for example.

Gribble was concerned that increased interaction between indigenous and non-indigenous communities would disturb the ability to evangelise effectively. His own approach in the mission field had been to leave ‘culture’ alone. Sione Havea, a Tongan minister, remembered Gribble’s time in Tonga: ‘he was always closely attached to the people … but he was detached from our culture.’ Gribble reflected later: ‘I’ve always pointed out to missionaries that when they go out to these places overseas, they must not interfere with the culture and custom of the people.’ The meeting’s outcomes echoed the colonial debates regarding the indigenous community in Fiji and the influence of European

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51 Ibid.
culture during the war. Elkin’s strategies were applicable to several mission fields — it was up to Gribble to determine whether it would be appropriate to continue encouraging a segregated model in Fiji or to move toward assimilation.

Though Gribble by now held the reins of the mission, Burton continued to be involved and publish his opinions on mission strategy. He had been in discussion with anthropologists throughout the 1940s, presenting a discussion paper in 1945 titled ‘Culture Contact in the Pacific’.

In his 1949 publication, *Modern Missions in the South Pacific*, it was evident that Burton was grappling with the same questions about social change as his colleagues. He believed Fijians needed to move from the ‘old native order’ to the new ‘complex’ form of society. Burton repeated his reference to the Robert Browning poem that he had included it in his 1917 layman’s missionary lecture: ‘Man is hurled/From change to change unceasingly.’

Burton’s use of Browning’s phrase showed the prolonged relevance it held for him. It engaged with the passage of time, and an innate belief that individuals were thrown almost violently, certainly without much control, through periods of alteration. Burton overtly applied this concept to his perceptions of race and culture, and his discussions about indigenous churches and industry.

Despite his apprehension about cultural contact and convolution, Gribble felt more sure about the devolution of the Fijian church and promoted self-governance. With the financial security of the Fijian branch assumed, Gribble turned his attention to making sure that non-European leaders were well-equipped for greater responsibility and leadership. Many of his colleagues had looked to the Tongan church as an exemplar of indigenous church governance but, in Gribble’s opinion, Tongan church independence was ‘more in name than in fact. For the past forty years a European has been the President of the Tonga church, and if there had not been sound European leadership, the Church might well have disintegrated.’ Gribble suggested that full independence was not secured while European missionaries remained at the head, although he still argued that continuing European missionary presence had strengthened the church. Many indigenous leaders from around the world stated that they did not intend to evict European missionaries, and sought their continued involvement.

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55 C Gribble to M Wilmshurst, 19 September 1949, MOM Correspondence papers, File 1949, ML.
Gribble believed that Fiji could become self-supporting under an indigenous president, as this would indicate true independence, and European missionaries would still be employed in the young church.\footnote{Ibid; C Forman, ‘Tonga’s Tortured Venture in Church Unity’, \textit{Journal of Pacific History}, vol. 13, no. 1, 1978, p. 4; C F Gribble to M Wilmshurst, 19 September 1949, MOM Correspondence papers, File 1949, ML.}

Gribble was in step with the ecumenical mission movement, where similar arguments were put forward about continuing European missionary presence past the point of independence. Gribble’s involvement in the National Missionary Council in Australia ensured his continued focus on international debates relating to indigenous rights, decolonisation and devolution.\footnote{‘Pacific Conference’, \textit{ Examiner}, Launceston, Tasmania, 19 April 1950, p. 17.} One of Gribble’s first overseas trips as general secretary was in 1950, to newly independent India. Here he witnessed the work of the United Church of Southern India led by the Reverend Lesslie Newbigin.\footnote{‘The Churches: Methodists Plan Missions in N G’, \textit{The Sydney Morning Herald}, 12 August 1950, p. 7; ‘Points from the pulpit: Indian church gives lead to the world’, \textit{ Examiner}, Tasmania, 19 May 1952, p. 3; G Wainwright, \textit{Lesslie Newbigin: A Theological Life}, Cary, NC, USA, Oxford University Press, 2000.} Any anxiety he had about anti-colonialism was allayed by his positive experience with Prime Minister Nehru, who ‘gave the impression that [Indians] were proud to belong to the British Commonwealth’.\footnote{‘Prestige in India: Britain’s Name Held in High Regard’, \textit{The West Australian}, Perth, 22 November 1950, p. 17.} After their meeting, Gribble wrote that ‘the country was now in the mood to welcome missionaries’.\footnote{Ibid.} He was also encouraged when he met eight ordained Indian ministers at the Methodist mission in Azamgarh, arguing that they ‘could hold their own with any minister in Australia’.\footnote{Ibid.} Gribble held the church union in India as a model for the rest of the world; but it was not church union that inspired him most during his trip, it was the belief that anti-colonialism could be overcome with the promise of independence.\footnote{‘Points from the Pulpit: Indian Church Gives Lead to the World’, \textit{ Examiner}, Tasmania, 19 May 1952, p. 3.}

The continuation of European missionary presence was a precarious point; it needed to be managed carefully to avoid accusations of oppressive colonial intent. Missionaries argued that ‘younger’ churches needed ongoing support from their ‘mother’ churches. Elkin had maintained that a continued European presence was required in the Pacific missions during the post-war period. He assumed that the European missionaries would be anthropologically trained and equipped to assist ‘primitive’ cultures towards civilisation.\footnote{A P Elkin, ‘Civilised Aborigines and Native Culture’, \textit{Oceania}, vol. 6, no. 2, 1935, p. 119.} The conceptualisation of culture offered by anthropologists offered a way for missionaries to reconcile the indigenous church ideal with understandings of racial and cultural difference. In his 1949 publication, Burton wrote:
In the Christian Church, which is now in many areas part of the indigenous culture, there will be demands for more power and for wider leadership. Already much has been done to make the churches in the South Pacific self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating, but there are still positions held by the European missionary which might be entrusted to indigenous clergy.64

Calls persisted for the transition of authority from European to indigenous hands. This had significant ramifications for the Fijian mission where, despite Burton’s earlier efforts to dismantle European power by removing the European synod, the mission’s constitution in Fiji had kept the European missionaries at the mission’s apex. The united synod had only limited indigenous input, as it was still run by European missionaries. Gribble took up Burton’s recommendations to dissolve the European synod in Fiji. The Fijian and Indo-Fijian synods each had their own European chairman, and Gribble set his sights on filling these particular positions with Fijian and Indo-Fijian ministers.

In 1950, Gribble and Burton met with Fijian members of the mission to gauge the desire for an independent Fijian church, and devise a strategy for devolution, determined to ensure a Fijian ministry would assume control of the church in Fiji.65 Those who attended the meeting — including Ratu Edward Cakobau, Jekope Ravoka, Inosi Vatucicila, Paula Seru, Apolosi Bavadra, Asaele Mata and Peni Tirikula — became the architects of Fiji’s independent Methodist church. They defined the shape of the future church and the speed at which it would be constructed. From the outset, all agreed that the mission’s devolution should continue at a slow pace.66 The mission board was curious about whether the ‘rank and file of Fiji’ supported the idea of a Fijian conference. Jekope Ravoka replied that the majority of the Methodists in Fiji knew very little about the idea of church independence, suggesting that it was not in the mind of the membership but rather just of synod.

The mission needed to ensure chiefly support for devolution. Ratu Edward Cakobau was present at this meeting and had been a leader in the colony for many years, helping to bring resolution to the 1943 strikes held in the sugar industry, for example.67 Historian Brij V Lal has suggested that he was ‘perhaps the most

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64 J W Burton, Modern Missions in the South Pacific, Great Britain, Wm Carling and Co Ltd, 1949, p. 68.


widely loved Fijian chief in this century’.68 It had been nearly 10 years since the Toko farmers’ request for independence, which had received widespread chiefly support, but members of this meeting said that the chiefs had not requested the church’s independence; perhaps they meant they had not requested it in the form that they now were ready to pursue.69 Burton believed the community needed to be better informed about what independence would mean. Paula Seru and Ratu Edward Cakobau suggested that chiefs be informed first, and then the annual meetings, quarterly meetings and superintendents of the circuits, before the circuit sections.70 The Reverend Inosi Vatucicila, superintendent at Bau, suggested that they work according to the existing mission ‘custom’ of consulting with the chiefs as part of the preparation for quarterly meetings. This was their usual method of ‘circulating information and obtaining opinion’.71

While the talatala at the meeting in 1950 suggested to Gribble and Burton that the chiefs knew little of the idea of self-support, Gribble later wrote to retired missionary A I Buxton that the ‘most forceful elements of the community’ were in favour of it. He continued: ‘I think it will be a matter of assuring the Church again of our desire … and of taking some actions which will indicate our sincerity even though these may be very small steps.’72 Gribble wanted Fijian ministers to receive greater autonomy and responsibility with self-governance, and knew that the process they were putting in motion would allow talatala to appoint their own ministers.73 While there was a need for the mission leaders to clarify what responsibilities talatala would assume, he relied on the ambition of the local ministry to drive the church towards independence.

At this meeting in 1950, Inosi Vatucicila anticipated that European missionaries would offer comment on indigenous custom at this point of transition, particularly regarding the role of chiefs. He encouraged their direction, requesting that ‘anything concerning Fijian custom or affairs must be stated clearly’, so that

69  Ibid., p. 1.
changes to be made within the church be made explicit. This allowed European missionaries to take part in advising the process in which changes might be implemented. Despite the presence of Ratu Edward Cakobau, Paula Seru asked Apolosi Bavadra if it was right that the method for obtaining church independence was determined before putting it to the chiefs? Bavadra thought not. According to Jekope Ravoka, there were ‘two ways of doing things’, indicating that they were following the ‘church way’ by going first to annual meetings. This did not discount the opinion of chiefs, as Cakobau was present at the meeting, and Ravoka believed that they would ‘hear what the chiefs in all areas think when the resolutions come back to Synod’. Asaele Mata agreed with this, acknowledging that many chiefs attended the mission’s annual meetings and would find out about it then. Chiefs were not excluded from discussions about independence, but they were not integral to the decision-making process either. Talatala and European missionaries took control of determining continuity or change in church structure, not the chiefs. All agreed, however, that the planning for self-support would be useless without the backing of the mission’s general membership, which would not be secured unless the idea was presented carefully. ‘The point at issue’, Tippett later suggested, ‘is whether we are to ask the Annual Meetings if they want a Conference, or whether we assume we do and put up a plan’. Either way they went about it, these approaches secured the prime position of the talatala over the process of devolution, even if it was in collaboration with Europeans. At this meeting, the talatala had defined their own leadership in the movement towards self-support within the church, albeit in the presence of one of the islands’ leading chiefs.

Racial integration was recommended by talatala, not members of the mission board or locally based European missionaries. The Reverend Apisai Bavadra asked the next big question: ‘What about the Indians?’ As superintendent at Nailaga, Ba, in an area with a high Indo-Fijian population, this was a question of great importance for Bavadra’s ministry. It also pointed to Deoki’s absence from

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75 Ibid.
77 The mission’s new position was contrary to the colonial administration which continued formal consultation with chiefs through the Great Council of Chiefs. R Norton, ‘Accommodating Indigenous Privilege: Britain’s Dilemma in Decolonising Fiji’, Journal of Pacific History, vol. 37, no. 2, 2002, p. 137. While Garrett has pointed to Tuilovoni’s appreciation of chiefs within the church, he was absent from this important meeting. J Garrett, Where Nets Were Cast: Christianity in Oceania since World War Two, Suva, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific in association with the World Council of Churches, 1997, p. 393.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid., p. 4. It is likely that Apisai Bavadra is related to the later Fijian Prime Minister, Timoci Bavadra. The Bavadra family is from Vuda in western Viti Levu.
the meeting. The Reverend Peni Tirikula, then superintendent in Suva, declared: ‘Our ultimate aim is complete union — with Indians and part-Europeans also.’

While he advocated union, Tippett, who was also present at the meeting, suggested they continue with separate synods, as this was similar to the model used in Victoria, Australia, where the Chinese mission was kept distinct from the rest of the state’s Methodist congregations. Again, mission strategies used in Australia were applied in the Pacific. However, Jekope Ravoka pushed for an inclusive single church conference.

In 1950, 20 talatala were allowed to sit in the united synod, with 13 representatives of the Indo-Fijian ministry. This produced a ratio of three talatala to two Indo-Fijian ministers in synod. Bavadra said that there was no intention of asking a Fijian church to carry the other races, but wondered if there would be potential for an interchange of Fijian and Indo-Fijian ministers in the new conference. When posed with this question, Gribble referred to other examples of Indian ministers working in the Pacific, as the South India Church had recently sent an Indian minister to Papua. The Reverend Stanley Andrews said that the question of Fijians ministering to the Indo-Fijian community had never been discussed. He thought that this might not occur for 40 or 50 years. There was no reference made to Deoki’s ministry and how he might diversify and minister to Fijian congregations. The missionaries struggled to imagine how the two branches of the mission might merge. The system of segregation persisted with the belief that the two cultures were irreconcilably different.

The attitudes of Burton and Gribble were important in the post-war era. Burton had promoted improvements to European missionary training as a means of moving the missions towards devolution, and Gribble extended this by turning his attention to the training of non-European ministers. His aim was to train them to a high standard so that missionaries would happily hand over responsibility to their non-European colleagues. Yet there were anxieties about the rising number of Indo-Fijians in Fiji, and the power they might gain in the near future. Burton accompanied Gribble to Western Australia in 1951 where he was quoted by the press in an article provocatively titled ‘Indians “beginning to oust whites in Fiji”’. He reportedly said that the ‘Indians were now playing a game of Nemesis’: Indo-Fijians were the enemy. Within the Methodist mission, the great majority of the membership remained Fijian. Missionaries catered

81 Ibid., p. 2.
83 S Cowled to C F Gribble, 20 September 1951, HO/1/1952, NAF.
86 ‘Indians “Beginning to oust whites in Fiji”’, The West Australian, Perth, 10 May 1951, p. 9.
to the bulk of their membership, and tended to place Fijian interests above the needs of the Indo-Fijian community. The suggestion that the Fijian and Indo-Fijian branches of the mission might work together in a new conference was not gaining traction with European missionaries, but it was being discussed seriously at the local village level amongst *talatala*.87

Culture remained the predominant paradigm used by missionaries in Fiji to understand social change and it was used in the post-war period to assess the effects of the war on Fiji’s society. Some felt that, with rehabilitation, the changes wrought by the wartime interaction between European, Indo-Fijian and Fijian peoples could be reversed. World War II had upset the neat lines of segregation and the cultures that had been previously considered protected were now altering at a faster pace than observers liked, forcing missionaries to consider abandoning the segregated mission structure for a more integrated model.

However, even though there was a realisation that the colony had changed, culture remained the main excuse for keeping the two branches of the mission apart. This separation was informed not only by European missionaries but also by the ideas of Indo-Fijian and Fijian mission leaders. Within the Indo-Fijian community at large there were fears that, while Indo-Fijians constituted the majority of the colony’s population, the colonial administration’s primary aim was to safeguard Fijian interests. Fijian paramountcy was still extended into the mission, with Indo-Fijians remaining the minority of the membership, and being well behind the Fijian mission in progressing towards self-support.88 The mission’s structure was revised, with greater consultation with the Fijian than the Indo-Fijian branch. Deoki was resigned to the fact that the Indo-Fijian Methodists would be marginalised. The mission walked a tenuous line between cultural sensitivity and racial discrimination, and its workers in the field often struggled to reconcile this. With renewed support for the ecumenical movement’s calls for devolution, missionary attention turned more critically to the question of how to adapt the self-support concept to Fiji’s plural society.

87 Meeting called by Reverend Deoki to ‘discuss the findings of the constitution committee in the circular of 23 March 1950’. The meeting was chaired by Deoki and attended by A C Cato, Ram Narayan, Williami, I Lapthorne, G Davies and F Caleb, Thursday 30 March 1950, F/3/1948–1960B, NAF.
88 R Deoki to M Wilmshurst, 1 April 1950, F/3/1948–1960B, NAF.