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Race Relations in Colonial Suva, 1945–1970

Robert Norton

The years after the war were a time of immense change. The war had taken its toll and left its mark on the political and psychological landscape of the colony. The practice of unquestioned racial segregation and white supremacy had entered its last throes.

— Brij Lal, pre-eminent historian of Fiji.¹

Where the prestige of the European is of such importance it is very disconcerting to find our influence undermined by unsavoury and ugly phases of civilisation depicted in American films and reflected in the harmful example set by some members of the European community.

— Acting inspector general for film censorship, 1936.²

As to improving interracial relationships ... it would not be a bad thing if the European would sometimes pause and consider whether his culture and civilisation are superior in all respects to those of other races.

— Governor Sir Alexander Grantham, 1947.³

1 Brij V Lal, *Broken waves: A history of the Fiji Islands in the twentieth century* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1992), 163.

2 NAF F113/2 part 1, National Archives of Fiji (hereinafter NAF), Suva.

3 'Farewell radio broadcast', *Fiji Times*, 24 March 1947, 4–5.

[T]he aim of government must be, in all its actions and policies, to strengthen the sense of unity of the people of this colony, ... to promote all measures that will help people to regard themselves not merely as Indians or as Fijians ... or as Europeans or Chinese, but as citizens of Fiji – Fijians in the wider sense ... [T]he objective should be ever before us of ... emphasising common interests ...

— Governor Sir Kenneth Maddocks, 1959.⁴

Introduction

The concept of a division of humanity into discrete ‘racial’ groups distinguished by genetically determined characteristics of ability and behaviour has long been discredited by scientific researchers. Yet until relatively recently this little diminished the idea’s potency in social and political discourse and practice. The concept was widely used well into the twentieth century by colonial powers in the justification and organisation of their rule.

‘Racial’ categorisation was central in policy and law and social relations in colonial Fiji, far more so than in other British colonies with which Fiji is often compared, such as Mauritius, Trinidad and Guyana.⁵ Its consequences for rights and inequalities in opportunities of various kinds and for social interactions were ever present. In everyday parlance and in official discourse it was conventional to talk of the people in terms of the ‘the races’, ‘the different races’, ‘the racial groups’ and a simplification into a triad of ‘Fijians’, ‘Indians’ and ‘Europeans’, with stereotyping ideas that disregarded differences within these ‘groups’ and interests linking them. On the margins in this categorisation were the Chinese, Part-Europeans and ‘others’ (including indigenes from other South Pacific countries).

This chapter discusses social changes in Suva, in peoples’ relationships, attitudes and aspirations, initiated by the impact of the Pacific War and postwar international pressures for the ending of colonial empire. There

4 Fiji Legislative Council Debates, 17 June 1959, 146–47.

5 Racial tension did exist in these countries, mainly between descendants of indentured workers or free settlers from India and descendants of African slaves. However, status and rights in political, administrative and school systems were not generally prescribed by an official racial classification, as was the case in colonial Fiji. Gordon Lewis, *The growth of the modern West Indies* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969); Thomas Eriksen, *Common denominators: Ethnicity, nation-building, and compromise in Mauritius* (Oxford: Berg, 1998).

were two trends in race relations: a heightening of antagonism of many Europeans and Fijians towards Indians, but also the beginning of a softening of discrimination in both law and social life and new affirmations of shared citizenship. A discussion of interracial social relations in the urban middle class highlights the elevated status often accorded leading Fijians in the life of clubs and service organisations, and the accommodation of moderate Indian political leadership. Notwithstanding the progressive social trends, reciprocal prejudices continued in Fijian–Indian relations. But balancing these was a shared resentment of European privilege and racialist attitudes. By the late 1950s, with rapid growth in urban population and poverty, some animosity towards Europeans was strengthening and marked a strike and riot in Suva. Those events persuaded major Suva-based business companies to widen employment opportunities for non-Europeans in the last decade of British rule. The chapter concludes with discussion of how political party rivalry in the context of decolonisation provoked new racial tension between Fijians and Indians, yet also encouraged further softening of old boundaries in urban social organisations.

Colonial Paternalism and the Impact of War

Before the Pacific War, Fiji's colonial rulers were concerned largely with the Fijians, to the relative neglect of the Indians, for the majority of whom the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR Co) held the major responsibility. Government gave little thought to a prospect of developing Fiji as a unitary society. Europeans, both official and non-official, generally held paternalistic convictions of racial superiority in their attitudes towards both Indians and Fijians, typically with a sentiment of protective affection for the latter and often ambivalence, sometimes disdain, towards the former. 'Fraternisation' between Europeans and non-Europeans was uncommon and generally disapproved by Europeans, official and non-official.⁶ Self-government was but a distant future possibility and little thought was given to preparing the colonial subjects for it.

6 'There was an effective colour bar and fraternising was regarded askance by the white people': William Geddes, 'Acceleration of social change in a Fijian community', *Oceania* 16, no. 1 (1945): 1–14, 7, doi.org/10.1002/j.1834-4461.1945.tb00428.x; Robert Norton, 'Averting "irresponsible nationalism": Political origins of Ratu Sukuna's Fijian administration', *The Journal of Pacific History* 48, no. 4 (2013): 409–28, doi.org/10.1080/00223344.2013.852706; 'Relations between Europeans and Natives', 1943, NAF CF50/22.

Friendly interactions with New Zealand and US personnel in Fiji and on the battlefield during the war with Japan began the erosion of the old social order, encouraging a questioning of European claims to superiority and privilege and giving rise, especially among Fijians, to new aspirations to share in the good things of the modern economy. The social and economic impacts of the occupying personnel were experienced mainly in Suva and its immediate hinterland, and in the western Viti Levu towns and districts of Nadi and Lautoka. A *Fiji Times* editorial voiced the consternation of many Europeans over the disruption of conventional social mores and economic conditions:

We see a complete upheaval in which all previous standards of life and morality are discarded ... Our problem [will be] ... to get the people back to more or less normal standards.⁷

Wartime events and trends also raised tensions between Indians on the one hand and Europeans and Fijians on the other: the general Indian objection to military service because of racial inequality in wages and conditions, the sugar cane farmers' strike at the height of the war, and large profits made by many Indians from transactions with the occupying troops.

The Early Postwar Years: Race Tensions and Initiatives for Change

The postwar years saw the beginnings of a weakened emphasis on racial categorisation and of the growth of a consciousness of shared citizenship. The major push was the redirection of British colonial policy towards preparations for self-government under pressure from the United Nations (UN) and the US. Change was compelled, too, by the new outlooks and aspirations among the subject people stimulated by wartime social experiences with members of the US and New Zealand forces and economic gains from commercial dealings with them.

7 Allport Barker, 'Repercussions', *Fiji Times*, 23 January 1943, 4. The occupying European personnel greatly outnumbered the resident Europeans. There were also many Afro-Americans whose seeming equality with their European compatriots contrasted with local race conventions and gave local Europeans some anxiety about the likely unsettling effects in Fijian minds of 'the introduction into the colony of people of a native race who are no longer native' (Barker, 4). Fraternisation with the Americans was often accompanied by their derisory remarks about colonial rule and the British Crown, urging on the locals a subversive way of thinking about the social order. For a review of wartime conditions and social change, see Lal, *Broken waves*, 108–25, 163.

The widespread condemnation of racialism following the defeat of Nazi Germany had particular implications for discrimination in the colonies. Early in 1947, anticipating interrogation by the UN Human Rights Commission, the UK Government instructed colonial governors to prioritise reviewing and, where feasible, eliminating racially discriminating legislation.⁸ Fiji's response, sent three years later by Governor Sir Brian Freeston (1948–1951), reported some legislative changes, described existing racial segregation in various contexts, and gave assurance of continuing 'evolution' away from discrimination. Freeston expressed opposition to change being made under UN pressure that disregarded local conditions:

I should prefer to see the whole matter left alone ... insofar as Fiji is concerned, because such problems as exist in this colony can be solved, if at all, only by natural process of evolution.⁹

But Freeston soon addressed his Legislative Council in the new official anti-racialist spirit. He was pleased to see a 'growing readiness ... to sink racial differences in pursuit of the common welfare', and declared that it was 'the supreme duty of each and all of us to foster that growing tendency to unity'.¹⁰

Fostering unity was impeded by continuing tensions. India's Independence in 1947 strengthened the anticolonial mood in many parts of the world. Fiji's Indians viewed the event as the harbinger of freedom from colonial domination everywhere and expected a Congress Government would soon pressure the British and Fiji governments to make reforms in Fiji. For several years Indians in Fiji celebrated the new India at public rallies with oratory by political leaders, displays of India's flag and photos of its leaders, and the singing of its national anthem.¹¹ European and Fijian fear that India would, with the UN, press Britain to bring changes especially advantaging Indians was heightened by the 1946 census confirming that they outnumbered Fijians and were reproducing at a far greater rate.¹²

8 A Creech Jones, circular despatch, 8 January 1947, NA CO83/257/7, Colonial Office (hereinafter CO), National Archives (NA), London.

9 Freeston's response, 19 January 1950, NA CO83/257/7; also: NAF F6/38. A major reform had been made before the London directive. Late in 1946, salary inequality between local European and non-European civil servants was ended, Governor Sir Alexander Grantham declaring that 'racial discrimination is repugnant to ... Government'. Fiji Legislative Council Debates, 1 November 1946, 297.

10 Fiji Legislative Council Debates, 25 November 1949, 156–57.

11 NAF files concerning celebrations in Fiji of India's independence: NAF CF51/47, CF51/51, CF51/54, CF51/64.

12 Indian growth from 1936 to 1946 was 41.7 per cent, the Fijian rate was 21 per cent; growth from 1946 to 1956 was Indians 40.7 per cent, Fijians 25.5 per cent.

Racial tension rose particularly in Suva where the affluence achieved by many Indians during the war was viewed by Europeans as a threat to their status and privilege.¹³ In the late 1940s, prosperous Indians were purchasing houses in hitherto *de facto* European areas, adding fuel to European animosity towards Indians as economic competitors and challengers to racial privilege. The minister of St Andrews Church wrote to the governor about ‘widespread discontent and alarm ... the distress caused to Europeans by the proximity ... of Indian homes’. Affluent Indians ‘were outbidding Europeans as houses were put up for sale’. He believed it was ‘too late now to arrange for any reasonable segregation of the races’, but asked the government to set a ceiling on the pricing of houses to ‘enable Europeans to buy them’. The sympathetic official response was that the trend could not be stopped.¹⁴

The mood of many Europeans was expressed by remarks of Amy Ragg, a leading politician from an old settler family, in a letter to a prewar governor: ‘You have no idea how things have changed since you were in Fiji. The Indians have acquired wealth and have become arrogant to both Fijians and Europeans’.¹⁵ The European–Fijian political alliance was frequently affirmed, and a suspicion voiced that under pressure from the UK and the UN the government was thinking of compromising its commitment to uphold the ‘paramountcy’ of indigenous interests by taking control over Fijian land for the sake of economic development that would particularly benefit Indians.¹⁶

13 Suva’s population grew by 64 per cent from 1936 to 1946, to 25,395 of whom 50 per cent were Indians, 25 per cent Fijians and 9 per cent Europeans; the remaining 16 per cent included Chinese, Part-Europeans and indigenes from other Pacific islands.

14 Watson to Freeston, 13 April 1948, and minute by the colonial secretary ‘Segregation of races in residential areas’, 25 May 1948, NAF CF37/16. An article in *Pacific Islands Monthly* in June 1946 (p. 24) illustrates the racist attitudes of some Europeans: ‘Indians overrunning residential areas in Suva’. In his account of racial patterns in Suva’s residential areas in the early 1960s, James Whitelaw describes an informal agreement among European homeowners in Lami to sell only to Europeans or Part-Europeans and to this end to avoid public advertising (James Sutherland Whitelaw, ‘People, land and government in Suva, Fiji’ (PhD thesis, The Australian National University, 1966), 196–97).

15 Ragg to Richards, 4 February 1953, NAF C166/13/1. In a survey of Fijian–Indian relations in 1954, 63 per cent of the Fijian interviewees ‘revealed an attitude of complete intolerance of the presence of the Indians in Fiji’: A Cato, ‘Fijians and Fiji-Indians: A culture-contact problem in the south Pacific’, *Oceania* 26, no. 1 (1955): 17, doi.org/10.1002/j.1834-4461.1955.tb00655.x. On European attitudes see Lal, *Broken waves*, 143–49.

16 For example, *Fiji Times* editorials 17 December 1952, 4; 26 June 1953, 4; 4 May 1954, 1. A measure of official concern about racial tensions was the attention given to preparing for possible future civil disturbance by securing agreement for military support from New Zealand. Acting Governor T Stoddart to T Macdonald, Minister of Defence, Wellington, 18 July 1955, NA CO1036/80.

The tension was starkly reflected in the European-owned English daily the *Fiji Times*. Every opportunity was taken to emphasise racial division, particularly the alleged threat from Indian demographic and economic advances and political ambition.¹⁷ At its annual meeting in 1952, the Indian Association in Suva resolved to ask the Colonial Government to ‘abate the creation of ill-feeling and hostilities against ... particularly the Indian people’.¹⁸ The pre-eminent Indian political leader Vishnu Deo accused the *Fiji Times* of ‘continuous propaganda and agitation of seditious character, fostering racial hatred against us’.¹⁹

In counterpoint to the tensions were initiatives begun in Suva in the early aftermath of war to encourage interracial ties. Fiji’s first multiracial social body, the Union Club, was formed in Suva in 1945 with the encouragement of colonial officials.²⁰ Chief information officer, Harold Cooper, took the lead, stressing the need ‘to find a basis for lasting and sincere cooperation between the three races of the colony’. He was especially concerned that the government reform its past often indifferent treatment of the Indians to persuade their full identification with Fiji:

It is useless to pretend that they have not ... had some excuse for suspecting that we regarded them as an inferior race ... We have just finished a world war fought largely to decide the ideological issue of whether certain races may claim to have the inherent right to dominate others ... [M]any coloured communities in all parts of the world, including the Indians in Fiji, are waiting to see how prompt the victor nations will be to translate into practice the fine precepts they voiced while the guns were still firing ...²¹

Governor Grantham had already reported to London his proposal to achieve ‘proper administrative contact with the Indian population’, explaining that in contrast to the government’s close contact with the

17 See, for example, *Fiji Times* 25 July and 15, 17, 21, 23 August 1950. Racial identity was frequently emphasised in headlines: for example, ‘Indian cost of living shows sharp increase’; ‘Ten Fijians charged with liquor offences’; ‘Indian woman injured in collision’; ‘Indians hurt in fight with Fijians’; ‘Six Indians fight in Waimanu road’; ‘Five Fijians fined for gambling’; ‘Indian charged with arson’; ‘Fijian hurt in fall from bus’.

18 NAF F51/113, Indian Association of Fiji.

19 *Fiji Times*, 3 March 1954, 6–7. Ironically, under the heading ‘Going forward together’, the *Fiji Times* editor had earlier written against emphasising race differences: ‘We should think of ourselves as being people of Fiji ... We cannot expect any advancement in this country by promoting racial discord’ (8 November 1950, 4).

20 NAF F6/12; and Linden Mander, *Some dependent peoples of the South Pacific* (New York: Macmillan, 1954), 446–47.

21 Cooper to Colonial Secretary, 24 February 1946, NAF CF51/47, Mother India Day.

Fijians through the Fijian Administration, it had no such means for contact with the Indians – ‘an unsatisfactory state of affairs which must be remedied’.²² At their annual conferences, administration officials discussed the need to improve relations with Indians who they acknowledged had tended to be neglected in the past. How can government officials ‘make the Fiji born Indian feel that Fiji is his home and make out of him a contented and constructive citizen?’ There was a need to have ‘more intimate contact with the Indians’ – ‘to discover [their] aspirations’.²³ There were political reasons for these concerns: recognition of a need to strengthen Indian loyalty to Fiji at a time of enthusiasm over India’s achievement of Independence.

The Union Club grew from this official concern. Active members were predominantly Indians, from taxi drivers and white-collar workers to businessmen and professionals. There were also many Fijians and Europeans, typically in government posts. With the objective ‘to bring the races together’, the Suva venture inspired the formation of similar clubs in other towns. They contrasted with bodies such as the Fiji Club and the Defence Club, both dominated by Europeans and admitting a very few elite Fijians but no Indians. Another Suva club, the United Club, also reflected the racial divides with a membership mainly of Part-Europeans.²⁴

Initiatives supporting multiracialism were taken in Suva by the British Council: the Viti Club for young Fijians, and the Youth Club, multiracial though predominantly Indian, for ‘social and educational activities and to foster harmony between the various races’.²⁵ Members from these clubs and students from the teachers’ college socialised at debating contests and other events organised by the council.²⁶ In sport, too, there were moves towards interracial competition and cooperation, such as ‘triangular’

22 Grantham to Secretary of State, 14 July 1945, NA CO83/242/85403, Australian Joint Copying Project (AJCP) microfilm reel 5021.

23 Administrative officers’ conferences 1944–1957, NAF F4/3/7 part 1, F4/3/7-5, C4/4/2-2. While several leading Fijian chiefs were appointed as district officers as early as 1950, no Indian held the post until 1961.

24 On the clubs, see Robert Norton, *Race and politics in Fiji*, 2nd ed. (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1990): 54–58; Alexander Mamak, *Colour, culture and conflict: A study of pluralism in Fiji* (Rushcutters Bay: Pergamon Press, 1978), 108–11. Union Club members in 1948 included 144 Indians, 89 Fijians, 119 Europeans: NAF F6/12.

25 *Fiji Times*, 18 March 1952, 3, 7.

26 *Fiji Times*, 13 March 1951, 6; 5 October 1951, 4; 12 October 1951, 5; 15 November 1951, 5; 18 March 1952, 3, 7.

cricket matches with European, Fijian and Indian teams competing, and sometimes multiracial teams.²⁷ Though a political alliance between European and Fijian leaders had existed since the 1920s, ‘fraternisation’ between Europeans and Fijians had been generally discouraged. But in wartime it became commonplace with the occupying servicemen and between Fijian and Fiji European soldiers. A *Fiji Times* editorial in 1950 urging sharing in sport reflected that transformative experience. Sport, especially rugby, the editor declared, ‘will help to create personal friendships between Fijians and Europeans, bringing them closer together in a proper understanding of each other and in mutual respect’.²⁸ A major ending of official racial discrimination at this time was the introduction of jury lists for Fijians and Indians. Until 1950 only Europeans were allowed jury trials and European ‘assessors’ judged cases brought against non-Europeans.²⁹

From the early 1950s, the government-backed radio broadcaster planned reforms declaring that its programs:

should help to weld the people into a homogeneous unit – the Indians to realise that their first loyalty is to Fiji ... and the Fijians to keep alive their native customs and abreast of social progress, and the whole community to develop a national consciousness and pride.³⁰

More time was to be allowed for programs in the vernaculars; there was especially a concern to wean Indians away from short-wave broadcasts from India and Pakistan.

The 1950s were also a time of rapid growth in the trade union movement in which Indians, Fijians and others united in disputes with government and private European employers. Unity was sometimes vulnerable, however, as in the case of the Public Works Department Employees Union where racial tension eventually led to a Fijian ‘breakaway union’. The commissioner for labour attributed the difficulties to cultural differences in leadership styles and to the tendency for Indians to predominate

27 *Fiji Times*, 25 January 1951, 7; 22 March 1951, 5; 5 January 1952, 5; 22 February 1957, 5; 17 April 1957, 5.

28 *Fiji Times*, 28 September 1950, 4.

29 *Fiji Times*, 25 May 1950, 6.

30 Fiji Broadcasting Commission Chair, Robert Munro, 1953, NAF C146/3-1. Munro urged in 1956 that ‘the station should continue to “indoctrinate” into good “kai vitis” the Indian population and wean them away from listening to Indian stations’: NAF C146/3-2.

among the office-bearers, a trend that would long continue as a source of conflict within some unions.³¹ It was sometimes difficult to separate trade union life from tensions in the political arena where Fijian and European anxieties about potential Indian domination were always latent if not overtly expressed.

Governor Garvey and the Promotion of 'Multiracialism'

Reform of race relations in Suva was strengthened from the mid-1950s, thanks especially to a new governor's efforts. Far more than his two postwar predecessors, Sir Ronald Garvey (1952–1958) stressed the need to work for the unity and prosperity of Fiji as a whole. At his swearing-in he talked of challenges facing the colony:

It must be a time of great endeavour for all ... It will entail sacrifices, and it will be necessary for us to abandon some preconceived ideas ... as well as bury some old-fashioned prejudices ...³²

In 1955 Garvey had discussions at the Colonial Office where preparations were underway for granting independence to two major colonies, the Gold Coast (Ghana) and Malaya. These decolonisation projects and others anticipated made all the more pressing in the discussions with Garvey a focus on Fiji's social, economic, and political problems, and progress towards self-government. On returning to Fiji, Garvey declared his intention to devote the remainder of his term to promoting economic development and a consciousness of national unity. All in Fiji, he said, must think of themselves as forming a united people and put Fiji ahead of their racial identities and interests: '[W]e must think not as Fijians, Indians, or Europeans, but as one, and join our hands to bring to the colony the prosperity within our grasp.'³³ The rhetoric echoed views expressed several years before by a young Fijian, Ratu Kamisese Mara,

31 CS Reay to President of Fiji Industrial Workers Congress, 15 October 1953, NAF C36/2/8-1; Mamak, *Colour, culture and conflict*, 69–71; Jacqueline Leckie, *To labour with the state: The Fiji Public Service Association* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1997), Chapter 6; William Sutherland, *Beyond the politics of race: An alternative history of Fiji to 1992* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1992), 87–88, 98–99.

32 *Fiji Times*, 6 October 1952, 1.

33 *Fiji Times*, 29 September 1955, 4. Sir Robert Sanders, a district officer at that time, told me of how Garvey, in his speeches around Fiji, would hold up one finger to symbolise unity, alluding to Churchill's 'V' for victory.

who would lead Fiji's first multiracial political party and become the first prime minister. In a controversial speech after returning from studies in the UK Mara had declared:

The future citizen of Fiji should be in a position to be proud ... that he was a Fiji national and not so much that he was a member of any particular race.³⁴

Marking the reform of official vision for Fiji was, from 1954, a change in Cession Day celebrations. Hitherto the occasion had concerned mainly the Fijians and the Colonial Government. Garvey now insisted that it should be made the day for celebrating Fiji's growth as a multiracial nation. He encouraged the holding of interracial activities such as sporting events as part of the festivities: 'The day should be a focal point for the spirit of unity which ... should prevail among all the peoples of this Colony.'³⁵

An egregious expression of European prejudice was the *de facto* bar against non-Europeans using the Suva Sea Baths. A small pool of inferior quality constructed for them beside the main baths highlighted the racialism and, in protest, was rarely used. In 1956, after three years of intermittent and at times acrimonious argument among the elected Indians and Europeans in the municipal council, it was decided to open the main baths to all.³⁶ Most European councillors were not enthusiastic in their agreement, the mayor saying that his support should not be taken as criticism of the past discrimination. The strengthening Indian middle class was a pressure for the change, especially as its ratepayers contributed to the baths' maintenance; a ratepayers association had been formed two years before with Europeans and Indians together in its council.³⁷

³⁴ Address to Marist High School Association, *Fiji Times*, 7 November 1950, 7. The *Fiji Times* editor praised Mara's speech and declared: 'We cannot expect any advancement in this country by promoting racial discord' (8 November 1950, 4). Yet well into the 1950s it was the newspaper's practice to emphasise race differences.

³⁵ Fiji Legislative Council Debates, 6 November 1953, 204; *Fiji Times*, 6 November 1953, 4.

³⁶ *Fiji Times*, 24 June 1956, 5; 30 August 1956, 1, 4; 2 October 1956; also *Fiji Times*, 15 January 1953, 4; 2 February 1953, 4; 24 June 1953, 5; NAF CF45/3; Carl Hughes, 'Racial issues in Fiji' (DPhil thesis, Oxford University, 1965), 259–68. The Town Board (later Council) had not imposed an official ban, but instructed the baths caretaker to exclude non-Europeans (though Chinese were admitted).

³⁷ *Fiji Times*, 24 September 1954, 4; Hughes, 'Racial issues in Fiji', 268.

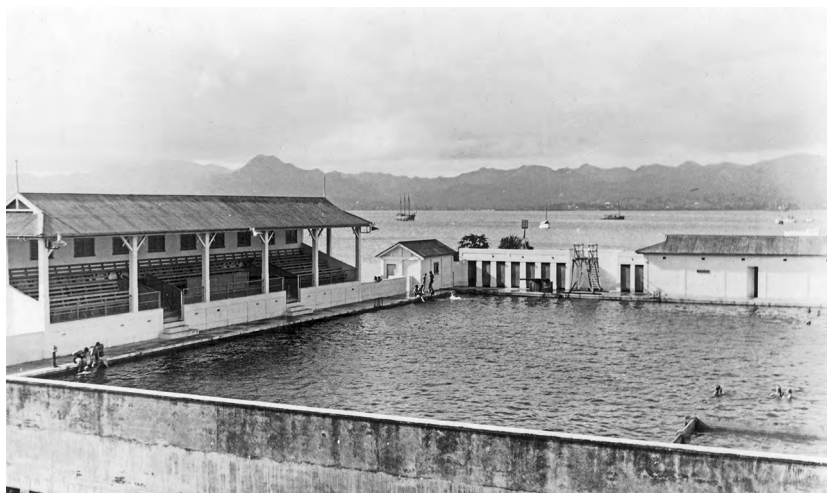


Figure 10.1: ‘Swimming Baths Suva, About 1930’.

Source: P32.4.17 Fiji Museum.

Fijians, then represented on the council by one nominated member, expressed little interest in the issue.³⁸ Yet during the war it had been a Fijian member, Semesa Sikivou, who protested against the discrimination when the then Town Board debated whether to temporarily allow non-European military personnel to use the baths. While endorsing this, Sikivou hoped:

that because we are bearing our burden together in this war, we shall enjoy what we are fighting for together when the enemies are crushed and all race differences and barriers [are] removed.³⁹

That possibility was tested in 1950, when Fijians, supported by some Europeans, formed a swimming association with a plan to establish links with such groups in New Zealand. A case might have been made for letting them train at the baths. However, ‘the fact that such an application might open the door to potential difficulties’ led to the abandonment of the project. The *Fiji Times* had praised the Fijians for not having pressed the council and government on the issue, declaring this was ‘an excellent indication of the extent to which Fijian patience and consideration

38 Fijians contributed tiny proportions of Suva rates. Even by the mid 1960s, their average over the four council wards was only 1.7 per cent in contrast to the Indians’ 32 per cent and the Europeans’ 40 per cent (Whitelaw, ‘People, land and government in Suva, Fiji’, 163–65).

39 *Fiji Times*, 12 June 1942, 7; 17 June 1942, 7.

for other races is carried'.⁴⁰ Now, in 1956, the newspaper applauded the abolition of discrimination as 'long overdue': 'timely, progressive, and humane'.⁴¹

The English daily was undergoing a striking transformation, with far less emphasis now on racial division and an alleged Indian threat. There was doubtless a quiet pressure for reform from official quarters. But the change was influenced in part by the realisation that, contrary to European and Fijian fears, the new India would not, after all, be pushing for radical reforms in the colonies. To the disillusionment of some Fiji Indian leaders, India's commissioners urged them to moderation and loyalty to the Fiji Government and the British Crown.⁴² Early in 1957 the *Fiji Times* praised India's commissioners for their wise counsel and extended congratulations on India Republic Day. India's representatives, the editor acknowledged, had encouraged Fiji Indians to think of themselves as 'British citizens of Fiji' and 'to seek a happy and profitable association with other races ...':

It would have been easy for India to interfere in Fiji's affairs, but it hasn't ... The overall racial picture in Fiji today is a reasonably happy and reassuring one, and all the other communities ... can sincerely join with their Indian friends and associates in greeting Republic Day.⁴³

The paper had signalled its change of heart several months before in its editorial for Cession Day. After extolling the Fijians' virtues and the need to safeguard their land rights, the editor recognised the 'equally virile Indian community with the ordinary rights of human beings'. Their land needs must be met too, he said, as the problems of population pressure and land are shared problems.⁴⁴ Garvey spoke of Cession Day in 1957 as 'Fiji's national day', when 'we should reflect not upon ... the interest of the race to which we belong, but upon the interests of the country of which we are citizens':

40 Editorial, *Fiji Times*, 21 January 1953, 4. See also 'Fijian swimmers have no place to swim', *Pacific Islands Monthly*, August 1950, 83.

41 *Fiji Times*, 30 August 1956, 4.

42 For example, India Commissioner SA Waiz's farewell speech, *Fiji Samachar*, 13 October 1950, 11–12 and *Fiji Times*, 6 October 1950, 1, and a speech by a new commissioner in Ba, *Fiji Times*, 20 January 1954, 6; Donald Calman, 'A history of Indians in Fiji' (MA thesis, University of Sydney, 1952), 231–35.

43 'Fiji's greeting to Indian Republic Day', *Fiji Times*, 26 January 1957, 2.

44 *Fiji Times*, 6 October 1956, 2.

Our responsibilities as citizens should prevail over racial interests when the two conflict ... We should regard others as human beings first and secondly as the members of any particular race.

Garvey even questioned the view that the Deed of Cession was a charter for the paramountcy of Fijian interests: 'The Indians are equally eligible to have their rights respected.'⁴⁵

Other expressions of changing attitudes and relations included the invitation in 1956 by the Suva Chamber of Commerce, a European body, to the Indian Chamber to send delegates to observe its meetings and to perhaps make a reciprocal invitation with a view to the two bodies presenting joint submissions to government: 'The problems of the Indian Chamber of Commerce are our problems.'⁴⁶ The *Fiji Times* reported in 1957 the formation in Suva of the Fiji Law Society 'to promote the welfare and integrity of the law profession', with a committee of six Indians and five Europeans.⁴⁷ Also established that year was the Fiji Cricket Association with the governor its patron and a committee of 13 Europeans, three Fijians and three Indians.⁴⁸ Changing interracial attitudes were evidenced in the launching in Suva of a new teachers' body, the Education Workers' Society, whose Fijian chair declared: 'The teaching profession can no longer remain in its racial camps. The era of racialism is coming to its end.' Though this venture failed to achieve much support, it was a noteworthy attempt to bridge the divide between the two predominantly race-based unions, Fiji Teachers Union and the Fijian Teachers Association.⁴⁹

A year after the sea baths were opened to all a start was made on abolishing racial restrictions on sale of alcohol. The liquor permit system, with graded rights from exclusion through various levels of restriction to unrestricted access, was a humiliating marker of colonial racist paternalism that affected mainly Fijians and Indians (Europeans, Part-Europeans and Chinese were exempted).⁵⁰ Non-exempted persons wishing to purchase liquor were required to keep a permit book, like a passport, where vendors recorded details of every transaction. Garvey declared in 1956 that 'the only real solution to our liquor problem ... is by educating our people

⁴⁵ *Fiji Times*, 15 October 1957, 1.

⁴⁶ *Fiji Times*, 20 September 1956, 5.

⁴⁷ *Fiji Times*, 19 June 1957, 5.

⁴⁸ *Fiji Times*, 18 December 1956, 5.

⁴⁹ *Fiji Times*, 2 April 1956, 4.

⁵⁰ The Council of Chiefs and the Fijian Affairs Board, dominated by leading chiefs, supported the restrictions.

to a proper sense of responsibility ... by a gradual lessening of a system of control'. As a start, the drinking of beer was to be 'open to all races without restriction by permit'. The community, Garvey counselled, 'must learn to develop a sense of responsibility to this new found freedom from control'.⁵¹ The change was in force from late 1957 and restrictions on liquor consumption were entirely removed for Indian and Fijian men early in 1963.

The outstanding initiative promoting multiracialism and a consciousness of shared 'national' identity in the 1950s was Suva's Hibiscus Festival, inspired by Hawai'i's Aloha Festival and planned towards the end of 1956 by government officials and leaders in the tourist industry. Its significance, anthropologist Claus Bossen explains, 'was reinforced by the lack in these years of a civil public event that could encompass all ethnic groups'. Though Cession Day was now declared a 'national' day affirming the value of all citizens for Fiji's prosperity and progress, its core meaning continued to be celebration of the sanctified Fijian–British alliance. In the Hibiscus Festival the emphasis was on the prideful affirmation of the cultural identities of all major groups and 'the equality ... and unity of them all'.⁵² More than any other social innovation of the 1950s, the festival, Bossen says, expressed the shaping of a new 'urban public sphere' marked by interracial activities affirming shared identity. Yet the festival highlight, the crowning of Miss Hibiscus, did not display a multiracial balance. Of the 15 awards from 1956 to 1970, nine were won by Part-Europeans, four by Fijians, one by a European and one by a Part-Chinese. Although there were 30 Indian contestants during this period, an Indian was not crowned until 1979.⁵³

Shortly before the first Hibiscus Festival, in December 1956, a 'carnival' of dance and theatre was presented by children 'of all races' at the Suva Town Hall, attended by Garvey and his wife.⁵⁴ On Christmas Eve the vice-regal couple graced 'carols by candlelight' in Suva's Albert Park, organised by the British Council: European, Indian and Fijian choirs sang

51 Fiji Legislative Council Debates, 14 September 1956, 77; *Fiji Times*, 11 December 1957, 5, and 12 December 1957, 1.

52 Claus Bossen, 'Festival mania, tourism, and nation building in Fiji: The case of the Hibiscus Festival, 1956–1970', *The Contemporary Pacific* 12, no. 1 (2000): 123–54, 141–42, doi.org/10.1353/cp.2000.0006.

53 Bossen, 'Festival mania, tourism, and nation building in Fiji', 144.

54 *Fiji Times*, 11 December 1956, 5.

the same carols in their respective languages, backed by the army band.⁵⁵ Garvey had advised London early that year: 'If one can believe local talk, the different races of which our community is composed have seldom been on more friendly terms.'⁵⁶

Garvey's successor as governor, Sir Phillip Maddocks (1959–1963), continued the policy of encouraging 'multiracialism', stressing to his Legislative Council in 1959 'the need to recognise the goal to which our efforts must be constantly directed – that of a genuine multiracial community':

[T]he aim of Government must be, in all its actions and policies, to strengthen the sense of unity of the people of this colony, ... to promote all measures that will help people to regard themselves not merely as Indians or as Fijians ... or as Europeans or Chinese, but as citizens of Fiji – Fijians in the wider sense ... [T]he objective should be ever before us of ... emphasising common interests.⁵⁷

The Structure of Interracial Relations in Suva's Middle Class⁵⁸

In Suva's middle-class multiracial milieu, developing from the mid-1950s, Fijian and European leaders were often patrons of social status and favours and Indians were their clients. Indian civic and political leaders valued the friendship and support of Fijian and European notables for advancing their status and influence. While Fijians prized friendships with eminent Europeans, they did not take special pride in ties with prominent Indians, nor did Fijian organisations seek their favour. This asymmetry in race relations derived particularly from official values affirming the special position of the Fijians and the long-established Fijian–European bond.

Pressure on Indian politicians to endorse the ideal of 'Fijian paramountcy' had come to a head in 1946 when the census confirmed that Indians outnumbered the Fijians. A European leader proposed in the colonial legislature that:

55 *Fiji Times*, 24 December 1956, 2.

56 Garvey to Lloyd, 11 February 1956, NA CO1036/10.

57 Fiji Legislative Council Debates, 17 June 1959, 146–47.

58 This section draws mainly from Robert Norton, *Race and politics in Fiji*, 2nd ed. (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1990), 53–58, 72–73.

in the opinion of this Council the time has arrived – in view of the great increase in the non-Fijian inhabitants and its consequential political development – to emphasise the terms of the Deed of Cession to assure that the interests of the Fijian race are safeguarded and a guarantee given that Fiji is to be preserved ... as a Fijian country for all time.



Figure 10.2: AD Patel speaks at a Federation Party election rally in Suva, 1966.

Source: Robert Norton, PMB Photos 103-069.

In the ensuing debate Europeans and Fijians united in emphasising an alleged threat of Indian domination. The Europeans reaffirmed claims to political privilege as the Fijians' protectors, insisting that the Indians had no such responsibility under the deed. The Indians retorted that protection of the Fijian was the British Government's responsibility and that if Europeans were co-trustees so equally, as British subjects, were the Indians. The principal Indian leaders, AD Patel and Vishnu Deo, reaffirmed their endorsement of the principle of the paramountcy of Fijian interests. The debate, at times acrimonious, ended in an atmosphere of accord with unanimous support for a watered-down amended motion that the government and the non-Fijians 'stand by' the Deed of Cession as a charter of the Fijian people.⁵⁹ The debate's initiator, Amy Ragg, believed

⁵⁹ Fiji Legislative Council Debates, 16 July 1946, 163–214.

his motion 'will in the future be a ... milestone in the history of this colony, something for the people to go on'. The *Fiji Times* apparently agreed, describing the debate as an event 'without precedence in the history of the legislative council'.⁶⁰

Indians seeking ties with Fijians and Europeans and official favours, such as appointments to boards and committees, had to disavow political radicalism. The longstanding sources of racial conflict that all wished to contain helped encourage cooperation by providing a focus for dialogue and reciprocal affirmations of goodwill and understanding. Indian leaders continued to call for constitutional change and land reform, but with moderation to preserve harmonious relations with government officials, and Fijian and European leaders. Changes in the Indian Association reflected this. Militants formed it during the original campaign in the 1920s for political equality with Europeans. It declined following the dissolution of that movement. It was revived in Suva after World War II with a membership mainly of well-to-do businessmen and professionals. As well as providing a base for political careers, it cultivated relations with Fijians and Europeans, earning their esteem by building schools that were well-managed and open to all. Social functions and deputations to the colonial governor on public matters also enhanced the Indian Association's respectability in the wider community. Social events welcomed representatives from the government of India and were attended by dignitaries of all races. Subjects of the deputations included, among others, constitutional advancement, franchise for women, education and land problems. Presented against a background of friendly interracial mixing and ritualised in petitions, such calls made Indian political assertiveness acceptable.

The Indian Association had a counterpart in the Fijian Association. Members of each had friendly interactions in multiracial institutions, and high-ranking chiefs in Fijian Association leadership were sometimes president of the predominantly Indian Union Club. The pressures and incentives to moderation in Indian leadership in Suva contrasted with the industrial conflict between the Australian CSR Co. and cane farmers' unions that was conducive to a confrontational leadership in the sugar districts, the foundation of the dominant Indian political leadership during Fiji's decolonisation.

60 *Fiji Times*, 17 July 1946, 6.

Persistence of Racial Prejudice and Division

Though in the 1950s there was progress in breaking or softening racial barriers, this happened mainly in the urban middle class. Racial prejudices and antipathies persisted. Particularly invidious, for its frequent association with status, wealth and power, was the attitude of many Europeans towards non-Europeans. The president of the multiracial Nadi Chamber of Commerce, AJ Foster, highlighted this in his contribution to the *Fiji Times* series of articles in 1957 on 'The Future of Fiji'. Denouncing European prejudice as an obstacle to 'cementing the racial divergencies of Fiji into a harmonious whole', he lamented that 'we have very few Europeans who work for the betterment of human relations' and even maintained that Europeans had created a 'caste' system.⁶¹

Foster's remarks concurred with those of an Australian journalist reporting on Fiji the previous year. Richard Aspinall was struck by European racial attitudes, especially against Indians: 'The attitude of many of these people towards their Indian fellow citizens is rude and ignorant'. He recounted the experience of a young Sydney woman working for a European firm in Suva who, after visiting relatives of an Indian student she met in Sydney, was warned 'that if she persisted in her friendship with Indians she would lose her job'. Indian leaders, Aspinall said, 'have one explanation' for the racism: 'The Europeans cannot bear to see the sons of indentured labourers becoming their equals'.⁶²

In a dispatch to Canberra in 1965, Australia's first commissioner to Fiji mentioned his impression of attitudes of Europeans, especially those in the colony for limited terms who comprised the vast majority. The latter, he said, 'seemed to assume that they were obligated from the moment of arrival ... to strike firm pro-Fijian, anti-Indian postures and to sustain these continually'.⁶³ When researching Fiji's political development in the mid-1960s I sometimes encountered European aversion towards Indians and the implicit view that I was crossing boundaries by meeting with Indian politicians and attending their campaign rallies. A leading Federation

61 *Fiji Times*, 2 October 1957, 2; and 3 October 1957, 2.

62 'The Fijis: Our "off-shore" islands have their race problems', *Voice*, April 1956, 21–22.

63 Robert Hamilton to External Affairs, 17 May 1965, NAA A1838 316/1/8 part 2, National Archives of Australia (hereinafter NAA), Canberra.

Party politician at that time,⁶⁴ Irene Jai Narayan, who represented Suva Indians for many years, later told me that few Europeans fraternised then with Indians who they tended to view as ‘interlopers’. So, she said, my attendance at rallies and socialising with Indians was seen by the party leaders and their followers as remarkable.

European prejudice was often suffered by Part-Europeans, predominantly people of mixed Fijian and European descent. Many took the major part of their identity, cultural values and customs from the Europeans who tended to view them as the products of racial boundary transgression and to exclude them from their social circles. Though Fijians and especially Indians often experienced European prejudice, their positive sense of identity and status had strong independent social and cultural supports. Few Part-Europeans were fully incorporated into Fijian communities. Colonial officials tended to view Part-Europeans as a problematic anomaly outside the system of racial categorisation, often remarking on their neglect and conflicted identity.⁶⁵

Rodney Acraman, a junior colonial official in the 1960s, recounted his humiliating experience of the ‘colour bar’ growing up in Suva as a person of mixed European, Fijian and Samoan descent attending the predominantly European Suva Grammar School.⁶⁶ In her account of a childhood in Suva in the 1940s, Patricia Page recalls her mother’s gentle counselling against playing with ‘half caste’ children, children who had ‘a touch of the tar brush’.⁶⁷ A complaint of many Part-Europeans was their marginalisation in schooling opportunities. Most were excluded from schools reserved mainly for Europeans; nor were they always welcome in ‘Fijian’ or ‘Indian’ schools.

The schooling system was a major contributor to intergenerational perpetuation of prejudices. An official investigation in 1944 by a New Zealand academic was critical of the siloing of most pupils in segregated schools. His report was considered too controversial for debate in the Legislative Council and a new inquiry recommended continued emphasis

64 This political party was renamed National Federation Party in the late 1960s.

65 On the Part-Europeans, see Annelise Riles, ‘Part-Europeans and Fijians’, in *Fiji in Transition*, vol. 1, ed. Brij V Lal and Tomasi Vakatora (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1997), 105–29; Lucy de Bruce, ‘Histories of diversity: Kailoma testimonies and “Part-European” tales from colonial Fiji (1920–1970)’, *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 28, no. 1 (2007): 113–28, doi.org/10.1080/07256860601082970.

66 Marsali MacKinnon, interview with Rodney Acraman, 9 March 1999, transcripts, Pacific Manuscripts Bureau (PMB), Audio 26–27.

67 Patricia Page, *Across the magic line: Growing up in Fiji* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2004), 66–73.

on maintaining racial boundaries.⁶⁸ Thus in the 1950s and 1960s the majority of children and adolescents continued to receive their education in racially exclusive schools. Voices in favour of interracial school experience to build foundations for mutual understanding and a sense of shared citizenship were outweighed by conservative opinion, mainly of Europeans and Fijians. Garvey himself supported continued separation at primary level, ‘in view of the difficulties of language and culture and the geographical distribution of the different races’.⁶⁹

When Garvey’s successor Sir Kenneth Maddocks advocated multiracial schools he encountered strong resistance, mainly from Fijian leaders. He reluctantly advised London that ending racial division in the school system, in accordance with a new UNESCO convention, was not feasible: ‘It would be politically impracticable ... to make any sudden change in the organisation of education in Fiji with a view to making it more interracial in character’.⁷⁰ Initially sanguine about the prospects for promoting multiracialism, Maddocks became pessimistic in his last two years, daunted especially by the Fijian fear ‘that any advance towards interracialism in matters of importance is a step towards Indian domination’.⁷¹

Urban Migration, the Labour Movement and a New Racial Tension

In the towns interactions across the race divides were frequent and awareness of European affluence and racist attitudes was sharp. Towns were also where interracial ties often developed: in workplaces, between

68 FB Stephens, ‘Report on Education in Fiji’, *Journal of the Fiji Legislative Council*, Council Paper no.18 (1944); and Report of Board of Education, Legislative Council Paper 27 of 1946 (debated in Fiji’s Legislative Council 19–20 November 1946, 462–553). See also Clive Whitehead, *Education in Fiji: Policy, problems and progress in primary and secondary education 1939–1973* (Canberra: Development Studies Centre, Australian National University, 1981), 31–55.

69 Fiji Legislative Council Debates, 26 November 1954, 179.

70 Maddocks to Secretary of State, 26 March 1962, NAF C28/37. Early in 1965, the Indian politician, AD Patel, then in government as ‘member for social services’, proposed to primary school managers in Suva that racial division in the school system should end. While the Indian and European managers were in favour, the Fijians unanimously opposed the suggestion as a threat to cultural and social identity: *Fiji Times*, 9 January 1965, 3–4. Only the Catholic Church and some Indian organisations encouraged multiracial enrolment. Many schools excluded from the category of ‘mixed race’ did have multiracial rolls. The vast majority of their students were of a particular racial category and the others comprised less than 25 per cent of the roll, the minimum for a school to be designated as ‘multiracial’. Hughes, ‘Racial issues in Fiji’, 308; Whitehead, *Education in Fiji*, 148.

71 Maddocks to Secretary of State, 19 June 1962, NA CO1036/775.

neighbours, in trade unions, in clubs and voluntary associations, and in some schools. This was particularly true of postwar Suva as its population rapidly grew, especially with Fijian migration from rural villages.⁷²

From the early 1950s there was a growing demographic of young Fijian men deserting their villages to seek opportunities in Suva and other towns, only to soon find themselves in impoverished conditions without regular income. They were viewed by government and self-supporting residents as a major social problem: 'koro-less' Fijians detached from the social constraints and supports of *koro* (village) life, with frustrated aspirations and disposed to petty crime.

In his contribution to the *Fiji Times* 'Future of Fiji' series, Alan Tippet, a prominent church leader, presciently warned of a looming threat from a discontented young 'proletariat' forming on racial lines: non-Europeans, mainly Fijians, set against Europeans. This development, he said, 'simply oozes with trouble': 'Sooner or later disillusionment must come and then we shall have a major social and labour problem on our hands.'⁷³

By the late 1950s, difficulties for urban workers and the unemployed were exacerbated by rising living costs. In December 1959 Suva experienced an unprecedented violent social disturbance after police, attempting to disperse a crowd gathering to hear leaders of striking workers, threw tear gas and made a baton charge. This provoked in many people an outburst of anger and rioting energised also by resentments against European wealth and racist attitudes.⁷⁴ Ratu Mara, who played a prominent role in the official inquiry, recalled in his memoirs 'a hostile anti-European atmosphere' and the stoning of European-owned cars.⁷⁵ Governor Maddock advised London that:

72 In 1956, Fijians made up 26 per cent of Suva's population, a 46 per cent increase since 1946. From 1956 to 1966, Suva's Fijians increased by 170 per cent to form 33 per cent of the city's population. Suva's Indian population increased over this period by 108 per cent to 50 per cent of the total; the Europeans comprised only 4.3 per cent and Part-Europeans 4.8 per cent. Still the only sociological monograph study of Suva is Alexander Mamak's valuable book, based on field research in the early 1970s (Mamak, *Colour, culture and conflict*, especially chapters 9 and 10 on race relations and attitudes).

73 *Fiji Times*, 12 August 1957, 2.

74 Peter Hempenstall and Noel Rutherford, *Protest and dissent in the Colonial Pacific* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1984), 73–86; A Lowe, 'Report of Commission of Inquiry into the disturbances in Suva, December 1959', *Journal of the Fiji Legislative Council*, Council Paper No. 10 of 1960; Francis West, 'Background to the Fijian riots', *Australian Quarterly*, 32 (1960): 46–53, doi.org/10.2307/20633592.

75 Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, *The Pacific way: A memoir* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 65.

the anti-European feeling demonstrates ... that in industrial matters, where land and political control are not concerned, the racial line-up tends to be an alliance of Fijian and Indian against the European.⁷⁶

The racial aspect of the riot was emphasised in accounts I heard in 1966 as I began my Fiji research. A senior British official described to me how the episode brought a change in non-European attitudes to Europeans ‘overnight’. For example, he said, the disposition of many house servants quickly cooled from seemingly friendly relations with their European employers.⁷⁷

Historian James Heartfield maintains that the racial tension in the Suva crisis of December 1959 has been exaggerated, a projection of European fears of a potential for rebellious unity of Fijians and Indians.⁷⁸ He is perhaps correct in asserting that emphasis on the anti-European sentiment has distracted attention from the reality of class conflict and the significance of the strike in the development of Fiji’s multiracial labour movement. Yet the racial ‘edge’ in the rioting was strong and jolted officials into recognising the need to address popular discontents and aspirations.

Governor Maddocks soon briefed Australian Government leaders in Canberra, stressing the antagonism towards Australian companies, the ‘colour’ consciousness and aloofness of many Europeans in commerce and industry, and the continued employment of expatriate staff in posts for which locals could be trained. He reported to London that in this briefing he ‘spoke frankly about the changing attitude that has grown up recently towards Europeans ... and, since European commerce and industry in Fiji is almost entirely Australian, especially towards Australians’.⁷⁹

The events in Suva, Maddocks later wrote, were marked ‘for the first time in the history of the colony’ by a ‘short-lived alliance between the Indians and the Fijians against the Europeans’. Within a year ‘the traditional Fijian–European alliance had been restored’, due mainly to the influence of Fijian chiefs. But ‘it would be wrong’, he cautioned, ‘to imagine that

76 Maddocks to Secretary of State, 11 December 1959, NA CO1036/333.

77 Carl Hughes, personal communication, Suva, 3 August 1966.

78 James Heartfield, “‘The dark races against the light’? Official reaction to the 1959 Fiji riots’, *The Journal of Pacific History* 37, no. 1 (2002): 76, doi.org/10.1080/00223340120096242A.

79 Maddocks to Secretary of State, 16 May 1960, NA CO1036/720. Another source of resentment against European privilege was the continuing dominance of expatriate Europeans at senior levels of the civil service, restricting career advancement of locals (Leckie, *To labour with the state*, 38–47; Mamak, *Colour, culture and conflict*, 71–77).

[the Fijians] love the European ... [T]he individual European is judged upon his merits and all too often ... found wanting – largely because of the grasping attitude and the aloofness and colour consciousness of the representatives of Australian big business’:

The traditional alliance has become one of convenience, of mutual support against the Indian ... Beneath the friendly surface there is, particularly in the urban areas, a growing envy of the wealth and security of Europeans and if leading Fijians turned against Britain the spark that showed itself in December 1959 could quickly be fanned into flame.⁸⁰

The Impact of Decolonisation and Party Politics

Whatever potential there might have been for a bonding of Fijians and Indians in a shared resentment against Europeans was dampened by resurgence of tension between them from the early 1960s. This was initially provoked by a cane farmers’ harvesting strike against the CSR Co. The Indian strike leaders divided between militants and moderates and the stance of the militants escalated the confrontation, provoking the governor to deploy army reserves to protect farmers who wished to harvest. European and Fijian political leaders accused the militants of damaging the economy and seeking to control the industry.⁸¹ As the British took the first steps to end their colonial rule, the militants launched the Federation Party, based initially on cane farmers’ unions.

The prospect of the British leaving Fiji engendered Fijian apprehension, dramatically in evidence at a large rally of the Fijian Association early in 1961, chaired by Ratu Mara, on the roof of Suva’s Native Land Trust Board building. Speakers insisted that if British rule was to end, Fijian paramountcy must be preserved and Fijians alone must govern the country. The police special branch observer reported ‘a very strong anti-Indian atmosphere

80 Maddocks to Secretary of State, 28 February 1961, NA CO1036/774. In 1961–1963, leading Australian companies such as the CSR Co. and the Bank of NSW, responding to the racial tension and official concerns, began to recruit local people to office jobs that had been the preserve of Europeans.

81 On the harvesting strike see Lal, *Broken waves*, 169–80. The Fiji Intelligence Committee noted in its September 1960 report that anti-Indian feeling amongst Fijians ‘has grown tremendously, principally because of the cane dispute’ as many viewed the militants’ actions as indicating ambitions for economic and political power (NA CO1036/700).

throughout the meeting'.⁸² Fijian fears were strengthened by the Federation Party's call for a common franchise as the necessary foundation of an integrated democratic Fiji, an electoral reform that would end secure racial group representation. As the Federation Party leaders established branches throughout much of Fiji they focused on Indian political status interests. Fijian leaders encouraged their followers to oppose the party as a threat to Fiji's stability and to their land and political interests.

It was initially in Suva, the centre of decolonisation talks and preparations, that the new political rivalry, with its racial overtones, played out most strongly. The Federation Party established its Suva branch early in 1965 just before talks commenced in the city among political leaders to seek agreements in preparation for the first constitutional conference in London. The Federation Party leaders soon withdrew from the discussions in an atmosphere of tension and mistrust.⁸³ Their action provoked steps towards the formation of the Alliance Party whose leadership included Fijians, Europeans and Indians, with the Fijians and Europeans dominant and the Fijian Association its strongest popular base.



Figure 10.3: The Indian polling Centre in Suva during the elections for the Southern division, Suva 1963.

Source: M2134, National Archives of Fiji.

⁸² NAF C5/12/1; Hughes, 'Racial issues in Fiji', 359–66.

⁸³ Lal, *Broken waves*, 195–97.

The advent of the Federation Party in Suva tested the political potential in the interracial accommodation nurtured there. Would this middle-class milieu encourage Indian support for the Alliance Party? Urban moderatism was jarred by the new militancy honed in the industrial strife of the cane districts, and many Suva Indians initially viewed the Federation Party with apprehension as a threat to peaceful interracial relations. The party recruited its Suva office-bearers and workers mainly from among people outside multiracial society, of modest occupational status in the lower middle class, offering them new prestige and influence. It was soon attracting large crowds to its rallies by aggressive oratory against the colonial establishment of European officials and business leaders and Fijian chiefs, denouncing them for relegating Indians to the status of second-class citizens.

The Federation Party grew as an embodiment of Indian strength and pride, sometimes denouncing Indian opponents as traitors to their race. No Indian in Suva and its hinterland was willing to contest a communal seat for the Alliance Party in the general elections of 1966 when for the first time parties competed for influence in the legislature. In by-elections for the communal Indian seats in 1968 following a Federation Party boycott of the council, Alliance candidates in southeast Viti Levu received only 10 per cent of the votes against the Federation Party's 88 per cent. The Alliance failure to build substantial Indian support in Suva and its environs reflected the limited social penetration of the ethos of moderatism.

Yet the political rivalry did have some positive effect on race relations. The prominence given by the Federation Party to racial status issues persuaded the Alliance Party's European leaders and backers to relax club membership restrictions. There were invitations to selected prominent Indians to join the hitherto racially exclusive Fiji Club, Defence Club and Suva Golf Club, and fund-raising dinners and parties that were open to all. Though there was little positive effect on voter support for the Alliance Party, the strategy, as part of the discourse of multiracialism, helped further the erosion of old barriers in urban social life.

10. RACE RELATIONS IN COLONIAL SUVA, 1945–1970



Figure 10.4: Indian polling station outside Suva Sea Baths, 1966.

Source: Robert Norton. PMB photos 103-154.



Figure 10.5: Fijians go in to vote, in mourning dress after death of Ratu Mara's father, Suva 1966.

Source: Robert Norton. PMB photos 103-158.

Voluntary service associations such as Rotary and Jaycees, and Suva's municipal council, were also contexts in which interracial ties were nurtured in counterpoint to tensions of the political arena. An instance from my field notes illustrates this: cooperation on the city council between a Fijian deputy mayor and an Indian lawyer to persuade Fijian Methodist Church leaders to end street protests against merchants who wished to open their shops to cruise ship tourists on Sundays. The value the lawyer put on this social tie influenced his decision to resign from the Suva committee of the Federation Party and contest the 1966 Legislative Council elections as an independent candidate, stressing the need for cooperation with Fijian leaders.



Figure 10.6: Main figures, from left to right: Ratu Sir Edward Cakobau, Andrew Deoki, Aileen Regan and Douglas Brown, on candidates nomination day in Suva, 1966.

Source: Robert Norton. PMB photos 103-169.



Figure 10.7: Fijians assisting at the stall of an Indian candidate contesting in a multiracial ('cross voting') electorate, Suva, 1966.

Source: Robert Norton. PMB photos 103-157.

The concern of the new governor, Sir Derek Jakeway (1964–1968), to encourage interracial political cooperation was reflected in the scene Australia's first commissioner encountered on a private visit to Government House a few months before the elections. He found Jakeway immersed in preparing a guest list for the Queen's birthday garden party:

I was pleased to see ... that the governor was revising the list ... [In the past] one finds frequently a large preponderance of European guests and a remarkably small number of non-European guests ... The governor appears now to be in a mood to improve the balance.⁸⁴

Conclusion

The social changes of the 1950s put in sharp relief the racialist paternalism of the past. They were compelled by the war and its aftermath, particularly the changes in British colonial policy in response to pressures from the US and the UN. The postwar era had begun with a heightening of tension

84 Robert Hamilton to External Affairs, Canberra, 24 May 1966, NAA A1838 316/2/1/1 part 2.

opposing Europeans and Fijians to Indians. This eased as the feared push by the new India for radical political reform in Fiji did not eventuate and as the value of 'the races coming together' was affirmed in a variety of social contexts, from social and sports clubs to community service associations, local government councils and town festivals.

Bridging difference, getting happily together despite persisting divides in most of routine social life, began to slowly emerge as a shared middle-class value in urban society during the last two decades of the colonial era, encouraged by the multiracial social milieu of leaders in Suva. It was from the mid-1950s that the concept of a collective identity began to frequently appear in public discourse, especially in statements by the governor and other senior officials and urban festival speakers, and in editorials and articles in the *Fiji Times* – 'the people of Fiji', 'the citizens of Fiji', 'national identity', 'national consciousness'. This hopeful vision of a unified Fiji reflected the UN ideology pressing for transformation of colonies into self-governing nation-states.

The decade ended with a trend to solidarity among many Fijians and Indians in pursuit of shared class and status interests in opposition to European bosses, signalling the possibility of a radical shift in popular dispositions that the colonial establishment, official and non-official, had long feared. It was a social development, driven by urban migration and increasing wage employment, that encouraged a working-class consciousness with an anti-European edge in the trade union movement and industrial strikes. Occurring on the eve of preparations for self-government, a strike and riot in Suva provoked official efforts to persuade European-owned businesses to end longstanding racial discrimination in their recruitment policies.

Pressure from international events and authorities had influenced positive social change during the 1950s. In the 1960s new international political pressure brought both negative and positive trends in race relations. The potential for interracial labour unity, dramatically evident in the Suva strike and riot, was soon outweighed by a resurgence of Fijian–Indian tensions provoked by the advent of decolonisation and party politics. There was a return to conflict and enmity that had marred the early postwar years, but now arising from contending political ambitions and demands amid the uncertainties of radical constitutional change. On the other hand, pressure on leaders, particularly Alliance Party leaders, to build multiracial electoral support reinforced efforts to soften racial barriers in social relations in Suva and other towns.

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