

**CHIEFS FOR THE NATION:  
CONTAINING ETHNONATIONALISM AND  
BRIDGING THE ETHNIC DIVIDE IN FIJI**

Robert Norton  
*Macquarie University*

Chiefship, a central element of indigenous Fijian society valorized and transformed under colonial rule, is becoming a crucial part of a national political culture for multiethnic Fiji. The collective status and authority of chiefs in Fiji's political life is grounded not simply in the part they have played in expressing opposition between indigenous Fijians and the descendants of the immigrant Indians, but also in a paradoxical function they have acquired in bridging ethnic conflict. This dual ethnic and national identity was affirmed and reinforced by their endorsement of the recent constitutional reform. This article suggests that in its capacity to contain and dampen the powerful potential for an antagonistic and excluding Fijian ethnonationalism, chiefship may function to help preserve a viable democratic political system for this deeply divided society. Thus it contributes to contemporary debate about the potential for reconciliation between cultural difference and the need for social and political cohesion.

Just as the "chief" once occupied a strategic position in colonial systems of indirect rule, so today he finds himself mediating local realities and larger spheres of national and transnational interaction. Far from premodern relics, the chiefs of modern Pacific states increasingly figure in the rhetoric and reality of national political development.

—Lindstrom and White 1997b

**THIS ARTICLE SEEKS** to illuminate the enigma of the continuing importance of chiefship in some of the rapidly changing societies of Oceania (Feinberg

and Watson-Gegeo 1996; Lindstrom and White 1997a) with an analysis of the national significance of chiefship in the most complex and modernized of these societies: multiethnic Fiji.

I argue that Fijian chiefship has a regulatory function. In doing this I seek to redress an imbalance in a postcoup literature that has predominantly viewed the leading chiefs as an aristocratic elite who have promoted ethnic division and conflict to secure power and privilege for themselves and their commoner allies (Robertson and Tamanisau 1988; Howard 1991; Lawson 1991, 1996, 1997; Lal 1988, 1992; Sutherland 1992).

Leaders of both chiefly and nonchiefly rank have sometimes exploited ethnic tensions for political advantage, but the force of ethnicity in political life has been only partly a function of elite interests and strategies. Fijian ethnonationalism has its roots in long-standing ethnic differences and inequalities in popular life, and chiefly leadership has been more significant in containing the ethnonationalist disposition than in fomenting it. For this reason, my focus is less on elite interests and manipulations (elite agency) and more on the *forms* of Fijian ethnic identity and leadership, and on how these forms have influenced the political process.

My argument thus dwells on a paradox in the development of the national polity and public culture of Fiji—the dual significance of leading Fijian chiefs and chiefly councils as the strongest embodiment of indigenous identity, particularly in opposition to the other major ethnic group, the Indians, yet also as a form of leadership that has facilitated interethnic accommodation. Under colonial rule the chiefs in administration and political leadership became rallying points of Fijian ethnic solidarity and the most powerful symbolic markers of cultural boundaries. But from this secure position as ethnic leaders, they were encouraged also to assume a function as conciliators across the ethnic divide.

The Fijian chiefs' role in both affirming and reconciling ethnic difference has roots in the cultural meaning of chiefship in most Fijian communities and in legacies of colonial rule. The colonial legacy is the unification of chiefly identity and authority in the Council of Chiefs and its privileged consultative relationship with the state. This relationship became an important factor in the management not only of Fijian affairs but also of the national political economy, particularly the allocation of much of the best Fijian-owned agricultural land to Indian tenant farmers.

Although elected Fijian political leadership is now dominated by commoners or people of relatively modest traditional rank, the chiefs, collectively as the Bose Levu Vakaturaga (Great Council of Chiefs), retain prerogatives in the state: they control the appointment of the president and vice-president of the republic, and they hold fourteen of the thirty-two seats

and a veto power in the upper house. These entitlements accord with a widely held view that in representing indigenous sovereignty the chiefs are an essential source of legitimacy for a national government, a function conceived in terms of their predecessors' act of trust in their cession of the islands to the British Crown in 1874. The continued privileging of the chiefs signifies not merely the appeasement of a powerful traditional "vested" interest group, but the preservation of a mechanism that has helped to constrain the potential for antagonistic Fijian ethnicity and to support the system of land sharing.

### **Chiefs in the Postcoup Literature**

Much of the postcoup literature to date has valuably emphasized cross-ethnic interests and intraethnic differences in the modern economy that create a potential for broad-based political parties or coalitions. This focus has countered a commonly held misconception, encouraged by certain writers (e.g., Scarr 1988), that the ethnic divide is the only significant social and political reality in Fiji. But in their mission to affirm the political potential in shared interests, the majority of writers have underestimated the weight of ethnic differences in popular life, conveying an abstracted idea of the people of Fiji as simply citizens of the nation who carry ethnic identities provisionally, like clothing styles that might readily be changed were it not for the "traditionalist" demagoguery of elites (e.g., Lawson 1996:43).

The political expression of general interests has been blocked by the more powerful force of indigenous Fijian concerns with cultural identity and political power. These concerns cannot be accounted for in terms of the manipulative strategies of "traditionalist" elites; rather, they are rooted in popular experience and outlooks, conditioned in interethnic relations by profound cultural differences, economic inequalities, and the continuing rarity of intermarriage. The crucial analytical and political question is not how general interests might submerge or marginalize particularistic interests and identities but by what kind of institutional system and public ideology they might be reconciled.

Before examining the chiefs' role in such reconciliation, I must explain in more detail my criticisms of the literature cited (Robertson and Tamanisau, Howard, Lawson, Lal, Sutherland). First, its focus on the vested interests and manipulations of a chiefly elite has disregarded or understated the fact that the Fijians who benefited from the coups were mostly commoners who gained places in state organizations and enjoyed easy loans from financial institutions.<sup>1</sup> Commoners have also predominated in all governing councils and cabinets since May 1987. There has been an expansion of an

affluent Fijian middle class in which people of chiefly rank are a small minority.

Second, there is often an assumption that commoners are less disposed than are chiefs to promote antagonistic communalism. Throughout colonial and postcolonial history aggressive ethnicist sentiments have actually been associated more with nonchiefly leadership (from the millenarian leader Apolosi Nawai to the Fijian National Party). Mainly commoners led the Taukei Movement, which influenced Rabuka's first coup and later induced him to reject an agreement between the deposed prime minister Timoci Bavadra and the paramount chiefs Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau. After briefly ruling with Taukei leaders, Rabuka returned authority to Ganilau and Mara, who further weakened the Taukei Movement by encouraging a split in its leadership. It is true that Mara had not initially condemned the Taukeists and later admitted his sympathetic understanding of their aggressive demands (Mara 1996:203–204). But he rejected pressure from army officers led by Rabuka, all commoners, to impose a highly repressive rule to secure Fijian economic power.<sup>2</sup> Whether Mara and Ganilau might together have overturned Rabuka's coup is a moot point. In that unprecedented moment of ethnic militancy, their resistance might well have been swept aside, preventing their subsequent moderating influence and strengthening Taukei control over the political process. It is clear that the two leading chiefs and the Council of Chiefs countered the Taukeist push for a more extreme ethnic dominance than that consolidated by the 1990 constitution.

In its focus on the interests of elites, the literature has, third, underestimated popular Fijian endorsement of the coups and its influence on the chiefs' support for Rabuka. A strongly chauvinist mood persisted for several years, not just in a hard core of Taukei extremists but widely in popular consciousness, and to some extent it remains. Much postcoup writing has overstated the influence of elite rhetoric, depicting the political force of the ethnic divide as being mainly an artifact of leadership and underestimating the influence of popular attitudes and expectations on elite behavior.

Finally, the characterization of the chiefs simply as a colonially constructed power elite fails to take account of the cultural and social bonds that chiefs in national-level leadership, including the Council of Chiefs, have with their local communities. They have a continuing significance in the life of local Fijian groupings as well as in symbolizing the encompassing ethnic identity. I do not ignore the failure of individual chiefs to live up to popular expectations for caring and protective behavior, and the consequent ambivalence toward them. Rather, I am referring to an ideology of chiefship in popular consciousness that is strongly grounded in routine Fijian cultural

practices and social relations (Norton 1993a:745–749). The image of an invidious inequality of privilege and power dividing chiefs and commoners has long been a misleading one for Fiji, where chiefs have not enjoyed a constitutionally backed dominance in popular life since the 1960s. Although chiefs have a privileged share of land rents, very few prosper from these, and fewer still are in a position to dictate the lives of ordinary people. To focus attention on their privileges, as most postcoup writers have, illuminates neither the chiefs' significance for Fijian group and ethnic identities nor their role in interethnic accommodation.

Several anthropologists have discussed the coups and their aftermath in relation to Fijian cultural meanings (most notably Kaplan 1993, 1995a, 1995b; Rutz 1995). These writers give more recognition to the popular roots of ethnonationalism, but their central theme is the tension between the actions of colonially reconstructed chiefs in the national political arena and their failure to meet popular Fijian expectations. There is no recognition of their accommodative function in the multiethnic polity. Kaplan's interesting discussion of the potential for cross-cultural discursive "articulations" in support of a nation-making project does not consider the possible role of the chiefs (Kaplan 1995b:chap. 7). Indeed, she sees "chiefs-centered" narratives about Fiji as being antithetical to nation making (1995a:116).

The present article, building on an earlier analysis (Norton 1986), examines a process of linkage between disjunctive systems, but it is not of the syncretizing cultural form on which Kaplan speculates. I show how Fijian chiefship, by facilitating the sharing of land and acquiring a distinctive role in a public culture of interethnic relations, has contributed to a discourse about the nation that suggests a concord between the Indians' strengths in the capitalist economic system and a valorized indigenous cultural identity and political prerogative.

### **Modalities of Ethnic Identity: Accommodative Chiefship and Militant Taukeism**

The fundamental question for nation making in Fiji is how indigenous identity and demands can be reconciled with the cultural and economic realities and democratic political needs of the multiethnic society. The importance of the chiefs in this process is highlighted by contrasting two forms in which Fijian identity and demands have been expressed.

The lesser form is antagonistic and excluding, involving protest marches and rallies with anti-Indian rhetoric and flaring especially in an atmosphere of tension generated by election campaigning and its outcome. Examples include the Fijian National Party from the early 1970s, the Taukei Move-

ment launched after the election of the Bavadra government, and, on occasion, the Methodist Church. While this militantly antagonistic leadership has come mainly from commoners (including trade unionists, church ministers, and politicians), individuals of chiefly rank have sometimes taken part, and the Council of Chiefs itself has voiced ethnonationalist demands.

But militant protest is not what distinguishes chiefship as the other, and dominant, modality of ethnic identity and leadership. As an institution, chiefship is a powerful but restrained affirmation of Fijian group identities, from local village and *vanua* (district) to the encompassing ethnic collectivity represented by the Council of Chiefs. The stress is on ceremonial order, restrained and conciliatory speech, and the achievement of consensus (Nation 1978).

Leaders of chiefly rank can more easily accommodate ethnic and national concerns because their legitimacy resides in secure authority within Fijian groups, not in aggressive rhetoric at the interface of ethnic relations. Moreover, the reconciling of group conflict is traditionally part of the chiefly role: conciliation from a position of sanctified strength. For these reasons chiefs are at less risk than commoner leaders from extremist challengers and so are less disposed to engage in ethnicist rhetoric.

The precedence of chiefly leadership over confrontational expressions of ethnic identity rests on the chiefs' control of the most potent cultural resources of Fijian collective life: the hierarchies of rank and authority that continue to define the identities and interrelations of groups. A chief traditionally has the dual roles of representing group identity in opposition to other groups and mediating communication and accommodation between them. Through chiefly alliances groups were linked, often with complementary responsibilities and rights. Other writers have suggested, without developing the point, that this principle of complementary mutuality across difference in group relations among Fijians also influences Fijian dispositions in interethnic relations (Nation 1978:xviii; Hooper 1996:264).

Chiefly leadership in the national political arena was patterned through a melding of this cultural form, expressed most strongly in the hierarchies of eastern Fiji, with the policies and bureaucratic practices of the colonial state (Norton 1990:63–64). From the late colonial period, the syncretized form of chiefly leadership assumed an important place in the promotion of interethnic accommodation. Of critical importance in this process has been the Great Council of Chiefs, Bose Levu Vakaturaga.

### **The Council of Chiefs**

The Council of Chiefs is the strongest embodiment of Fijian identity and power as a central presence in the nation. Originating in the assembly of

chiefs who, by the Deed of Cession, gave their islands to the British Crown, it was formalized by the early governors to facilitate indirect rule and to nominate Fijians for the colonial parliament. It is the classic “neotraditional” institution, established through a blending of traditional forms of rank with colonial law and its administrative and consultative requirements. The meaning of the council meetings as ritual reaffirmations of the special trust and shared authority binding chiefs with the Crown disposed participants to assume a responsibility not only to protect ethnic interests, but also to accommodate needs of the wider society. Membership was eventually broadened to include commoner leaders, many of them parliamentarians. But, after the first army coup, it was remade as almost exclusively a forum of chiefs, and so it remains. Under present rules each of the fourteen provincial councils chooses three members. The five *ex officio* members are the president and the two vice-presidents of Fiji, the prime minister, and the minister for Fijian affairs, who nominates an additional six chiefs. The Council of Rotuma has two representatives.

The assemblies are publicized to the nation as affirmations of the strength of indigenous tradition. Yet there is also a modern “corporate” tone: grave-faced men in suits gathering at Suva’s convention center with briefcases and conference folders. The chiefs form a wide spectrum of experience and outlook. A few have tertiary education, careers as bureaucrats and politicians, and are widely traveled. But most have had little formal education and live mainly in their home villages. While some, including several of the highest rank, have progressive views on the sharing of power and resources, the majority have ethnocentric outlooks. There are several women, all of high rank. The most influential members have historically been leading paramount chiefs of southeastern Viti Levu and the eastern islands who have since late colonial times held high office in the state (Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Ratu Sir George Cakobau, Ratu Sir Edward Cakobau, and Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, of whom only Mara survives today as president of the republic).

At moments of heightened conflict the council has shared in the affirmation of ethnic chauvinism, as when it ratified Rabuka’s coup and approved the consolidation of Fijian dominance through a new constitution. Yet earlier ethnicist demands had been little more than rhetoric. Following the exceptionally acrimonious 1982 elections, many members called for constitutional change to secure Fijian political dominance (Lal 1992:249–250). The demand was not maintained. At a more serious crisis point in ethnic relations near the end of colonial rule, the council had called for the repeal of legislation it had earlier approved for the benefit of Indian tenants. The chiefs did not force their threat, however, and several years later, in spite of the emergence of the anti-Indian commoner-led Fijian National Party, they

agreed to further reforms advantaging the tenants (Lasaqa 1984:163–164). Furthermore, it has not only been chiefs who have voiced ethnic antagonism in the council. From the 1950s until 1987, commoners representing wage workers, town dwellers, and the church comprised up to 50 percent of the members. The most notorious outburst of anti-Indian sentiment came after the 1982 elections from a commoner trade unionist.<sup>3</sup>

While ethnicist opinions are voiced and politicians are sternly questioned when seen to be compromising Fijian interests in their dialogue with Indian and other leaders, the Council of Chiefs also provides experiences, direct and vicarious, that enhance Fijian convictions of political and cultural strength in relations with other ethnic groups and thus have encouraged acceptance of concessions to them. In particular, the ethnic identity and political privilege embodied in the council has been a symbolic counterweight to the economic power of non-Fijians.

Most postcoup writers have not appreciated the extent to which, in the context of interethnic politics, cultural and political uniformities among Fijians have overlaid regional and provincial differences. That these uniformities have been produced by a blending of aspects of tradition, particularly eastern variants, with colonial law, does not lessen their contemporary significance for Fijians. The image of the strong chief, derived particularly from eastern *vanua* (tribal communities), was reinforced by colonial practices and was long associated with the dominance of eastern chiefs in political leadership, but it became a central element of a pan-ethnic Fijian identity (Norton 1993a; Tanner 1990).

With its members drawn from leading *vanua* in all fourteen provinces, the council continues to be a unifying counterweight to the local allegiances and jealousies among the Fijians. The well-documented differences and inequalities between “eastern” and “western” Fiji have not disturbed its cohesion. Students of Fijian politics have often stressed westerner resentment of the eastern chiefs’ dominance of political leadership (e.g., Norton 1977, 1990; Lawson 1991; Howard 1991; Lal 1992). While the political potential in regional sentiment remains important, there have been counterforces. Since the early 1970s politicians from eastern provinces have drawn western chiefs into the establishment, and westerners have not been underrepresented in government since then. In fact, for several years the most prominent western-districts chief, Tui Vuda, has been a vice-president of the republic. Demands for an independent western political confederacy to complement the three based in the east have been restrained by old ties with eastern chiefs and *vanua*. Rivalries in eastern Fiji, expressed in the formation of the Fijian Association Party, have not fractured the Council of Chiefs, and in the Fijian submissions to the 1995 Constitutional Review Commission, provincial dif-



ferences were outweighed by the general demand for the preservation of Fijian political control (Norton 2000).<sup>4</sup>

What is most significant about the place of the Council of Chiefs in national political life is precisely the unity it has sustained on ethnic concerns, especially land and political prerogatives. The continued presence of this culturally well-grounded unitary indigenous authority for approving changes on such matters has helped to inhibit the emergence of a power struggle on ethnic issues that could be destructive to the security of other groups (Norton 1990:chap. 1, 1993b).

### Chiefs in Their Fijian Context

The hierarchical values reinforced by the political prominence of eastern chiefs have usually been reconcilable with the local ranking systems, especially as symbols of Fijian cultural strength. In fact, the social and political significance of distinctive values and institutions in terms of which people of all localities can identify with one another as Fijians has been greatly underestimated by writers stressing the themes of colonial “invention” of tradition and a “myth of cultural homogeneity” (Lawson 1991, 1997; Sutherland 1992). As White observes for the Solomon Islands, overemphasis on the idea of cultural invention “draws attention away from the substantial cultural and historical continuities that give so-called invented forms much of their emotional and political power” (1997:232; also Norton 1993a).

The contemporary value of chiefship has been reinforced by its potency in symbolizing in popular Fijian discourse the contrast between an idealized “traditional” way of life of reciprocal kinship and *vanua* relationships in communal attachment to the land, and the often denigrated “modern” lifestyles of the individual and household pursuit of money to which people are increasingly drawn. Chiefly ceremonies are everywhere significant for the affirmation of Fijian identities in the context of the ambivalence and anxiety associated with economic and cultural modernization, a feature often noted of contemporary chiefship in Oceania (Firth 1979; Marcus 1989; James 1997; Howard and Rensel 1997; White 1997).

The symbolic importance of the chiefs is further enhanced by the ethnic divide. The Indians’ superiority in commercial farming, business, and the professions has created economic opportunities for Fijians but also provokes their resentment and suspicion. Ethnic disparities gave chiefs and the state institutions empowering them significance as ultimate guardians of cultural identity and political strength, enabling them to hold their preeminence as ethnic leaders after Fijians were given the vote and emancipated from coercive village administration. The 1960s marked a shift in the identity of the

leading chiefs from paternalistic and often resented authorities overseeing Fijian local government to defenders of the Fijian ethnic collectivity in opposition to Indians. The chiefs' symbolic importance strengthened as political party rivalry aggravated ethnic conflict in the move to self-government. As ethnic leaders the chiefs were able to co-opt trade unionists and other potential challengers emerging with economic and social change (Norton 1990: 79–80).

For all Fiji's economic modernity and the predominance of commoners in leadership and administration today, the chiefs remain the most powerful legitimators of political leadership and decision making where matters of ethnic interest are seen to be at stake. This significance of the leading chiefs has generally submerged the tension some scholars have stressed between them and their traditional local communities, the "people of the land" (Kaplan 1995b; Rutz 1995).

### **Chiefs in the National Context**

Paradoxically, the very fact that chiefship continues to be the strongest expression of Fijian ethnic identity has supported its accommodative function in interethnic relations. Many Indians, at both national and local levels, view chiefship favorably, for Indians have needed chiefs to help contain ethnic tensions and to facilitate reforms no less than chiefs have needed Indians to shore up their popular relevance as the symbolic anchor of Fijian ethnic identity.

This mutual dependence was highlighted by an unprecedented event in the last phase of negotiations to reform the discriminatory postcoup constitution. The principal Indian leader, Jai Ram Reddy, was invited to speak to the Council of Chiefs. His address helped win the chiefs' assent to proposals agreed between Fijian and Indian politicians.<sup>5</sup>

Reddy began with a declaration of respect and unity: "The grandson of an indentured labourer answers the call of the Bose Levu Vakaturaga . . . and together we keep an appointment with history . . . to put the final seal on a troubled era and to open a new chapter of hope." He addressed his hosts as "the chiefs not just of the indigenous Fijians, but of all the people of Fiji," and reminded them of how their forebears had overcome mutual animosities to lay the foundations for the modern nation in the Deed of Cession. "This great council," Reddy urged, "is called upon again . . . to be a foundation of unity for the islands your ancestors set on the road to nationhood." In proposing a "partnership" between Indian and Fijian, he assured the chiefs that "we honour your place, and the place of your people, as the first inhabitants of Fiji. . . . We seek not to threaten your security but to protect it. . . . For in your security lies the basis for our own."<sup>6</sup>

The chiefs had not in fact “called” Reddy. The visit was arranged by the prime minister, Sitiveni Rabuka, and the president, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, and some chiefs were offended that the council had not been first consulted. But most agreed that the speech was gallant and persuasive, and the few who had been vociferously opposing reform now acquiesced. The upper house of parliament, which the chiefs dominated, soon unanimously endorsed the reforms. A colleague of Reddy recounted how after the debate some of the chiefs walked across to the offices of the Indian political parties and “hugged us.” The only member of the reform committee who did not sign its report, a commoner lawyer with Taukei Movement links, eventually endorsed the reforms—in deference, he declared, to the chiefs.

Reddy’s speech was a defining event in the quest for a political community reconciling the principle of indigenous primacy with multiethnic government, for never before had an Indian leader appealed directly to this bastion of Fijian ethnic identity and solidarity. Encouraged in his view that “the Indians can best advance their interests by working with the chiefs,”<sup>7</sup> Reddy later began to talk with local chiefs about the future of the farmers’ leases, and several responded by declaring their concern for Indians in their districts.<sup>8</sup>

### Chiefship and the Control of Militant Ethnicity

The chiefs’ decision subdued the voice of ethnic chauvinism. There were protest rallies by the “Viti National Union of Taukei Workers” and the “Indigenous Rights Movement,” one speaker warning that “the *leve ni vanua* [people of the land] will now turn against their chiefs, because they have betrayed the indigenous peoples’ trust.”<sup>9</sup> A copy of the reform proposal was publicly burned. But the most significant feature of the protests was that very few people took part.

Nonetheless, the protests echoed the rhetoric of betrayal with which the Fijian National Party had pressured the Fijian leaders who controlled the precoup Alliance Party government (Rutz 1995; Kaplan 1995a). Like that earlier chauvinism, the Taukei Movement voiced widely held sentiments. Rabuka’s coups had encouraged the mood, and fear of a reproving chauvinist challenge to his leadership inhibited him during most of the constitutional reform process, causing him to swing between ethnic and national visions, at one moment declaring his goal was power sharing, at another insisting that Fijian power must be further strengthened.

The charismatic persona of the heroic warrior defending the *vanua* and its chiefs against the threat of domination by the *vulagi* (foreigners) had become an obstacle to the compromises Rabuka and some of his colleagues now conceded must be made. They were beset by the contradiction between

their ethnic political base and the pressing task of nurturing a stagnating economy dependent on the resources of nonindigenous people and foreign investors. Since the coups, one in seven Indians have emigrated with their skills and capital, ironically contributing to Rabuka's failure to fulfill Fijian expectations.<sup>10</sup> Yet the exodus also gave Fijians a demographic edge (51 percent to the Indians' 44 percent) that encouraged their leaders to agree to changes allowing Indians to share in government. Another major inducement to the accord was steady pressure on human-rights issues from aid givers and trade partners (especially Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand).

In his efforts to remake himself as a national leader, Rabuka has needed the chiefs, because as a commoner he has no basis of legitimacy for inter-ethnic "bridging" actions. He relied on the Council of Chiefs to validate his compromising with Indian leaders just as he depended on them to ratify his coup and secure his first regime, to constrain the chauvinism inflamed by that crisis, to endorse the 1990 constitution, and to authorize the political party through which he has ruled. These episodes all highlighted the chiefs' control of cultural and social capital with which affirmations of ethnic identity can be most strongly made.

Chauvinist discourses rivaling chiefship in the expression of ethnic demands have usually remained weaker political voices, despite stressful economic and social changes evidenced in urbanization, rising unemployment, and growing land shortages. The significance of chiefship in the context of ethnic concerns is reinforced by its continuing place in popular life. Rapid growth of the urban population, now 40 percent of Fijians,<sup>11</sup> has not eroded the weight of customary values of rank and authority in social organization for life-crisis celebrations and other activities. The social and cultural realities of clan, village, and *vanua* persist in the lives of most urban Fijians (Griffin and Monsell-Davis 1989; Overton 1989; Rutz 1987).

The most progressive Fijian challenger to Rabuka, the Fijian Association Party (FAP), launched by politicians from southeastern Viti Levu and the eastern islands as a breakaway from the governing Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT) Party, has been favored by many in the growing stratum of Fijian executives, professionals, and business people, most of whom are commoners. But the FAP is careful to show respect to chiefs and has prominent chiefs among its principals. Its commoner leaders are quick to reprove Rabuka for not consulting the Council of Chiefs,<sup>12</sup> which they have defended as the "highest authority in the land" for Fijian issues,<sup>13</sup> and they opposed a proposal for a countervailing "Council of Commoners."<sup>14</sup> In an ironic by-election outcome, the FAP's chiefly candidate, a young member of the Cakobau clan, failed because more senior members of this preeminent

chiefly family backed Rabuka's commoner contestant.<sup>15</sup> Although initially promoted as the party for educated commoners on issues linking them with non-Fijians, the FAP relies on traditional relationships and provincial loyalties. While its followers are mostly in the villages, even its urban support, campaigners have told me, has reflected these ties more strongly than interests of social class and urban life.

What seems most remarkable about Fiji is less that urban interests have yet to be given an effective political voice, with the potential for some inter-ethnic solidarity, than that ethnic chauvinism has not been more strongly sustained. The predominant pattern in the public expression of ethnic difference has been an asymmetric complementarity and accommodation rather than antagonistic schism.

I have discussed aspects of the institutional form of chiefly leadership that contribute to this pattern. In the next three sections I consider how historical shifts in the development of political economy and public culture created three contexts that have encouraged the accommodative disposition of chiefly leadership: (1) the origins of the chiefs' interethnic role in their agreement to a state-controlled system for managing the leasing of land to Indian farmers; (2) the subsequent strengthening of the chiefly political and bureaucratic elite, partly to secure the chiefs' solidarity with the colonial state as their cooperation became crucial for economic development; and (3) the engagement of this elite in interethnic relations during a new nation-making phase in the last two decades of colonial rule.

### **Chiefs in the Political Economy of Colonial Fiji**

Most academic writers on Fiji have depicted the strengthened chiefly elite of the late colonial period as continuing an unbroken line of authorities inaugurated by the first governors and concerned simply with Fijian affairs. This view ignores events from the mid-1930s that reshaped the chiefs as an elite of national as well as ethnic significance. During the colony's first fifty years, many chiefs exercised power in a system of indirect rule designed to supervise Fijians in their villages. By the 1930s this system had been relaxed, and the chiefs were marginalized by British district administrators (Macnaught 1982:115–117). Yet it was at this time that chiefs began, under pressure from the colonial government, to assume a crucial role in the management of the economy by facilitating the provision of Fijian lands for the sugar industry.

As the Australian-owned CSR Company that controlled the industry remade its plantation laborers into peasant farmers (Moynagh 1981:chap. 6), it relied increasingly on Indians obtaining secure leases from Fijians.

This trend clashed with a growing Fijian interest in cash cropping as the government encouraged individualism “to fit the Fijian for competition with his Indian neighbour.”<sup>16</sup> Although by 1933 nearly 10 percent of cane farmers were Fijians, they were proving less efficient than the heavily cash-dependent Indians. When Fijians began to exploit the tenants’ vulnerability by inducing bribes and threatening not to renew leases, the company pressured the governor to take charge, warning of “calamity for all . . . [if] the land situation . . . were to fall into the hands of the original owners,”<sup>17</sup> and insisting that Fijians must not be encouraged to take up cane farming at the expense of the Indian farmers. Official concern was reinforced by the English crusader for overseas Indian welfare and friend of Gandhi and Nehru, Charles Andrews, who concluded after his 1936 visit that farmers who had easily obtained land when it was “almost useless to the Fijian” now faced dispossession and that the sugar industry was “in danger of collapsing.”<sup>18</sup>

Wishing to avoid “an imposed solution,”<sup>19</sup> the governor relied on the most influential chief, Ratu Sukuna, to persuade the Council of Chiefs and the provincial councils to allow the state to control the leasing out of lands not required for clan members’ use. Sukuna preached about the wisdom of sharing land with the Indians, from whose labor “much of our prosperity is derived”: “Bear in mind the biblical story of the talents: Whoever utilises what is given him will be given more. He who fails to use what he has, will lose all. . . . It is therefore the bounden duty of landowners to utilise what they possess for the benefit of all.” Ratu Sukuna continued: “The land can only be fairly leased if this is regulated by the government. . . . We shall receive more rents for there will be no waste land. Bribery, fraud, and lies will be suppressed. We will live peacefully with our neighbours . . . and we shall have dissipated causes of evils that are now giving us a disreputable name.”<sup>20</sup> He urged the chiefs to accept his proposal lest “our house be forcibly put in order from without.” Colonial officials hailed his achievement as a breakthrough for economic development and praised the chiefs for their “statesmanlike attitude towards the general affairs of the colony.”<sup>21</sup> Sukuna was soon conceding that in the cane areas Indian interests should be “paramount,”<sup>22</sup> although a few years before the governor had urged the chiefs “to do everything in your power to encourage your people to undertake the cultivation of sugar cane.”<sup>23</sup> Sukuna himself had then insisted that “the Indian community, having shown us the way, can hardly expect to continue to hold all the agricultural land in the sugar districts where the plough mints money.”<sup>24</sup> Nearly seventy years later, only 25 percent of the cane farmers are Fijians.

The strongest expression of indigenous identity—chiefly leadership—had been made a support for the economic security of the Indian settlers. Central to this paradoxical link was the bond the Deed of Cession had

created between the chiefs and the British Crown, a mutual commitment that both established their collective authority in indigenous leadership and, by binding them in a privileged consultative relationship with the colonial state in which the chiefs' rank and prerogative were regularly honored, helped to secure the Indians' and the company's economic position. Indian leaders recognized this link in their concurrence with legislation that strengthened the chiefs' position in the state soon after the land reform (discussed below). When, in parliament, a European leader denounced the political change as a barrier to Fijian progress, the senior Indian leader, Vishnu Deo, responded that he did not wish to be associated with "a direct challenge to the chiefs" and that the Indian leaders would "cooperate with the chiefs and the Fijian people in furthering the welfare of their race."<sup>25</sup> On Sukuna's death Deo lamented that "the Indian community had lost a very good friend." Ratu Sukuna, he declared, "was not only a leader of the Fijian people, but the leader of all races."<sup>26</sup>

However, the potential for popular Fijian opposition to the chiefs' land decision was reflected in protests by the exiled millenarian leader Apolosi Nawai, who had tried to organize villagers to compete in the market economy and whose most ardent admirers were now the new Fijian sugarcane farmers (Macnaught 1978; Kaplan 1995b:133–139). He complained that "the chiefs have . . . given away many leases to Indians against the wishes of the people."<sup>27</sup> With his release impending, he sent to his expectant followers a "Proclamation of the New Era" announcing momentous events to come, including "the destruction of the haughty chief."<sup>28</sup> Apolosi was the nascent voice of militant ethnonationalism. But after returning to Fiji, he was briefly confined to Suva and then shipped back into exile.

### A Strengthened Chiefly Elite

The leading chiefs themselves were briefly seen to pose the threat of disaffection. Their cooperation with government had become crucial just as their status had been diminished, with some *roko tui* (provincial governors) enduring a humiliating subordination to young British officers. The chiefs' grievance was redressed by the new wartime governor, Sir Phillip Mitchell, who worked with Sukuna to elevate their position in a revitalized system of indirect rule. In justifying this move to the Colonial Office, Mitchell explained that it was "urgently necessary to broaden the base of Native collaboration," warning that "Fijians have political representation . . . but no direct responsibility or authority" and that "if this does not produce irresponsible nationalism or racialism it will be surprising."<sup>29</sup> Mitchell's reliance on the chiefs in preparing Fiji for war was doubtless a consideration in his reform.

From 1945 leading eastern chiefs enjoyed a stronger position in the colonial state than ever before. Indeed, Sukuna, as head of the new Fijian Administration, became the first non-European to join the colonial cabinet. The Council of Chiefs controlled appointments to the Fijian Affairs Board, which formulated regulations for “communal” village life and chose officials to administer them (Roth 1953; Nayacakalou 1975). The liberal philosophy of the 1930s had been reversed. Colonial officials had once hoped that Sukuna would help guide the Fijians in “their transition to individualism.”<sup>30</sup> He now governed them with the conviction that they were “still at heart subsistence villagers” (Norton 1990:46).

The new paternalism had contradictory meanings for the Fijians. Many referred to it as “the bond” (Nayacakalou 1975:132), and the constables appointed to retrieve runaways from village duties faced a daunting task. The British colonial officials themselves soon regarded it as an obstacle to economic and social progress, and they arranged the study by the geographer Spate that encouraged further criticism of the system (Spate 1959). In the 1960s, as the government began again to emphasize the necessity of individual initiatives for indigenous Fijian advancement,<sup>31</sup> they abolished the coercive sanctions that had bound most people to village life.

But as the Indian population grew and as self-government loomed, the strength of the paternalistic institutions and the chiefs in the state gave them a reassuring symbolic importance. It is one of the ironic twists of Fiji’s history that the obstacles Sukuna’s administration placed in the way of Fijian economic development intensified anxieties that reinforced its value as framework and symbol of ethnic solidarity and political power.

For most Fijians, the last two decades of British rule were marked by a protective fusion of bureaucratized chiefship, the colonial state, and a strengthening consciousness of ethnic identity. Though also in this period new “class” interests drew many together with Indians and others in workers’ and farmers’ unions, the nexus of chiefly leadership and ethnicity continued to dominate political consciousness.

Yet in the context of interethnic relations the chiefly elite also began, not always wittingly and willingly, to acquire an identity as mediators and conciliators no less than as rallying points for ethnic solidarity. This dual identity was encouraged by a new colonial ideology and the new roles it supported for leading chiefs.

### **Chiefs in Interethnic Relations**

The empowering of chiefs as a “corporate” ethnic elite paradoxically occurred just as the postwar British government proclaimed a new mission to encour-



age among its colonial subjects everywhere a sense of national identity in preparation for self-government. In the Fiji of the 1950s there was an unprecedented emphasis on interethnic ties and nation building after a period of tension aggravated in part by the Indians' actions in wartime, the revelation that they had become a demographic majority, and fears of local political repercussions from India's independence.<sup>32</sup>

An annual holiday was inaugurated for the anniversary of the chiefs' gift of their islands to the British Crown. The occasion hitherto modestly celebrated mainly between government and the Fijians was now to be commemorated "not as a Fijian day, but as Fiji's day," "a focal point for the spirit of unity."<sup>33</sup> The Deed of Cession, in Fijian eyes symbolizing their special status and protection under colonial rule, was sacralized as having secured peace and civilization, marking the ancestral chiefs' commitment to the development of a modern nation in which all could prosper. Radio programs were introduced to help "the whole community to develop a national consciousness."<sup>34</sup> An administrators' conference discussed "how to make the Fiji-born Indian feel that Fiji is his home and make out of him a contented constructive citizen."<sup>35</sup> Multiethnic social clubs were formed in the provincial towns, modeled on an organization established in Suva in 1945. Although members were predominantly Indians, partly reflecting town demography, leading office bearers were often prominent Fijians holding government posts (Norton 1990:53–58).

Thus, just as Fijian ethnic identity was being strengthened within reconstructed institutions of separate rule, the Fijian leaders were drawn into a process of interethnic bridging. Chiefs in the new Fijian Administration or as district officers in mainly Indian areas assumed roles in public celebrations and joined Indians as members of community boards, patrons or office bearers in social and sports clubs, and sometimes even chairmen of Indian advisory committees and town councils (Norton 1990:53–58).

A pattern of public sociality began to form, paradoxically on the very basis of an ethnic difference accentuated by the presence of the chiefs. There was in the new ties a sense of conciliation between the "foreign" agents of economic modernity and the elite custodians of an indigenous culture and political strength on whose goodwill harmony and prosperity were seen to depend. The identity of chiefs in these relationships has paralleled their role as what Nation terms the "focal points" in the structure of relations between groups within Fijian society, articulating a unity across difference (Nation 1978:42, 148; also Nayacakalou 1975:chap. 3; Walter 1978:10–13). The willingness of Fijian leaders to engage in this interethnic bridging was enhanced precisely by their privileged position in the colonial state.

The senior Indian political leaders acknowledged that Fijian interests

should be paramount in government,<sup>36</sup> and the chiefs' new position in the colonial state strengthened the force of rhetoric invoking the Deed of Cession in support of this principle. From this vantage point Sukuna continued to be a voice of conciliation. In the early 1950s a young commoner's plan to provoke a debate on the threat posed by Indian population growth was foiled by Sukuna's persuading his fellow high chiefs not to support the proposal.<sup>37</sup> A decade later Sukuna's political protégé Ratu Mara dissuaded a group of young commoners and minor chiefs against starting a political party on the platform "Fiji for the Fijians" (Norton 1990:79–82).

The pattern of interethnic relations emerging in the town middle class helped to define an ideal of complementarity and partnership that encouraged alliances or agreements in the national political arena. All four leading chiefs in the Alliance Party had been drawn into relations with Indians while serving as district officers or as governors of Fijian provinces whose geographic boundaries included areas of non-Fijian settlement. It is true that the most popular Indian political leaders in the last years of colonial rule generally had few ties with Fijian leaders. In their election campaigning they initially condemned chiefly privilege and sought legitimacy as champions of universalist egalitarian ideals. But after a crisis in ethnic relations on the eve of independence, precipitated by their demand for a common-roll electoral system, they moderated their rhetoric with a conciliatory affirmation of the importance of the chiefs (Norton 1990:100–103).

The changing ethnic relations in the late colonial period highlight another of Fiji's historical ironies. Most Indian settlers, having left the ancient caste system and developed an egalitarian society among themselves (Mayer 1973; Jayawardena 1972, 1975; Kelly 1991), were compelled by economic interests to come to terms with a new order of ascriptive difference and inequality—in the popular Fijian expression, as "*vulagi*" (foreigners and guests) dependent on their "*tauvei*" (indigenous landowner) hosts and patrons. The inequality in control of the means of production and in associated forms of occasional social deference was balanced by the tenants' greater economic gains (sometimes even employing members of the landowning group as labor) and by a quiet conviction of their cultural superiority and their role in transforming Fiji from "bush and barbarity."

A contradiction emerged between the progressive universalist ideals adopted from Gandhi's movement and the benefits Indians actually gained from the preservation of Fijian village "communalism" within the framework of chiefly authority. Land leases were available and cheap for farmers and business people to the extent that the owners remained subsistence villagers only marginally reliant on money incomes, as most did until the 1970s.<sup>38</sup> From the late colonial period until well after independence, the

Indians of Fiji were one of the best-off economically of all the populations descended from emigrant indentured workers; a survey of the diaspora, published in 1951 by India's governing Congress Party, declared Fiji to be "a bright spot in an otherwise black picture."<sup>39</sup> Although in the 1950s and 1960s Indian leaders protested against the reclamation of certain lands into Fijian reserves, the displaced tenants could usually be relocated as the sugar industry expanded (Moynagh 1980:188, 195). In fact, material conditions have generally favored the management of ethnic conflict. The archipelago has a population just below eight hundred thousand, abundant natural resources, and the most advanced capitalist economy in the Pacific (excepting New Zealand and Hawai'i). Only in the last two decades has competition for jobs and land become a major problem. A continued relative affluence, until the coups, is a theme in recent writing by a leading Fiji Indian author (Subramani 1995:167, 174, 204).

Ethnic tension was aggravated when the British preparations for self-government signaled the prospect of a power struggle. Fijian anxieties were deepened by the Indian demand for political equality under common-roll elections when Indians were 51 percent of the population. Indian fears were aroused by short-lived rhetoric about a "Fiji for the Fijians." The militant campaign for a common electoral roll eventually provoked Fijian protest marches and rallies. However, these protests were followed by a rapprochement in which Indian leaders moderated their demand and proposed special powers for the Council of Chiefs in an upper house of parliament. Transcripts of the confidential talks in 1969 that led to a united call for full independence from British rule reveal a remarkable spirit of mutual understanding and trust after a dangerous phase of acrimony and suspicion (Norton 1990:104–107).

The accord was eventually broken by the emergence of the Fijian National Party and the reluctance of Ratu Mara's government to condemn it strongly. Fijian ethnonationalism was a central force in the two major political crises in postcolonial Fiji, both arising after electoral wins by groups based largely in Indian constituencies. The first of these victories, in 1977, was enabled by the Fijian National Party splitting the Fijian vote. The governor-general, the highest ranking chief, reinstated Ratu Mara as prime minister after the victorious, mostly Indian, National Federation Party leaders procrastinated in their efforts to form a government. Although their protest forced fresh elections, they then split into factional rivalry rather than try to repeat their victory. A decade later, Timoci Bavadra's new Labour Party and National Federation Party coalition government was ousted by a military coup influenced by an intimidating ethnicist protest movement.

Events from the late colonial period, however, suggest a pattern of recur-

ring phases in national politics: crises that accentuate conflict yet also create new contexts for dialogue and accommodation through a reformulation of shared values and principles (Norton 1994).<sup>40</sup> The recent constitutional reform is a striking echo of the rapprochement that preceded the achievement of independence. Indeed, the main historical significance of the coups may well prove to be the impetus they eventually gave to a nation-making project more surely based than that inaugurated by independence in 1970. In this project the place of the Council of Chiefs in facilitating and legitimating change has been more strongly affirmed than it was at the end of colonial rule.

### **Chiefship in a National Political Culture**

Postcoup debate on how to make the nation has revolved around three “discourses” reflecting contrasting modalities of interethnic relations (Norton 2000). At one extreme is the schismatic ethnonationalist vision: an antagonistic and excluding ethnicity asserted by some Fijian individuals and groups, particularly the Suva-based Taukei Movement. The proponents have typically been commoners. The most ominous assertion of their vision was a proposal for authoritarian rule unsuccessfully urged on the highest chiefs by senior army officers two years after the coups.

At the other extreme, a “universalist” vision of equivalence among the citizens is held by many leaders (mainly Indians) in the multiethnic labor movement, most Indian religious and political groups, some Christian churches, and some individual Fijians as well as Indians and others in the urban middle class. Proclaimed in the face of deep difference in culture, social relations, and economic interests, this vision has yet to acquire an effective political voice.

The model of the nation that prevailed in the recent constitutional reform is the one that developed as I have described, affirming an asymmetric complementarity linked with the role of chiefship in the management of ethnic conflict. Most Fijian petitions to the Constitutional Review Commission in 1995 did not voice an antagonistic and excluding ethnicity, but rather a theme of accommodation and inclusion, stressing the idea of a partnership based on preserving indigenous political preeminence in some form.<sup>41</sup> Although the petition of Rabuka’s own party initially insisted on preserving a heavy Fijian dominance, with little change from the 1990 constitution, the Council of Chiefs declined to endorse it.

The place of chiefs in the public imagining of the nation is highlighted annually on “Ratu Sukuna Day,” instigated by the Council of Chiefs several years after the army coups. The most renowned chief of the colonial era is

exalted as a model of Fijian leadership for the multiethnic society, symbolizing a way in which chiefship, still the core element of Fijian political culture, might also become a central element of a national political culture. The iconic Ratu Sukuna potently melds the ethnic and national meanings of chiefship.

Since the 1930s he has been the ideal exemplar of high chiefs as figures of unassailable strength and dignity representing and protecting Fijians, their land, and their culture in the modern world. This image has sometimes been invoked by ethnic extremists—as when, soon after the first army coup, some members of the *Taukei* Movement gathered in “warrior” dress beneath Sukuna’s bronze statue in Suva and threatened to roast in an oven freshly dug beside them any supporter of the ousted government who tried to initiate legal action against their high chief, then the governor-general, for dissolving parliament.

Many Fijians denounced that use of Sukuna’s image, and now he is being configured to symbolize the role a chiefly leader should play in bridging the ethnic divide: “Ratu Sukuna, the man who graced a nation. This man of noble birth carried out deeds with even greater nobility, without motive against any race.”<sup>42</sup> On Sukuna Day in May 1995, as public hearings for the constitutional review began, Rabuka’s press statement intoned: “The unity and sanctity of traditional Fijian society was always his foremost interest. . . . But at the same time it was clear to him that Fijians would have to adjust to coexistence with other communities. . . . All share a wish to live peacefully . . . and contribute to the development of Fiji.”<sup>43</sup> In the late 1990s Sukuna’s “national” outlook is officially invoked as inspiration for an equitable resolution of a new uncertainty about the future of Indian leases: “Ratu Sukuna laid the foundation for modern Fiji by guiding the Fijian people towards an acceptance of others as partners in the development of their land as a national asset.”<sup>44</sup>

### Conclusion

The colonial legacy for ethnic relations in postcolonial Fiji has two dimensions. Most obvious is the reinforcement of the ethnic divide marked by persisting differences in economy, culture, and social relations. In political life these differences, long emphasized by a communal electoral system, have outweighed the shared interests of workers, farmers, and consumers. The other colonial legacy, less recognized, is the one with which the postcolonial political process has now strongly reconnected and is reinforcing: cultural codes and institutions that facilitate mediation and accommodation across difference. In considering this articulation between indigenous identity and

power, on the one hand, and the multiethnic economy and polity, on the other, I have examined the intersection of aspects of Fijian culture, colonial institutions, and the development of political economy in which non-Fijians, primarily Fiji Indians, gained lease access to much of the best agricultural land.

The colonial rulers encouraged the development of a chiefly elite holding a privileged position in the state and symbolizing indigenous Fijian culture and political strength. Yet chiefly privilege has not inevitably been equated with Fijian ethnonationalism. On the contrary, the formation of this elite facilitated the growth of a national political economy and has constrained antagonistic ethnicity. The significance of the chiefs in the political process has been their paradoxically dual position, on the one hand, as the most powerful ethnic boundary markers and rallying figures in the occasional affirmation of indigenous Fijian solidarity in opposition to Indians and, on the other hand, as mediators of that division, reconcilers of the conflicting demands of ethnic and national domains.

This accommodative function was not necessarily a matter of considered personal commitment on the part of chiefs. Rather it was favored precisely by the manner in which Fijian ethnic identity and leadership were so strongly constituted from the late colonial period. Especially important has been the privileged consultative relation between chiefs and the state, which from the 1930s was turned toward national as well as ethnic goals.

I have not denied that chauvinist opinions are often voiced in the Council of Chiefs. The chiefs endorsed the coup d'état and its promise of ethnic political rule with chiefs at the forefront, a regime that was to prevail for several years. However, I would argue that the ethnicist governments and constitution following the coups are more accurately to be understood as a constrained expression of a potential for a more oppressive ethnonationalism rather than as the unbridled triumph of that potential. The ethnicist phase began in the context of a perceived loss of Fijian preeminence in the state, a groundswell of popular Fijian support for the coup, and the coup maker's quick convening of a meeting of the Council of Chiefs where he sat, one participant told me, "like a messiah" whom no one dared challenge.

Initially, like the millenarian leader Apolosi, Rabuka promised a redemptive "new era" of Fijian power and prosperity, repudiating the economic dominance of non-Fijians. The ironic spectacle a decade later of Rabuka, like Apolosi's nemesis Ratu Sukuna, urging the chiefs to approve reforms in support of interethnic partnership and national prosperity reflected a perennial dialectic in national politics in which the chiefs mediate conflict between needs of the multiethnic economy and society, and the persisting strength of indigenous cultural identity and demands.

It is true that a major outcome of the coups has been the much strengthened prominence of commoners in political leadership. The principals in government have been mostly commoners, and Rabuka himself as chairman of the Council of Chiefs has demonstrated charisma and skill in influencing the chiefs' decisions. Yet it is also clear that since the coups the chiefs have become more significant in the national domain, less by their constitutional prerogatives than in their place in a nascent public imagining of the nation. The important part played by the council in the final phase of the constitutional reform and the reconstructed iconic Ratu Sukuna affirm this significance. The attitude of commoner leaders such as Rabuka toward the persisting weight of chiefship in both ethnic and interethnic politics is ambivalent because the chiefs, as ultimate arbiters of the legitimacy of ethnic leadership, are potentially independent adjudicators of the political process.

The circumstances of ethnic relations are now different from those in which the forms of Fijian leadership and ethnic identity I have been describing were shaped. The inception of the chiefs' function in interethnic accommodation was linked with a pattern of complementarity supported in large part by a substantial ethnic separation in economy. This structure is weakening. For some time, an increasing convergence of Fijians and Indians as wage employees, commercial farmers, and consumers has been generating some shared interests and values, as reflected in the scale and strength of the trade-union movement. But there is also an increasing competition for jobs, land, and other economic resources, and a rising incidence of militant landowner protests in disputes with non-Fijian leaseholders and government authorities. Strengthening common interests might encourage intensified ethnic rivalry and antagonism no less than a disposition to unite politically across the ethnic divide.

New Fijian ethnonationalist political groups were formed in preparation for the first elections under the new constitution. A critical question for Fiji's future is whether chiefs will continue to contribute to accommodation, to a political and cultural articulation across the ethnic divide, or whether they might tend to align more strongly with the chauvinist style of leadership they have in the past helped to restrain.

## NOTES

This article draws on thirty-two years of study, but particularly on twenty-one months in Fiji between 1993 and 1998. I have benefited from discussions with informants too numerous to name and from the friendly and efficient assistance of Margaret Patel and her staff at the Fiji National Archives. I especially thank Kerry James and Tony Hooper for their suggestions and encouragement, and acknowledge the invaluable comments by three anonymous *Pacific Studies* readers. An earlier and much shorter version is to be

published in *Culture and Development in the Pacific*, edited by Antony Hooper (UNESCO, 1999).

In these notes “CSO” refers to Colonial Secretary’s Office files held in the Fiji National Archives. Fiji Archives rules do not permit reference to specific confidential files. “CO” refers to Colonial Office files, Public Record Office, London; those not identified as AJCP microfilm copies were studied in London.

1. Fifty-nine percent of 1,011 civil-service appointments in 1991 were Fijians, 33 percent Indians; 62 percent of the 702 promotions were Fijians, 34 percent Indians (Public Service Commission report for 1991). For several years after the coups, many Fijians readily obtained poorly secured loans from the National Bank of Fiji (*Fiji Review*, July and November 1995, August 1996).

2. *Australian Financial Review*, 25 September 1989, 1; and the original forty-four-page document.

3. Joveci Gavoka, former president of the Fiji Trades Union Congress, *Fiji Times*, 6 and 10 November 1982.

4. The most ethnicist petitions were from provincial councils and other groups in south-east Viti Levu near or in the capital city.

5. The most controversial proposals, endorsed by parliament soon after Reddy’s speech to the chiefs, were for political representation in proportion to ethnic demography, a bipartisan cabinet, and special appointive and veto powers for the Council of Chiefs. The Constitution Review Commission was headed by Sir Paul Reeves, a former governor-general of New Zealand. The reforms rejected the commission’s recommendations for full common roll but introduced some common seats, complementing a majority of communal seats, as well as allocating the latter in proportion to ethnic demography. The offices of president, vice-president, and prime minister are no longer reserved for Fijians (*Report of the Joint Parliamentary Select Committee on the Report of the Fiji Constitution Review Commission*, Parliamentary Paper No. 17 of 1997). The commission’s report was published as *The Fiji Islands—Towards a United Future*, Parliamentary Paper No. 34 of 1996. See also Lal 1997 and (*Fiji Review*, November 1996 and July 1997).

6. The speech is reported in full in *Fiji Times*, 7 July 1997. It was arranged after Reddy complained that the chiefs’ opposition to some of the agreements being negotiated among political leaders on constitutional reform was encouraging resistance from some Fijian participants in the talks. Before presenting Reddy, Rabuka urged the chiefs “to think of the other communities”: “International law has given us the right to self-determination. . . . But equally under international law . . . we have an obligation to look after the minority communities” (*Daily Post*, 7 July 1997).

7. Interview with Mr. Reddy, 27 January 1998.

8. *Fiji Times*, 11, 16, 30 January 1998. While the renewal of numerous Indian farm leases is currently in doubt, many Fijian clans and political leaders agree that the sugar industry will be best served by the continuation of most of them.



9. *Fiji Times*, 9 June 1997, 3. See also *Fiji Times*, 6 June 1997; *Daily Post*, 6 and 9 June 1997.
10. Chandra and Mason 1998:70–73; World Bank, “Fiji: Restoring Growth in a Changing Global Environment,” 22–23, Report No. 13862-FIJ, 1995.
11. Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical News*, no. 8, 21 February 1997.
12. *Fiji Times*, 10 February 1995; *Daily Post*, 13 and 25 February 1995.
13. F. Dewa, in House of Representatives, *Daily Hansard*, 9 December 1994, 2580.
14. *Fiji Times*, 10 January 1995.
15. *Fiji Times*, 24 June 1996; *Review (Fiji)*, July 1996, 28.
16. Fletcher to Secretary of State for Colonies, 26/1/1932, CO83 196/7, PRO, London.
17. C.S.R. Co., Sydney, to Governor of Fiji, 23/2/34, CO83/207/9. By 1934, 4,600 farmers leased Fijian land, and 4,100 were company tenants (Lal 1992:100).
18. Andrews to Government of Fiji, May 1936, CO83/215/85038/36, AJCP, reels 4168, 4169.
19. Richards to Secretary of State for Colonies, 30/12/1937, CO83 222/8.
20. CO83 215/15.
21. Barton to Secretary of State for Colonies, 31/10/1936, CO83 215/15. The Native Lands Trust Board was chaired by the governor and initially comprised two Fijian and two European members but toward the end of the colonial period had a Fijian majority. It supervises relations between landowners and tenants by arranging leases and collecting and distributing rents within landowning clans.
22. 1944 Administrative Officers’ Conference, CSO F50/104.
23. Fiji Legislative Council Paper No. 3, 1931, 3.
24. *Fiji Legislative Council Debates* 1933:301.
25. *Fiji Legislative Council Debates* 1947:112.
26. *Fiji Times*, 31 May 1958, 1; *Fiji Legislative Council Debates* 1958:469.
27. Nawai to Governor Luke, 16/9/1937, CSO confidential files.
28. “The Order of the New Era for the Year 1938,” distributed in Fiji from Rotuma, CSO confidential files.

29. Mitchell to Secretary of State, Colonies, 15/4/1943 and 16/7/1943, CO83 236/15. Sukuna's ambivalence toward Europeans began with his rejection on racial grounds when as a young Oxford student he tried to enlist in the British army for World War I. He later united with Indian leaders against color discrimination in the civil service, formed a close friendship with a leading Indian critic of colonial rule, and sympathized with striking Indian sugarcane farmers in the midst of the Pacific War; for more information on Sukuna's life, see Scarr's evocative biography (Scarr 1980). Continuing official anxiety about Fijian loyalty is indicated in Governor Freeston's urgent request to London for funds to rebuild Queen Victoria School, where Fijian youths were prepared for government service. Insisting that this project "should have complete priority over all development projects," he warned that "dissatisfaction was reaching such a pitch as to threaten the longstanding Fijian loyalty. . . . I cannot overemphasise the political aspect. . . . Further procrastination will have disturbing and far reaching political consequences" (Freeston to Secretary of State for Colonies, 12/1/1949, CSO F28/224, part 2).
30. Secretary Native Affairs to Colonial Secretary, 5/7/1932, CSO confidential files.
31. Governor Maddocks's Cession Day speech in 1961, CSO F9/21-2.
32. On these sources of ethnic tension in the early postwar years, see Lal 1992.
33. *Fiji Times*, 29 September 1955, 4-5; 6 November 1953, 4; *Legislative Council* 1953: 204; CSO F50/115/1-6, F9/21-2.
34. CSO confidential file.
35. CSO F4/3/7-5.
36. *Fiji Legislative Council Debates* 1944:44, 1946:211, 1947:112, 1948:219.
37. CSO confidential file.
38. The 1940 legislation set rents for twenty-five years. Although since 1967 rents have been allowed to reach 6 percent of the unimproved capital value of the land, they were usually much lower until quite recently. For the vast majority of Fijians, including most people of chiefly rank, rents have been a minor source of income (Overton 1989:44, 110).
39. "Indians outside India," by N. V. Rajkumar, CSO confidential file.
40. The earliest expression of this cyclical trend was the famous "Deed of Cession debate" in 1946 on the question of "safeguarding the Fijian race," which took place in the colonial parliament during a phase of heightened ethnic tension and culminated in an agreement among political leaders on the principle of paramountcy of Fijian interests (Norton 1977:39-40).
41. Records of the Constitutional Review Commission, Fiji National Archives.
42. *Fiji Times*, 29 May 1995, 1.

43. Ibid.
44. *Daily Post*, 30 May 1997.

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