

Introduction: Reclaiming Suva

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‘Welcome to Suva – the capital city of Fiji’, reads the banner as you drive into the metropolis. Lautoka advertises itself to the world as the ‘Sugar City’, Nadi as the ‘Jet-Set Town’, Sigatoka as the ‘Salad Bowl’ and Labasa as the ‘Friendly North’. But Suva, being Suva, sees no need to advertise its wares and attractions to the world. It is, simply, the ‘capital city’ of the nation. It has been so since 1882 when the capital of the then British colony moved from Levuka. Home now to over 93,000 people, both longtime residents as well as recently arrived migrants, it is a microcosm of modern Fiji: multicultural, vibrant, resilient, still standing strong despite all the challenges that nature and humans have thrown at it over the decades. Suva remains a special place in a special nation.

It is also a place that defies easy description. How you first ‘see’ Suva depends on how you enter it. First impressions of Suva are shaped by the mode of arrival. Those privileged enough to fly across the island of Viti Levu will cross the Navōsā and Namosi Highlands before descending to the fertile delta of the Rewa River. To the west of the river mouth, across Laucala Bay, a hilly peninsula juts out from the mainland, a mix of verdant green vegetation, roads that snake like arteries across the land, and tin roofs of all colours, shapes and sizes. Those who approach from the sea enter Suva Harbour from the south, sighting Joske’s Thumb protruding from the mountains that silhouette the city and passing the graveyard of shipwrecks at the break in the reef. This deep-water harbour has made Suva a lucrative location for commercial activity – once crowded with the sails of native *drua* and *camakau* watercraft, today populated by fishing trawlers and shipping container vessels. Oil slicks and rubbish decorate the shoreline of concrete walls and mangrove forest. Those who travel by

road will see that the settlements increase in number and stature the nearer they approach the city centre. Stuck in crowded buses on congested roads, travellers may gaze at the urban sprawl of the Suva–Nausori corridor, a vast suburbia of makeshift and modern housing encroaching on farmland. Others may travel from the mountains of Namosi or Naitāsiri, descending through the cool climate of the protected Colo-i-Suva rainforest to sell their produce at the bustling waterfront market. Some may gaze across the harbour to nearby Beqa Island as they travel on the Queens Road, crawling through Lami town traffic, past the unsightly industrial areas on the outskirts of the city, passing the old cemetery of Lovonilase and the whitewashed walls of the jail. Older Suva residents will recall the smell of the Suva dump at Naibenubenu that once greeted travellers on this road but has since been relocated to accommodate the growing city.

For those parents bringing their children from the *koro* (village) to Suva for the first time, it is possible to imagine their shock and surprise at the contrast. The hustle and bustle of crowded pavements, the energetic marketplace, the loud noises of shopfront speakers and taxi horns and the unfamiliar fashions and faces. Childhood memories of Suva may recall the pungent smells of the fish market by Nubukalou Creek, the belching smog of buses at the central bus stand, the whiffs of shoe polish from the shoeshine boys, perfumes sold by the ladies on their street stalls, and aromatic hot buns from the tea houses and coffee shops. On rainy days, travellers seek refuge in a bowl of hot meaty bone soup, or an Indian curry or Chinese noodle dish. On sunny days, relief can be found under a flame tree by the water, or on the open expanse of Albert Park, or at the shaded park benches of Thurston Gardens or even on a breezy seaside ride on the bright green Nasēsē bus.

Officially, Suva is the commercial and political centre of Fiji, but for the everyday Fijian, it is a meeting place. A space to welcome families and friends at the docks and the bus stands, a space to gather at the sports grounds to cheer a favourite team, a space to meet for business (or to stand in a queue for a bank statement, a certificate, a licence), a space to meet for pleasure in the clubs and kava bars, or simply a place to *talanoa* (swap stories and chat). A favourite location for this dialogue is under the shade of an aging Tahitian chestnut tree. Others may see Suva as a gateway, the departure point for boats to other islands. Suva is also the arrival point for opportunities that cannot be found in the villages and rural towns – the pursuit of education or employment continues to underscore the rural–

urban migration that grows the city of Suva year after year. This migration encourages new relationships and encounters between different peoples, which results in new lifestyles, new associations and groupings, new attitudes and aspirations, which are then transmitted back to the villages.

This collection is an attempt to document the rapid transformation and expansion of Suva from an indigenous village, to a colonial hub, to bustling metropolis. Such a project has not been attempted for some time – efforts have been made to document pieces of Suva's history by residents, businessmen and government officials. Their names will be familiar to those who have searched the libraries for information about the city – Suva town mayor Len Usher, European educator and historian RA Derrick and linguistics professor Albert Schütz of Hawai'i. Schütz's 1978 history is the last book dedicated solely to the town and it urgently needs updating.¹ With a rich history comparable to the larger urban centres of Honolulu in Hawai'i and Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea,² it is surprising that a collection of Suva's histories has yet to be produced.

Shaping the Land

Situated on an undulating peninsula on the east coast of Viti Levu, one of the Fiji group's 300 islands, Suva is a maritime city. Walu Bay was once named for its vibrant fish population, sustaining local villages of fishermen until colonial visitors identified the potential of its deep-water harbour for commercial benefit. In the mid-nineteenth century, settlers of the Polynesia Company began establishing themselves near the mouth of Nubukalou Creek where there was a natural break in the mangroves. The soapstone cliffs and high average rainfall, comparative to other parts of the island, made colonial experiments in agriculture difficult – coffee, cotton and sugarcane were grown, and a crushing mill established at Naiqai, but it did not last. Livestock was also farmed on the areas cleared of vegetation, but it was the colonial buildings and roads that would eventually dominate the landscape as the settlement expanded and became a busy entrepot in the British Pacific colonial empire. Nubukalou

1 Albert J Schütz, *Suva: A history and guide* (Sydney: Pacific Publications, 1978).

2 Ian Stuart, *Port Moresby: Yesterday and today* (Sydney: Pacific Publications 1970); Gavan Daws and Bennett Hymer (eds), *Honolulu stories: Voices of the town through the years: Two centuries of writing* (Honolulu: Mutual Pub., 2008); N.D. Oram, *Colonial Town to Melanesian City: Port Moresby 1884–1974* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1976).

Creek remains at the heart of Suva city centre, one of five wards maintained by Suva City Council today.³ Rural–urban migration since the 1950s has expanded the city well beyond the peninsula. Today the Greater Suva Urban Area comprises 4,000 hectares and includes Lami, Nasinu and Nausori towns.⁴ Once considered the outskirts of Suva town, some of these areas have more residents than Suva itself, which recorded a population of 93,874 in the 2017 Census.⁵

Roughly 3,000 years ago, the first humans occupied the Fiji Islands. While it is possible they landed on the Suva peninsula, archaeological evidence suggests other areas of Fiji were settled first. Some Fijian myths of origin attributed spiritual significance to the Nakauvadra Range, the home of the creator spirit Degei.⁶ Later, people from the hill country of Viti Levu established fortified settlements on top of the Suva peninsula's steep ridges, while fishers settled in or near what is now called Walu Bay. When Europeans arrived in the early nineteenth century, they observed a large human settlement that stretched from present-day Albert Park to the Nasova Police Barracks. This was the combined village of Suva, and Europeans later referred to the central area now occupied by the Fiji Museum and Thurston Gardens as the 'Native Reserve' or Naiqasiqasi. The first curator of the Fiji Museum, Coleman Wall, attributes the name 'Suva' to a mound on which a temple stood – inside the temple was a sacred stone used for chiefly installations.⁷ What happened to the stone is unclear. Much of the village was destroyed during the Bau–Rewa War of 1843, when Christian missionaries recorded the ransacking of the village and massacre of its people. This was a precursor to further marginalisation of the Suva people as European expansion eventually forced the relocation of the villagers to Narikoso, which was named Suvavou (translated as 'New Suva').

3 The others being Tamavua, Extension, Samabula and Muanikau: suvacity.org/our-city/.

4 UN-Habitat, *Fiji: Greater Suva urban profile* (Nairobi: UN-Habitat, 2012).

5 Fiji Bureau of Statistics, *2017 Fiji population and housing census: Administration report* (Suva: Fiji Bureau of Statistics 2018), 146. Since 2007, the population of Nasinu has exceeded Suva. See Appendix 1.

6 Aubrey Parke, *Degei's descendants: Spirits, place and people in pre-cession Fiji*, ed. Matthew Spriggs and Deryck Scarr (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014).

7 Colman Wall, 'Sketches in Fijian history', *Transactions of the Fijian Society* (1919); Colman Wall, 'Historical notes on Suva', ed. Paul Geraghty, *Domodomo* 10, no. 2 (1996): 28–39; 11, no. 2 (1997): 15–37; 12, no. 2 (1999): 49–58.



Figure 0.1: ‘Native village near Suva’, n.d.

Note: This was presumably Suvavou. Archival record notes ‘wife of chief on right’.

Source: Burton Brothers, Dunedin, NZ. Andrew, Thomas, 1855–1939: Fijian photographs. Ref: PA7-01-08-2. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. natlib.govt.nz/records/22304049.

The efforts by the Suvavou people to assert their rights to the land of Suva since then has been a consistent attempt to reclaim a history dominated by colonial forces. The arrival of the Polynesia Company in the mid-nineteenth century marked a period in which Suva land was acquired and transformed by white settlers. Like other parts of Fiji, the transfer of land at this time was poorly documented and regulated, and Europeans used this situation to their advantage. The British Colonial Government, which gained control of Fiji in 1874 when a number of chiefs signed a Deed of Cession, saw an opportunity to buy the land from the Polynesia Company to establish a new capital. When the capital was relocated from Levuka to Suva in 1882, the inhabitants of Suva were moved to the Suvavou site and paid compensation of £200 annually. Subsequent government claims that the people were fairly compensated have since been disputed, first by the Roko Tui Suva Ratu Avorosa in 1898 and more recently by the Tui Suva, Ratu Epeli Kanakana in the 1990s. They point to the absence of a formal deed or written agreement as evidence of this dubious arrangement. Kanakana’s efforts resulted in a 222-page report

titled *Suva State Land: 'Land of My Fathers'*.⁸ Anthropologist Hirokazu Miyazaki's ethnographic study of Suvavou in the 1990s argued that apart from monetary gain, the long series of petitions by the Suvavou people 'represent an enduring hope to confirm their self-knowledge, the truth about who they really are'.⁹ These claims continue to this day, most recently when the Suvavou village reasserted their rights as traditional custodians of the land to prevent the rezoning of an area near the Fiji Museum for the construction of an embassy.¹⁰

Suva has been the site of another form of reclamation since Europeans marked it for their capital. As European expansion of the town began, the land was subsequently shaped and remoulded. Forests were felled, mangroves were cleared, rivers were dredged and soil was piled upon the shores to make way for the development of colonial enterprise. Much of the land may now be unrecognisable from its original state. Muanikau, a point named for its thick tree line, was cleared for farmland, and has since become lucrative real estate for suburbs close to the city centre. The shoreline from Nubukalou Creek to Thurston Gardens was slowly reclaimed over time, first at the site of the original markets (present-day Westpac Bank) and then at Ratu Sukuna Park and Suva Grammar School. In the central business district a few lone *ivi* trees are all that remains of the original shoreline, markers of an ancient coast now covered by concrete and rock. Reclamation work continues today in the capital. On the other side of the peninsula in the suburbs of Vatuwaqa, mangroves are cleared to provide space for the expanding urban population. This reclamation has prompted a counter-reclamation, as concerned residents attempt to repossess and restore natural space from the urban sprawl. This includes individual efforts to plant gardens for subsistence, or more coordinated efforts to plant mangroves along the My Suva Park shoreline or clean the polluted waters of Suva Harbour. Some reports indicate that 66 per cent of fish in the area now contain microplastics.¹¹

8 Anare Matahau and Associates, *Suva state land: 'Land of my fathers'* (Suva: Anare Matahau and Associates, 1991).

9 Hirokazu Miyazaki, *The method of hope: Anthropology, philosophy, and Fijian knowledge* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 3.

10 In 2019, the Suva City Council proposed rezoning the vacant area next to the Fiji Museum in order to relocate the Indian High Commission. The people of Suvavou delivered a petition opposing the rezoning, and after much public opposition, the proposal was quietly abandoned. This case is one of a number of rezoning and building regulation reforms since the 2000s that threaten to change the face and character of Suva.

11 Tifa Vataiki, 'Serious concerns raised as research shows microplastic in fish and other seafood sources in Fiji', *Fijivillage*, 2 July 2020, www.fijivillage.com/news/Serious-concerns-raised-as-research-shows-microplastic-in-fish-and-other-seafood-sources-in-Fiji-58f4xr/.



Figure 0.2: Suva Harbour, n.d.

Source: P32.4.141 Fiji Museum.



Figure 0.3: A view of Suva Harbour and Queen's Wharf, n.d.

Source: P32.4.30 Fiji Museum.



Figure 0.4: ‘Indian at Suva Street, 1970’.

Source: M6745 National Archives of Fiji.

This edited collection may also be considered a modest form of reclamation, an attempt to redress the imbalances in Fiji’s history and expand the breadth of knowledge of Suva beyond a narrow colonial focus. Though the British have played a significant role in shaping the capital from 1882 until formal Independence in 1970, their contribution has been well documented. Suva is replete with reminders of colonial rule, from the streets named after European officials or planters, to the buildings and memorials they left behind. Sir Leonard Usher, a New Zealand-born teacher who later became editor of the *Fiji Times* and mayor of Suva (1966–1976), was one of the members of the Fiji Society who documented the origins of these names.¹² Many of these streets began as simple walkways, and the motor car was a novelty when it arrived in 1904. Foot traffic may explain why the layout of the town’s pathways resembles a *koro*, with roads going to and from the centre, but not usually

12 Len Usher, *Mainly about Fiji: A collection of writings, broadcasts and speeches* (Suva: Fiji Times, 1987); Len Usher, *50 years in Fiji* (Suva: Shell, 1978); JJ McHugh, ‘Recollections of early Suva’, *Fiji Society of Science and Industry* (19 July 1943): 210–14; Albert E Ward, ‘Old land marks of Suva’, *Transactions and Proceedings of the Fiji Society of Science and Industry* 2 (1953): 215–17; Albert Lee, *Historical notes on the city of Suva with particular reference to the central business district* (Suva: National Archives of Fiji, 1974); Albert Lee, *Historical notes on the city of Suva supplement* (Suva: National Archives of Fiji, 1984).

passing through it.¹³ Less well known is the contribution of indentured labourers to the construction of the roads. Melanesian and Indian indentured labourers who were brought to Fiji to make it a profitable sugar colony in the late nineteenth century were also used in Suva's early earthworks and construction. Suva was the first point of arrival for the Indian indentured labourers (*girmitiya*), their boats depositing them on the island of Nukulau to be registered and reallocated across Fiji between 1879 and 1916. They became a valuable and sizable proportion of the population of Suva, with the government creating a new subdivision in the 1930s at Samabula for them.

A focus on Suva's colonial history also risks overlooking the lives of ordinary Fijians in favour of major political players and events. It is tempting to focus on the political implications of Suva's place as the capital of Fiji. It contains the Parliament, the High Court, the headquarters of most ministries. It is the political centre of national decision-making, home to most of the country's public servants, its ministers, the prime minister and president. It is also home to the major educational and training institutions such as the University of the South Pacific and the Fiji National University and the major newspapers, so it is home to influential opinion-makers. Kim Gravelle's volumes of Fiji history based on the *Fiji Times* highlights some of the key political moments in Suva.¹⁴ Ralph Premdas and Jeffrey Stevens observed similar characteristics in the city of Port Moresby, which they observed to be 'the meeting place and melting pot of the best of PNG's [Papua New Guinea's] leadership'.¹⁵ What constitutes the 'best' leadership is a subjective issue considering Suva has been the site of four coups d'état, two in 1987, then in 2000 and in 2006. Yet Suva's character is not defined by its political elite. It is quite the opposite, argues historian Brij V Lal. Though a series of coups reasserted the power of a few over the masses, the historical conditions that led to the coups reflected a changing attitude to traditional chiefly power, as more urban residents questioned the customary authority of Fijian chiefs.¹⁶

13 John O'Carroll, 'Multiple cities: Suva and the (post)colonial', *Dreadlocks in Oceania*, 1 (1997): 26–42.

14 Kim Gravelle, *Fiji's times: A history of Fiji*, vols 1–3 (Suva: Fiji Times 1979).

15 Ralph R Premdas and Jeffrey S Stevens, *Electoral politics in a third world city: Port Moresby 1977* (Konedobu: University of Papua New Guinea 1978), 1.

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

Our collective knowledge of the everyday lives of Suva residents is surprisingly limited. Much remains stored in oral traditions or family memorabilia, as well as a rich and vibrant archive of newspapers, in the English language and multiple vernaculars. Anurag Subramani's recent history of the English-language publication the *Fiji Times* is an example of this revisionist turn towards a 'people's history' of Fiji that can provide a more local and personal view of the lives of ordinary Fijians.¹⁷ A vast archive of images also awaits the intrepid researcher seeking a more humane view of Suva. Once hidden within Suva institutions like the *Fiji Times*, the Fiji Museum and the National Archives of Fiji, increasingly images are finding their way into online spaces where they can be shared and scrutinised.¹⁸ They complement a large digital archive of Fijian images stored in Australia and New Zealand, and a number of photographic histories of Fiji.¹⁹ The majority of images reproduced in this volume were chosen from the Fiji Museum and National Archives of Fiji to draw attention to the less visible historical collections available to Suva residents. Admittedly, early photography of Suva reflects the colonial bias of its photographers. Images of city architecture and official portraits are more common than informal settlements or minority ethnic groups, which included Indians, Rotumans, Chinese, Melanesians and Part-Europeans (*kailomas*), the populations of which fluctuated over time in Suva (see Appendix 1). Images of marketplaces are one of the few glimpses we have of the ordinary lives of people in Suva, particularly of women, who are oft overlooked in the archive. Still today, marketplaces play a central role in Suva life bringing people from all walks of life together.

17 Anurag Subramani, *The Fiji Times at 150: Imagining the Fijian nation (or, a scrapbook of Fiji's history)* (Suva: Fiji Times, forthcoming).

18 The Fiji Museum created a 'virtual museum' on its website (virtual.fijimuseum.org.fj/), while the National Archives of Fiji has relied on Facebook to share some of its photographic images (Opeta Alefaio, 'Archives Connecting with the Community', paper presented at the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, World Library and Information Congress, 'Connections. Collaboration. Community', Session 96: Asia and Oceania, Columbus, Ohio, 9–19 August 2016).

19 The Pacific Virtual Museum pilot project developed a search engine for Pacific archival and library collections in 2020 (digitalpasifik.org/). See also Elsie Stephenson, *Fiji's past on picture postcards* (Suva: Caines Jannif Group, 1997); Ian Thomson, Peter Thomson and Rob Wright, *Fiji in the forties and fifties* (Auckland: Thomson Pacific, 1994); Max Quanchi and Max Shekleton, *An ideal colony and epitome of progress: Colonial Fiji in picture postcards* (Suva: University of the South Pacific Press, 2019).

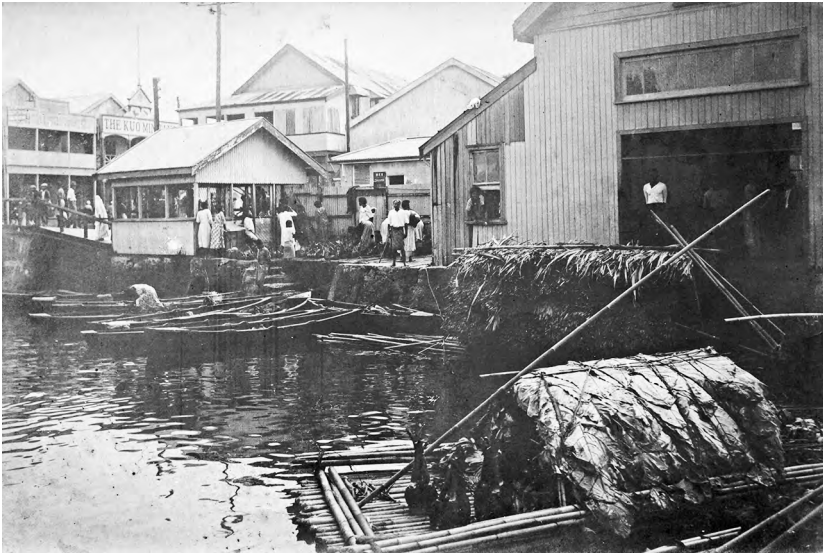


Figure 0.5: Nubukalou Creek, n.d.

Source: P32.6.25 Fiji Museum.



Figure 0.6: Women at a market, Suva, 1939.

Source: Whites Aviation Ltd: Photographs. Ref: WA-03291-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. natlib.govt.nz/records/30663265.



Figure 0.7: Vegetable market in Suva, 1950.

Source: Whites Aviation Ltd: Photographs. Ref: WA-24823-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. natlib.govt.nz/records/23226746.



Figure 0.8: Indian women in Suva, 1949.

Source: 2505 National Archives of Fiji.



Figure 0.9: A garment shop, Suva, n.d.

Source: P32.4.91 Fiji Museum.

Shaping the City

What shaped the development of Suva from a colonial town to a multicultural city? Colonial records highlight attempts by British officials to control, shape and mould the growth of the urban area from the early twentieth century. In fact, as the headquarters of the Western Pacific High Commission from 1882 to 1952, Suva was the location where much of the British Pacific Empire was governed. The majority of government buildings were sited close to the wharves and trading houses, reflecting the importance of trade in the colonial entrepot. Over time, the wooden buildings that were constructed by colonial settlers along Nubukalou Creek were gradually replaced by larger, sturdier ones that were more resistant to extreme weather or fire. One notable example was a group of wooden buildings on All-Nations Street (now known as Cumming Street) that once hosted the main market for the town since it moved from behind the old post office on the harbourfront in 1904. Most of the buildings were destroyed in a fire in 1923 that subsequently forced a reorganisation of the fire brigade and prompted new regulations that all new commercial buildings were to be made of stone, brick or concrete.²⁰

²⁰ Lee, *Historical notes on the city of Suva: Supplement*.

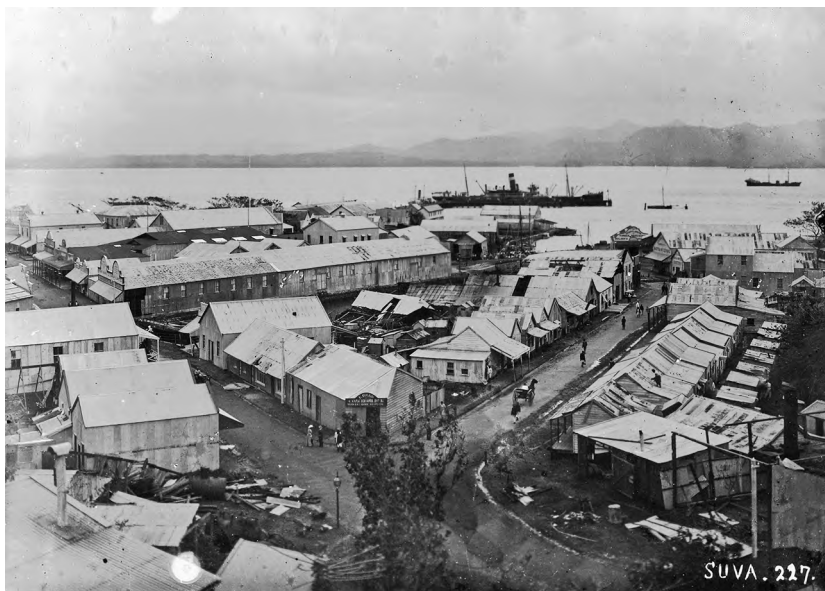


Figure 0.10: Suva town, n.d.

Source: P32.4.94 Fiji Museum.



Figure 0.11: Suva town, n.d.

Source: P32.6.6 Fiji Museum.

As early as the 1910s, cruise ships from Australia, New Zealand and the United States began visiting Suva with regularity. The construction of the iconic Grand Pacific Hotel opposite Albert Park in 1914 was symbolic of the importance tourism would gradually begin to play in Suva, and Fiji more generally. By the 1930s, up to 700 tourists would disembark from a single cruise ship. The Suva they encountered was carefully staged, segregated and regulated. Non-whites needed licences to drink alcohol or to perform dances, and were subject to strict curfews.²¹

Despite these careful controls, Suva's growth was often spontaneous, accidental or indirect – records of Suva's prisons and courts show that people were constantly testing, stretching and breaking the rules that were in place. This is typical of many metropolitan areas of the Global South according to AbdouMaliq Simone's history of Jakarta.²² Informal networks and processes frequently challenged colonial conformism and planning. Through a process of opportunism that Simone terms 'incrementalism', residents test the water of what is possible to create their own spaces or territories within cities.²³ This involves manoeuvring around authorities and regulations to engage in diverse initiatives, and negotiating relationships with neighbours who have competing claims, skills and aspirations. For example, James Whitelaw noted that in the 1950s 'hawker' licences were issued in a vain attempt to regulate the growth of vendors who walked the city streets to sell their wares for tourists or sell lunches to office workers. Other informal commercial enterprises that emerged were 'barrow boys' who used mobile glass-covered handcarts to sell food and sweets at the fringes of formal markets, office buildings and public events.²⁴ Simone believes these informal enterprises are responsible for shaping cities:

Through a continuous process of give-and-take and the interweaving of small and large initiatives that incrementally transformed built and social environments, residents elaborated spaces adept at keeping up with the changes underway in the larger city by generating new opportunities for accumulation, employment, and livelihood.²⁵

21 See Nicholas Halter, 'Tourists fraternising in Fiji in the 1930s', *Journal of Tourism History* 12, no. 1 (2020): 27–47, doi.org/10.1080/1755182X.2019.1682688.

22 AbdouMaliq Simone, *Jakarta: Drawing the city near* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), doi.org/10.5749/minnesota/9780816693351.001.0001.

23 Simone, *Jakarta*, 92–101.

24 James Sutherland Whitelaw, 'People, land and government in Suva, Fiji' (PhD thesis, The Australian National University, 1966), 118.

25 Simone, *Jakarta*, 109.

The search for housing in the rapidly growing city was another avenue in which residents and authorities negotiated new spaces and regulations. When Suva was proclaimed a city in 1956, its population had increased to 37,371.²⁶ This postwar growth and migration concerned town planners and authorities, who observed opportunistic informal settlements emerging on native land, such as Tacirua. They established a Housing Authority two years later to address the pressures caused by population growth. The first public housing was constructed in the suburb of Raiwaqa, and the homes were ready by 1959.²⁷ As the city expanded, new formal settlements were established in the peri-urban areas. This first began with the subdivision of Samabula for Indians in the 1930s. There were also longstanding *koros* that were formally recognised by the government at Tamavua and Kalabu. These settlements were shaped around the basic outlines of a village, but over time their members grew to include Fijians from different parts of Fiji.²⁸ Tamavua featured a large *bure* and was visited by organised tours from the city for its traditional Fijian food and dances, while Kalabu was predominantly Indian. Crown land was subdivided by the Lands Department to implement low-income housing projects at settlements along the Kings Road between Suva and Nausori, such as Caubati, Kinoya and Nasole. On the Queens Road, native land in Lami was subdivided from 1951, with people attracted by its views and sea breezes. Nearby were settlements occupied by other Pacific Islanders, including a large number of descendants of the Solomon and New Hebridean labourers at Wailoku and Kalekana. The stories of these emerging settlements and suburbs are largely preserved in the memories of their residents, and only a few have documented their urban lives in writing. Indigenous anthropologist Rusiate Nayacakalou was one of the first to conduct fieldwork in urban iTaukei communities in the early 1960s, and former civil servant and soldier Manu Korovulavula has written about his experiences growing up in Toorak in the 1940s.²⁹

26 Whitelaw, 'People, land and government in Suva, Fiji'.

27 Joseph Veramu, *Growing up in Fiji* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1984); Alexander Mamak, *Colour, culture & conflict: A study of pluralism in Fiji* (Rushcutters Bay: Pergamon Press, 1978).

28 Whitelaw explained that 'official' koros were located on their own land and were recognised by the Fijian Affairs Board.

29 RR Nayacakalou, 'The urban Fijians of Suva', in *Pacific port towns and cities*, ed. Alexander Spoehr (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1963), 34. Less well known is an unpublished manuscript in the Pacific Collection of USP that contains a survey commissioned by the Colonial Government in the 1950s: Ravuama Vunivalu and WL Verrier, *A social survey of Fijians in Suva* (Suva: 1959); Manunivalagi Korovulavula, *Gone ni Turaki* (Nasinu: Manu Korovulavula Publisher, 2011).



Figure 0.12: Tamavua, n.d.

Source: P32.5.62 Fiji Museum.

Unexpected natural disasters could also force sudden changes to the urban landscape. On 29 January 1952, Suva was battered by a cyclone with winds recorded at 213 kilometres per hour at Laucala Bay.³⁰ Many buildings were destroyed and government plans to build the village of Nabua in 1951 were fast-tracked to assist those left homeless – 100 acres of land next to the military camp and 60 dwellings were built over the next four years.³¹ The following year, on 14 September 1953 at 12:28 pm, an earthquake resulted in a tsunami that broke across the Suva foreshore. Len Usher recalled the earthquake lasted for half a minute, and water flowed out of Suva Harbour before returning and washing over the sea wall, covering Albert Park. People picked up fish left stranded on the foreshore. In the aftermath, three people were killed, and significant damage was caused to the Kings Wharf, Lami seawall, Nukulau, Makuluva and the Fijian village of Nukui on the Rewa River.³² Suva has been relatively fortunate

30 JR Campbell, *Dealing with disaster: Hurricane response in Fiji* (Honolulu: Pacific Islands Development Program, East-West Center, 1984), 9.

31 Whitelaw, 'People, land and government in Suva, Fiji', 204.

32 Usher, *Mainly about Fiji*. There is reference to another earthquake and tidal wave when Suva's main reef cracked on 15 September 1955: Thomson, Thomson and Wright, *Fiji in the forties and fifties*.

compared to the rest of the country to have avoided major natural disasters, with the exception of the events of 1952/53, and the Category 5 Cyclone Winston in 2016. However, environmental factors have consistently played an understated role in shaping the development of the city. Tropical storms necessitate the regular reconstruction and renovation of buildings and infrastructure in the capital, and residents are constantly adapting to changes in their built and natural environments. This is most clearly visible in the settlements by the ocean, where the effects of climate change cause gradual sea-level rise, or more sudden storm surges, that force residents to be ready to move if required. Global environmental changes will undoubtedly shape the city of Suva in the future.

Government efforts to mitigate the pressures caused by rural–urban migration and respond to the negative effects of urbanisation in Suva have struggled. Unofficial settlements began to emerge in response to restrictive British colonial policies for establishing formal settlements, and their growth was accelerated by the non-renewal of agricultural leases under the Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act (1977) since the mid-1990s and post-coup economic downturns.³³ Estimates of informal settlements in Fiji vary. In 2016, an estimate of 220 informal settlements argued most of them were in Suva.³⁴ A more conservative estimate by UN-Habitat identified over 100 settlements in the Greater Suva Urban Area. These were home to 90,000 residents who made up 30 per cent of the area's population.³⁵ Suva is not yet at the scale of some Melanesian cities, but its growing peri-urban populations and overwhelmingly young demographic resembles Melanesian urbanisation trends. The continued presence of these informal populations reminds us of the power of the masses to shape a city, and the ineffectiveness of the state to effect all the controls and reforms it desires. Suva has been the site of organised protest and resistance in the Pacific, most notably the 1959 oil workers' strike that culminated in rioting in Suva, and the antinuclear activism of the 1970s and 80s. More recently, citizen ratepayer organisations have emerged, in particular in Tamavua and Flagstaff, in response to illegal developments and overdevelopment in areas close to the city centre. They voice concerns

33 Vijay Naidu et al., 'Informal settlements and social inequality in Fiji: Evidence of serious policy gaps', *Journal of Pacific Studies* 35, no. 1 (2015): 27–46.

34 A Penjueli, '220 squatter settlements across Fiji, majority in Suva', *NewsWire Focus*, 10 February 2016, newswire.internet.com.fj/community/220-squatter-settlements-across-fiji-majority-in-suva.

35 UN-Habitat, *Fiji: Greater Suva urban profile*, 26.

about lack of control over urban development since elected municipal councils were abolished in 2009 and replaced with unelected officials.³⁶ Willard Miller of Ellis Place, Suva, wrote in the *Fiji Times* in 2020:

Unelected administrators listen to our complaints and try to placate us if possible but have made promises they don't keep since all local government officials are now first and foremost answerable to their minister, not us.³⁷

Suva's population growth also had many positive implications for the future of the city. The multicultural nature of the city has fostered a vibrant and diverse community, evident in the variety of cultural arts, music, food, architecture, dress and lifestyles. Community groups play a vital role in the operation of schools and churches in Suva and have shown great solidarity in times of crisis. Suva has hosted a number of memorable community events and celebrations in the capital. One of the oldest annual urban traditions is the Miss Hibiscus pageants, established in 1956.³⁸ Another annual celebration is the commemoration of Fiji's independence from Britain, which took place at Albert Park on 10 October 1970. Suva was also the major centre for national and regional sporting fixtures, and was notable for hosting some of the earliest regional events. Len Usher recalled the excitement of the first South Pacific conference in Suva in 1950, when the delegates found shared commonalities 'in the dining rooms and recreation halls, in the dormitories, on the verandahs and lawns ... and in the homes of Fijians in Suva'.³⁹ It was followed by the first South Pacific Games in Suva in 1963 and the first South Pacific Festival of Arts in 1972, which lasted for 15 days at Albert Park. At the South Pacific Games closing ceremony, teams marched as one, not as national groups, as Usher recalled:

The mixing-up procedure was not a new one in international games, but this was a South Pacific first, with strong and stirring overtones of the rebirth of a regional unity with deep emotional roots.⁴⁰

36 Sally Round, 'Motion for local elections defeated in Fiji parliament', *Radio New Zealand*, 3 April 2019, www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/386256/motion-for-local-elections-defeated-in-fiji-parliament.

37 Willard Miller, 'Taxation without representation', *The Fiji Times*, 14 November 2020, www.pressreader.com/fiji/the-fiji-times/20201114/281676847442554.

38 Claus Bossen, 'Festival mania, tourism and nation building in Fiji: The case of the Hibiscus Festival, 1956—1970', *The Contemporary Pacific* (2000): 123–54, doi.org/10.1353/cp.2000.0006.

39 Usher, *Mainly about Fiji*, 136.

40 Usher, *Mainly about Fiji*, 139–40.

This sentiment would underpin the regional institutions that were created in Suva, namely the University of the South Pacific (established in 1968) and the South Pacific Forum (established in 1971).

Though British colonial authorities regarded Fiji as racially divided, a history of Suva that describes the city according to ethnicity risks reinforcing a colonial assumption. Again, Simone's work on cities is helpful here. He argues that relationships and networks in cities are not based on ethnicity or politics or identity: 'The basis of similarity rests not in people's identities but in what people are trying to do.'⁴¹ This may explain better why different districts or suburbs have specific genealogies that are not necessarily along homogenous ethnic lines. Suva suburbs today are characterised by a mixture of incomes, occupations, residential histories, attitudes and beliefs. For this reason, separating spaces according to class is also problematic. Instead, Simone refers to the 'urban majority' as those who live in the in-between spaces of the rich, poor and middle classes.⁴² This is particularly relevant for Suva because it is a place for many who may not fit within a particular group or conform to a conventional lifestyle, and who seek refuge in the urban realm – the elderly, non-indigenous Fijians, religious minorities, the LGBTIQ+ community, informal settlers. For this reason, this collection presents stories of Suva that broaden the history of the city to include the urban majority.

The Authors

Authors were sought from a range of professions and backgrounds, unified by their interest in a shared local past. The chapters presented here are a varied combination of personal reflections and archival research, capturing episodes in Suva's history from its indigenous beginnings to the present. The evolving urban landscape of Suva means that no single book can adequately describe every aspect of its history, but it is hoped this humble collection brings together a number of unique perspectives that add to existing knowledge of the city.

The chapters are grouped into three parts. Part 1 explores the foundation of Suva, beginning with the origins of the indigenous people of Fiji and their displacement to make room for a capital in the late nineteenth century.

⁴¹ Simone, *Jakarta*, 90.

⁴² Simone, *Jakarta*, 85.

Paul Geraghty's detailed account of Suva oral traditions highlights the development of the village and the impact of the Bau–Rewa War of 1843. Max Quanchi focuses on the Melbourne-owned Polynesia Company and its efforts to acquire land on the peninsula, examining the lives, successes and failures of the early settlers. Robert Nicole follows with a detailed social history of the capital's early years, with particular focus on the contribution of iTaukei, Indian and Melanesian communities who have been obscured by history. Simione Sevudredre considers the importance of music to iTaukei culture and history, and the ways in which communities have preserved and adapted musical traditions. Anurag Subramani presents glimpses of personal stories from Suva recorded in the *Fiji Times* based on his exhaustive research of Fiji's oldest newspaper. The stories of Dwarka – the so-called 'Prince of Thieves' – and Thomas Le Clair De Francoeur around the turn of the twentieth century highlight the rich archive of the *Fiji Times* and the importance of the 'scraps of history'.

Part 2 explores the development of Suva under British colonial rule in the twentieth century and the creation of new institutions and divisions. Nicholas Halter and Jacqueline Leckie provide histories of Suva's first jail and mental asylum, institutions whose occupants have been stigmatised and overlooked in the past. Kate Stevens explores how women and children responded to violence in Suva's streets and homes, as viewed through the colonial records of the Supreme Court. The division of Fiji's population into races by the British colonial administration had lasting and unintended consequences for the development and segregation of Suva. This is explored by Robert Norton over a 25-year period from the end of World War II to Fiji's Independence. These racial divisions had implications for the education system in Fiji, highlighted by Christine Weir's study of three colonial Suva Methodist schools, namely Dudley House School, Suva Methodist Boys' School and Ballantine School. Another major educational establishment in Suva, the University of the South Pacific, is explored by Jacqueline Leckie who recounts its rich history as the leading tertiary institution in the region for over 50 years.

Part 3 consists of an eclectic mix of reflections and reminiscences by Suva residents who consider aspects of Suva that mean the most to them. In this section uniformity was deliberately avoided and each author was free to write along the lines they wished. Kaliopate Tavola, from the island of Dravuni, reflects on major events in Suva and their implications for his own family members, framing his narrative around the idea of swimming under the *ivi* tree, a geographical marker in the centre of Suva

city. Daryl Tarte considers what Suva looked like in the 1940s and 50s when he was a student at Boys Grammar School. Kantilal Jinna recalls the streets, sounds and sights of Suva as a young boy growing up in an Indian family in Flagstaff around the same time. Larry Thomas makes an important contribution to an often overlooked sector of the city – the arts. His account weaves together his memories of Raiwaqa and his experiences in the dramatic arts. Anawaite Matadradra considers the history of the Melanesian minority community that were descended from indentured labourers of the nineteenth century and now have settlements throughout Suva. Her account indicates the challenges and hopes that many minority groups in Fiji have in common. Fijian scholar Vijay Naidu then considers the significance of Suva as a site of turbulence and political violence, recalling his own experiences of coups in 1987, 2000 and 2006. Continuing on the theme of minorities, the late Fijian historian Brij V Lal recalls his personal encounters with informal settlements in Fiji, and a particular encounter with a mother and son from Wailea. This touching reflection speaks to the daily trials and tribulations faced by a growing underclass in Suva society.

So, here it is, this book about Suva, the capital of Fiji. Individual recollections, reflections, perspectives and responses that collectively paint a portrait of a city we call home. There is more, much more, to be said about the dreams, hopes and aspirations of its residents, and one hope for this book will have been amply achieved if it prompts readers to share their own memories of living and working in this lovely place.

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