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## CHAPTER THREE

# Theories of Culture: Responding to Emergent Nationalisms

This chapter explores missionaries' conceptions of 'culture' and 'race' that were influenced by both their experience in the mission field and by international debates.<sup>1</sup> The 1920s saw the General Secretary for Methodist Overseas Missions of Australasia, John W Burton, engaging heavily in international discussions about mission policies. This chapter outlines his efforts to enact those policies through the mission's institutions. The International Missionary Council called on missionaries everywhere to support the establishment of a 'native' church, yet missionaries were convinced that European control was required, and were therefore reluctant to push too strongly for indigenous self-governance. Burton used the policies discussed at the International Missionary Council as guiding principles for all the mission sites in the region, which roused different responses depending on the local context. In Fiji, his adaptation of these principles both stirred and quelled tensions as the Indo-Fijian community increasingly articulated anti-colonial feeling. Some missionaries tried to alleviate racial sentiment but others intensified it, exacerbating competition over land and often advocating for Fijian rights in the face of the increasing Indo-Fijian population. This chapter examines the development of ideas grounded in the 'three selves' church policy that related to indigenous autonomy and access to land throughout the 1920s, as missionaries and colonial administrators used essentialist ideas of Fijian and Indo-Fijian 'culture' to determine colonial Fiji's racial hierarchy.

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1 M Kaplan and J Kelly, 'On Discourse and Power: Cults and Orientals', *American Ethnologist*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2000, p. 852.

To fully understand the changes in the Fijian mission, it is crucial to understand the broader networks the Methodist Overseas Missions operated within. The Methodist mission aided Australia's colonial administration of Papua New Guinea through provision of infrastructure, and the administration, under Sir Hubert Murray in the 1920s, relied heavily on government anthropologists. This meant that there was considerable overlap between discussions about governance and those within the anthropological discipline. By the 1920s, anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski's criticisms of missions — that missionaries (particularly in Papua New Guinea, where he had conducted his fieldwork in 1914) were forcing change on indigenous communities — had encouraged some missionaries to question their thinking and gradually gravitate towards the lessons of 'functional anthropology'. Functional anthropology encouraged people to think of society not in terms of 'aims', such as the aim to move from a primitive to a more civilised state, but rather in terms of function: each cultural practice was considered to serve a purpose.<sup>2</sup> Mission leaders involved in Fiji were engaging with ideas about 'culture' and filtering anthropological discourse into mission debates.<sup>3</sup> These concepts of difference helped missionaries address the practicalities of ministering to the colony's various communities. As historian David Wetherell discussed in his study on Charles Abel, an Anglican missionary in Papua New Guinea, the shift to functional anthropology promoted acceptance of the difference between indigenous and European culture; it encouraged missionaries to discard evolutionist conceptualisations of society, and adopt methods that they hoped would create a 'tranquil colonialism' where their authority would not be disputed. Anthropologists were starting to explore the potential for cultures to continue in the 'modern' colonial world, rather than be altered to suit European expectations.<sup>4</sup>

Contrary to some anthropologists' criticisms, there was evidence that missions had tried to maintain traditional customs in Fiji. Evidence of this can be found in the movement established around 1920 at Davuilevu called the *Viti Cauravau*, the Young Fijian Society, which sought to promote Fijian culture and values to

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2 D Wetherell, *Charles Abel and the Kwato Mission of Papua New Guinea 1891–1975*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1996, p. xvi; T H Eriksen, *Small Places, Large Issues: An Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology*, third edition, New York, Pluto Press, 2010, p. 91. Peter Pels has noted that anthropologists had been criticising mission policies as early as the 1870s, with F Max Mueller. P Pels, 'Anthropology and Mission: Towards a Historical Analysis of Professional Identity', in R Bonsen, H Marks and J Miedema (eds), *The Ambiguity of Rapprochement: Reflections of Anthropologists on their Controversial Relationship with Missionaries*, Vondalstaat, Focaal, 1990, p. 82. He notes also that W H R Rivers made similar comments in 1920, p. 84. See Malinowski's comments on p. 85.

3 H Gardner, 'The Culture Concept and the Theological Colleges', unpublished conference paper, Pacific History Association conference, Wellington, 2012.

4 D Wetherell, *Charles Abel and the Kwato Mission of Papua New Guinea 1891–1975*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1996, p. xvi.

the extent that they protested against Fijian women marrying non-Fijian men.<sup>5</sup> The *Viti Cauravau* was an embryonic ethno-nationalist movement. That it had emerged from one of the central sites of Methodism in Fiji is perhaps not surprising considering the approach the Methodists had taken in shaping the mission around tradition, despite the limitations its foreign leaders placed on emerging indigenous leaders.<sup>6</sup>

The mission board consciously also strived to foster separate cultural and ethnicised branches within the Indo-Fijian branch, through continuing to deliberately recruit workers with knowledge of Indian cultures and languages. Among those who had travelled to Fiji after working in India was the Reverend Leslie Muir Thompson, who spent two years in northern India studying language before relocating to the mission station at Navua, Fiji, in 1916, where he remained until 1931.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Frank L Nunn traversed the two colonies, working in India from 1909 to 1913 and then again from 1920 to 1926, and in Fiji from 1914 to 1920 and from 1928 to 1937.<sup>8</sup> European missionaries hoped that their cultural and linguistic comprehension of Indian society would set them apart from European settlers as anti-colonial sentiment rose in the Indo-Fijian community. The greatest attribute sought was language proficiency. Language was seen as a distinctive element of a national character, and became an essential pillar in the identity of a 'national' or 'native' church. As Indo-Fijians were considered 'natives', despite not being 'indigenous' to the colony, there was a sustained focus on this construction of a distinctive Indian 'native' identity.

Since his first trip to India in 1908, John W Burton had not only aided the recruitment of missionaries from India to Fiji, but had ensured that lasting networks were built between the two British colonies. He travelled to India in 1926, visiting numerous sites. At the end of his trip, he met with Charles Freer Andrews, an English Anglican missionary who became the globally recognised Indian nationalist leader, Gandhi's emissary.<sup>9</sup> Burton had already caught Andrews' attention when he published *Fiji of To-Day* in 1910. Andrews read this book before travelling to Fiji in 1917 to report on the condition of

5 D Scarr, *Ratu Sukuna: Soldier, Statesman, Man of Two Worlds*, London, Macmillan Education for the Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna biography committee, 1980, p. 108.

6 Ibid., p. 109.

7 'Church News', *Advertiser*, Melbourne, 13 May 1916, p. 2; T M O'Connor, 'Thompson, Leslie Muir (1885–1975)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Center of Biography, The Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/thompson-leslie-muir-11850/text21211, accessed 6 February 2013; J Garrett, *Footsteps in the Sea: Christianity in Oceania to World War Two*, Suva, University of the South Pacific in conjunction with the World Council of Churches, 1992, p. 166.

8 A H Wood, *Overseas Missions of the Australian Methodist Church: Fiji-Indian and Rotuma*, vol. 3, Aldersgate Press, Melbourne, 1978, p. 77.

9 Indian Visit 1926, 3 November 1926, MLMSS 2899 Add On 990; C F Andrews, *India and the Pacific*, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1937, pp. 18, 23.

indentured Indian labourers.<sup>10</sup> Both Burton and Andrews, moving between Fiji and India to call for the end of the indenture system, had engaged with popular notions about the inevitability of Fijian extinction in the face of the more 'industrial' Indo-Fijian race.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the efforts of Burton and some other missionaries to advocate for the rights of Indo-Fijian workers, the majority of the Indians who remained in Fiji after indenture saw missionaries as part of the colonial machine.<sup>12</sup> When indenture ended, no one seemed particularly sure about how much of the Indian community would remain in the colony.<sup>13</sup> From 1915 onwards, missionaries in the agricultural areas of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, in particular, watched as Indian families settled on 10-acre blocks leased from the Colonial Sugar Refining Company.<sup>14</sup> This consolidated the expectations held by many observers that Fiji would be increasingly populated by Indo-Fijian peoples.

With the cessation of indenture, there was trepidation about empowering Indo-Fijians with the same rights as Europeans, such as voting privileges.<sup>15</sup> Indo-Fijian labourers staged widespread riots against oppressive labour conditions throughout January and February 1920.<sup>16</sup> Charles Freer Andrews, during his trips to Fiji in 1916 and 1917, had discussed Gandhi's work and ideas with both Indo-Fijians and Fijians,<sup>17</sup> adding weight to the argument of historian Ken Gillion that, by 1920, Gandhi's ideas about home rule were already stirring opinion in the Indo-Fijian community.<sup>18</sup> The Reverend Richard Piper, stationed at the mission's Indo-Fijian branch in Lautoka, believed that these riots had

10 C Weir, 'An Accidental Biographer? On Encountering, Yet Again, the Ideas and Actions of J W Burton', in B V Lal and V Luker (eds), *Telling Pacific Lives: Prisms of Process*, Canberra, ANU E Press, 2008, p. 216.

11 C F Andrews, *India and the Pacific*, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1937, p. 63; C Weir, 'An Accidental Biographer? On Encountering, Yet Again, the Ideas and Actions of J W Burton', in B V Lal and V Luker (eds), *Telling Pacific Lives: Prisms of Process*, Canberra, ANU E Press, 2008, p. 216; A Pande, 'Indians and the Struggle for Power in Fiji', *Diaspora Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2010, p. 59; J Garrett, *Footsteps in the Sea: Christianity in Oceania to World War Two*, Suva, University of the South Pacific in conjunction with the World Council of Churches, 1992, p. 161.

12 'Indians in Fiji: Indenture system: Address by Visiting Missioner', *The West Australian*, 17 April 1917, p. 4.

13 K L Gillion, *The Fiji-Indians: Challenge to European Dominance, 1920–1946*, Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1977, p. vii.

14 M Moynagh, 'Land Tenure in Fiji's Sugar Cane Districts Since the 1920s', *Journal of Pacific History*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1978, p. 54. The mission also benefited from assistance from CSR. For example, in 1904, the church at Lautoka was placed on land 'given as a grant' by the CSR, which also contributed to a church built at Davuilevu. Fiji District Synod Minutes 1904–1905 in A Thornley, 'The Methodist mission and the Indians in Fiji, 1900 to 1920', Masters thesis, p. 19.

15 K L Gillion, *The Fiji-Indians: Challenge to European Dominance, 1920–1946*, Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1977, p. vii.

16 'Indian Strike Riots in Fiji: Report by the Governor', *The Mercury*, Tasmania, 20 February 1920, p. 5; K L Gillion, *The Fiji-Indians: Challenge to European Dominance, 1920–1946*, Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1977, pp. 26–7.

17 C F Andrews, *India and the Pacific*, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1937, p. 68

18 K L Gillion, *The Fiji-Indians: Challenge to European Dominance, 1920–1946*, Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1977, pp. 19–20.

a racial undercurrent, which was exacerbated by the colonial administration opting to use Fijians as strike breakers. Anti-colonial sentiment similarly drove Indo-Fijian opposition to European missionaries preaching the gospel.<sup>19</sup> There was a correlation between the frustrations aired in the strikes against European employers, and those that were starting to simmer amongst Indo-Fijian catechists who laboured under the superintendence of European missionaries. Catechists believed that they were being denied promotion on the basis of their race. In both spheres of life — work and mission — European efforts to assert their own cultural hegemony had spawned unequal labour conditions.

European missionaries used their international networks to develop responses to anti-colonial sentiment. By 1921, Burton was a member of the Methodist mission board in Sydney. That year, he was one of 60 mission leaders who attended the International Missionary Conference at Lake Mohonk, New York, which was led by his mentor John R Mott, American leader of the Student Christian Movement.<sup>20</sup> As at previous International Missionary Council conferences, there was talk of incorporating national customs and cultures in missions, but many mission leaders simultaneously sought to promote indigenous progress to an end point of 'Christian civilisation'.<sup>21</sup> There was a tension between the perceived need not only to convert communities to Christianity but also to 'modernity', while trying to dispel accusations of imperialist attitudes. The Mohonk conference was pinned on Mott's optimistic message about evangelising all of the world's people and the need to establish 'native churches' throughout the world.

At this time, members of the International Missionary Council suggested that a mission's first line of defence against anti-colonial nationalist movements should be a demonstrated celebration of culture. They argued that an 'Indian church', an 'African church', and a 'Japanese church' — indigenous, self-supporting churches — should be built, and reflect the national character.<sup>22</sup> Acculturating Christianity appeared to missionaries to be in some respects more straightforward than elevating indigenous ministers to positions of authority, as racist beliefs persisted and diminished belief in indigenous capability. This is certainly what appeared to be happening in Fiji.<sup>23</sup> Acknowledging the importance of culture became particularly important when the mission was competing against the highly

19 'India in Fiji', *The Spectator*, 9 June 1920, p. 422; K L Gillion, *The Fiji-Indians: Challenge to European Dominance, 1920–1946*, Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1977, p. 73.

20 J W Burton, *The Weaver's Shuttle: Memories and Reflections of an Octogenarian*, unpublished manuscript, n.d., pp. 32, 100; W R Hogg, *Ecumenical Foundations: A History of the International Missionary Council and its Nineteenth Century Background*, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1952, pp. 150, 202.

21 F Lenwood, 'The International Missionary Council at Lake Mohonk, October 1921,' *International Review of Missions*, vol. 11, 1922, p. 37; G R Doss, 'John R Mott, 1865–1955: Mission Leader Extraordinaire', *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2010, p. 79.

22 K Saunders, 'The Passing of Paternalism in Missions', *Journal of Religion*, vol. 2, no. 5, 1922, p. 468.

23 F Lenwood, 'The International Missionary Council at Lake Mohonk, October 1921,' *International Review of Missions*, vol. 11, 1922, p. 41.

active Indo-Fijian nationalist group, the Arya Samaj, which was grounded in Hindu faith. Linking culture to emergent nationalisms, missionaries considered incorporating certain elements of Hinduism in the Indo-Fijian mission branch.<sup>24</sup> Nationalism and culture were bound in this mission project of the 'three selves' church, but in these discussions were being disengaged from racist thinking.

The International Missionary Council's ideas were lofty, and the reality on the ground was markedly more complex. By 1921, the Indo-Fijian branch of Fiji's Methodist mission had only 70 members and conversion remained an important focus of mission work.<sup>25</sup> Frustrated with the slow progress, Richard Piper wrote in support of acculturation in 1922. He described the tendency of 'European' Christianity to lead to the disintegration of 'the ancient faiths and social systems of India'.<sup>26</sup> Piper believed efforts to incorporate Indian culture into Methodism had been lacklustre, attributable to the lack of contact between European mission staff and the wider community. European missionaries remained aloof, he claimed, too mindful of maintaining a distinction between themselves and the Indo-Fijian community. This had limited the linguistic attainments of mission staff, which Piper said was 'much lower than would be tolerated in India'. For example, missionaries used rough Hindustani rather than Urdu, the language associated with India's educated elite.<sup>27</sup> Missionaries working in India had described their work as being defined by language rather than geographical boundaries. Edgar W Thompson, himself a Methodist missionary in India, wrote in 1912 that it was 'useless to attempt an approach to a Muslim through the medium of Tamil or Telugu', saying that mission workers should use Urdu (Hindustani) and be familiar with Islam.<sup>28</sup> Piper may have failed to realise that there was a new language evolving in Fiji — Fiji Hindi — which blended Bhojpuri and Avadhi.<sup>29</sup> However, aware of a growing race-consciousness in the colony, Piper's primary concern was that the divide between European missionaries and the Indo-Fijian community could be deepened if their approach was interpreted as racist.

24 Arya Samaj was a strong anti-colonial force in Fiji and South Africa during the early twentieth century. See also J Kelly, *The Politics of Virtue: Hinduism, Sexuality and Counter-Colonial Discourse in Fiji*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991, pp. 202–3; N Green, 'Islam for the Indentured Indian: A Muslim Missionary in Colonial South Africa', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 71, 2008, p. 530; P N Vedalankar and M Somera, *Arya Samaj and Indians Abroad*, Durban, South Africa, Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, 1975, p. 122.

25 J Garrett, *Where Nets Were Cast: Christianity in Oceania since World War Two*, Suva, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific in association with the World Council of Churches, 1997, p. 243.

26 'India in Fiji', *The Spectator*, 9 June 1920, p. 422.

27 R Piper, 'Indian mission: problems in Fiji: a report, compiled and printed by R Piper, December 1922, Lautoka', MOM 238 CY3465, screen 490; A Dalby, *Dictionary of Languages: The Definitive Reference to More Than 400 Languages*, London, Bloomsbury, 1999, p. 663.

28 E W Thompson, *The Call of India: A Study in Conditions, Methods and Opportunities of Missionary Work Among Hindus*, London, The Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, Bishopsgate, 1912, pp. 159–60.

29 B V Lal, 'Bahut Julum: Reflections on the use of Fiji Hindi', *Fiji Studies: A Journal of Contemporary Fiji*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2005, p. 153.



Piper was concerned that efforts towards the 'three selves' church policy appeared tokenistic in the Indo-Fijian branch, and warned that unfulfilled promises of self-governance would 'lead to the same old troubles that have marred the usefulness of our work'.<sup>30</sup> One of the problems that he identified was a jealousy between the mission's branches: the mission's workers could cooperate on matters that were of mutual interest, but he believed that the Fiji district synod was overbearing, had become 'big and unwieldy' and was 'breaking down under its own weight'.<sup>31</sup> The chairman was expected to preside over all three sessions of the district synod, but business was conducted separately for each racial group over several days. There was little energy to hear about matters relating to the Indo-Fijian mission, which was discussed at the end. With the Indo-Fijian work relegated to the back end of proceedings in every synod, those working within the Indo-Fijian community felt dejected. It would be better, Piper argued, to separate the proceedings, so that the mission's leaders were able to listen to concerns with fresh ears.<sup>32</sup> Piper also suggested that to address the growing resentment about the pre-eminent position given to Fijians in the mission, the Indo-Fijian branch needed its own representative, rather than a member of staff designated to European or Fijian work. This formed part of his case for increasing separation, and suggested that autonomy could be achieved with a 'divorce' from the district synod — Piper believed that Methodism in Fiji was already 'a house divided against itself'.<sup>33</sup>

The 1923 constitution amendments achieved some of what Piper hoped for with the establishment of the united European session at synod.<sup>34</sup> The institution segregated through a system that ensured European authority remained intact. The united European session included all of the European ministers and probationers who were involved in the Fijian and Indo-Fijian branches. The mission's constitution held that 'all questions relating to the character or work of the European missionaries shall be considered in the absence of the native ministers', the exclusion of Fijian and Indo-Fijian mission staff removing any chance that they might have any say in European staff appointments.<sup>35</sup> While the European session was an exclusive arena, the Fijian session included all European ministers and probationers, and one Fijian minister to represent each circuit.<sup>36</sup> A separate financial session included members of the pastoral

30 R Piper, 'Indian Mission: Problems in Fiji: A Report', MOM 238 CY3465, screen 490, ML.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 M Pickering-Bhagwan, 'A Historical Examination of the Indian Synod's Amalgamation into the Conference of the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma', [thejournalofspiritualwonderer.blogspot.com.au/2013/05/a-historical-examination-of-indian.html](http://thejournalofspiritualwonderer.blogspot.com.au/2013/05/a-historical-examination-of-indian.html); 1923 Constitution, Constitution of Methodist districts in Samoa, Fiji, Tonga and New Britain, 1936, MOM 317, ML, p. 5.

35 Ibid., p. 4.

36 Ibid.



session, with one lay representative from each Fijian circuit nominated by the European superintendent. The Indo-Fijian session included Europeans and any Indo-Fijian ministers and probationers working in the Indo-Fijian branch, as there were so few of the latter.<sup>37</sup>

Despite their exclusion from some areas of governance, Fijian paramountcy seemed impenetrable. Fijians were working as ministers and were involved at almost every other level as probationers, catechists, circuit stewards, sectional stewards and in the local teaching community. They also worked as local preachers and class leaders, and attended quarterly meetings with European missionaries. Circuit stewards were charged with communicating the business of mission to local chiefs and villages. This process of dissemination was embedded within the constitution and showed the importance placed on communal involvement in mission affairs.<sup>38</sup> The mission's staff was required to report to chiefs, bringing together the 'ancient' and 'modern' forms of leadership in Fiji, and delivering ideas from the International Missionary Council debates on cultural accommodation to the local village level.

Church structures became a focal point for discussions about acculturation in the early 1920s. The architectural design and the process of building churches was expected to reflect the national character. The Reverend Richard McDonald, who succeeded A J Small as chairman of the mission the following year, believed the incorporation of Fijian cultural traditions into the church was a reflection of 'true' religious life, and also a sign that the church had become self-propagating. McDonald explained the need to respect Fijian custom in providing houses for Fijian ministers, saying that this was:

native custom through and through and the natives claim this as a right. Their *tavi* as they call it is to supply planting land and residence for the Minister of God appointed to them. This they regard as a sacred obligation and we must be very careful how we interfere in the matter.<sup>39</sup>

McDonald had noted that Fijian ministers benefited from the communalist ideal of reciprocity. Churches reflected the efforts to demarcate cultural identities, through incorporating structural designs and decorations that were seen as typically 'Fijian' or 'Indian'. There were efforts to reify communalism through the way in which whole communities were involved in the construction of Fijian churches, including the buildings themselves. The Reverend Robert Green, stationed in the Lau group during the following decade, was convinced of the importance of incorporating cultural insignia in church buildings. He watched a new church being built, describing the concrete as representing

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37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., p. 3.

39 R L McDonald to J W Burton, 26 January 1923, F/1/1923, NAF, pp. 1–2.

European culture, the ‘curved and rounded ends and roof’ as being Tongan, and the ‘artistry and beauty of workmanship’ as being essentially Fijian.<sup>40</sup> A suitably modified mixture of cultures were therefore captured and celebrated within the mission in a variety of visible ways in order to demonstrate the successful adoption of Christianity and its being intertwined with a ‘national character’ or culture.

Burton and McDonald did not always see eye to eye, with Burton keen to push for social change and McDonald tending to promote the status quo. McDonald’s favourable opinion about the support offered to Fijian ministers in the communal society was evidence of this. Burton, on the other hand, worried that the communal system hindered rather than aided progress towards self-support, and expressed the need to give Fijian ministers ‘definite responsibility in an area that they can cover. That seems to me to be the only way to build up a real Native Church.’<sup>41</sup> McDonald was more concerned about the influence chiefs still had on the church — chiefs were rarely challenged by Fijian ministers, and could potentially control and limit the ministers’ stipends. McDonald wrote to Burton:

The majority of Native Ministers do NOT desire that they shall be left to the tender mercies of their chiefs in regard to their stipends. Central control is to them sure control. Their appointment is assured as is their stipend whether they are near home or in the land of strangers. And you must take the NATIVE MIND into consideration when attempting to put responsibility on him. You cannot give him responsibility if he does not want it and refuses to accept it.<sup>42</sup>

Missionaries saw themselves as the protective buffer between chiefs and ministers. If European missionaries were to retreat — as the ‘three selves’ church policy seemed to recommend — Fijian ministers would be subject to the whim of the chiefs. McDonald argued that Fijian ministers should not have to concede part of their pay to their chiefs. At the core of his argument was doubt in the ability of the Fijian people to make the transition from a ‘primitive’ to more ‘modern’ society, and a belief that European missionaries could intervene to prevent chiefs exploiting their subjects.

They had differing opinions, but both Burton and McDonald depicted Fijian culture as ‘primitive’, just as this anthropological characterisation of indigenous people was becoming outdated. In his preface to Bronislaw Malinowski’s *Pacific Argonauts*, published in 1922, Sir J G Frazer stated that the terms made popular

40 Circa 1934. R H Green, *My Story: A Record of the Life and Work of Robert H Green*, Melbourne, 1978, p. 182.

41 J W Burton to R L McDonald, 9 January 1923, F/1/1923, NAF, p. 2.

42 R L McDonald to J W Burton, 26 January 1923, F/1/1923, NAF, pp. 1–2.

by E B Tylor's work were becoming redundant.<sup>43</sup> Missionary discourses lagged a little behind developments in the discipline, although McDonald flagged his engagement with the fairly current work of W H R Rivers, for example, when he referred to the 'native mind', and his belief that it negated the fulfilment of the self-government principle espoused by the International Missionary Council.<sup>44</sup> McDonald suggested that the ministers were content working within the new system rather than reverting to a system of governance that might open the door to greater chiefly control of the institution and ministers' wages.

McDonald and Burton were at odds on the question of what characteristics marked a society's potential to transition from 'primitive' to 'civilised'. As Burton's beliefs provoked frustration, missionaries in the field simultaneously juggled Indo-Fijian needs and Fijian paramountcy. In 1925, responding to these concerns, another draft constitution was circulated that established two separate synods, rather than just organising distinct sessions of the one synod as per the 1923 constitution. A united European synod would continue to decide European ministerial appointments and make decisions relating to lay missionaries, mission sisters, and mission finances, without the input of non-European mission workers.<sup>45</sup>

Piper was again a key advocate for separate synods, citing a fear of Fijian dominance and resultant marginalisation of Indo-Fijian Methodists. He was supported by others working in the Indo-Fijian branch, such as G H Findlay, who agreed that Indo-Fijians and Fijians were too different to be organised through a shared administration.<sup>46</sup> Findlay later suggested that 'Europeans, Fijians and Indians formed an "eternal triangle" of races, which created a strong unsettled feeling, although manifestations of it were rare'.<sup>47</sup> Findlay saw separation as necessary for the mission's functionality, relaying his opinion to mission meetings in Australia.<sup>48</sup> Through this systematic categorisation and organisation of peoples, missionaries were integral to the 'othering' process, widening the sense of difference between Fijians and Indo-Fijians, all the while seeking a 'nativising', acculturating project.<sup>49</sup>

43 J G Frazer, 'Preface' in B K Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*, Long Grove, Illinois, Waveland Press, 1984, p. x.

44 G W Stocking, *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology, 1888-1951*, London, Anthlone, 1996, p. 108.

45 1925 draft constitution; District Synod minutes, appendix 2, F/4/E, PMB 1138.

46 A H Wood, *Overseas Missions of the Australian Methodist Church: Fiji-Indian and Rotuma*, vol. 3, Aldersgate Press, Melbourne, 1978, pp. 65, 98; Findlay is mentioned in J Kelly, *Politics of Virtue*, p. 217; A Ravuvu, *The Façade of Democracy: Fijian Struggles for Political Control, 1830-1987*, Suva, Fiji, Reader Publishing House, 1991, p. 56.

47 'Liquor Laws and Mixed Races: Fijian System Aggravates Racial Feeling', *The Advertiser*, Adelaide, SA, 6 May 1932, p. 16.

48 Ibid.

49 M Kaplan and J Kelly, 'On Discourse and Power: Cults and Orientals', *American Ethnologist*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2000, p. 854.

John R Mott, acting as envoy for the International Missionary Council and expressing the Methodist ideal of unity in diversity, visited Melbourne for the National Missionary Conference in 1926. Mott outlined the church-planting project, challenging missionaries to articulate exactly what constituted an 'indigenous church'.<sup>50</sup> He envisaged a church that would 'not interfere with native ideals and good customs'.<sup>51</sup> He hoped that church buildings would incorporate local architectural styles, appropriate to the climate. He also hoped that indigenous converts would 'be given a larger freedom of expression in the way they worshipped God'.<sup>52</sup> Self-governance was important, but 'vitality was more important than autonomy'.<sup>53</sup>

Mott's ideology, created at a considerable distance from any mission field, offered a theoretical vision for the missionaries in the audience who believed that their role was to bridge the divide between ancient and modern societies. Mott was concerned about public opinion that suggested missions were not capable of meeting the challenges of rapidly changing societies.<sup>54</sup> In response, Burton called for a united, inter-denominational and national missionary training college to equip men and women who intended to apply for foreign mission service.<sup>55</sup> Students would study a history of missions, tropical medicine and hygiene, other religions, bookkeeping, and mechanics. He also argued for training in phonetics and the science of language, suggesting this was important because, without knowing the local language, 'it is impossible to enter into "The Shrine of a People's soul"'.<sup>56</sup> Mott recommended missionaries also be taught elementary social anthropology:

Too often missionaries, with the best of intentions, but entirely ignorant of the social customs of the people, have done considerable damage to the delicate fabric of native social life. In some cases that damage has been irreparable, and it may not be long before some farther-seeing governments will place a ban upon those coming into intimate contact with native peoples unless they have had some preliminary training in anthropological science.<sup>57</sup>

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50 Mott was leader of the student volunteer movement, and had established the World Student Christian Federation in 1895, G R Doss, 'John R Mott, 1865–1955: Mission Leader Extraordinaire', *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2010, p. 76; 'Courageous Meeting: International Missionary Council', *The Brisbane Courier*, 10 April 1928, p. 11.

51 'Missionary Conference: Native Church Problems: Address by Dr J R Mott', *The Argus*, Melbourne, 13 April 1926, p. 13.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 Memorandum on United Kingdom Training, J W Burton Memo on missionary training R Hicken, circa 1926, MOM 319, ML.

55 Ibid., p. 2.

56 Ibid., p. 3.

57 Ibid., p. 4.

The Australian National Missionary Council nominated Sydney as the site for the college, as this was:

the port of departure for missionaries to the Pacific and to the Far East, and secondly, and more important, is the fact that the Sydney University alone provides courses in Anthropology, native linguistics and tropical medicine and hygiene.<sup>58</sup>

A special arrangement was made with the University of Sydney for the provision of discounted anthropology courses for missionary training.<sup>59</sup> Not only, then, did missions and colonial administrations work together to provide health and education to indigenous peoples throughout this period, but now they were receiving the same training in the same classrooms. Colonial and mission programs were increasingly aligning as staff were funnelled through courses at the University of Sydney.

Burton capitalised on Mott's support for missionary education while continuing discussions about the Fijian mission structure with McDonald. The ideal of self-governance was never far from their minds, with Burton pointing out:

The trouble is that we have taken our circuit system of the Home Land and applied it without distinction on the field. The European Superintendent is rather the Chairman of a district, and we shall have to rethink this whole matter it seems to me before very long.<sup>60</sup>

Despite their differences of opinion, Burton and McDonald agreed that a centralised system of governance would best suit Fiji.<sup>61</sup> Superintendents, scattered throughout the islands, had considerable authority, even though Burton and McDonald believed that the greatest power should lie with the district's chairman, who was charged with defining the parameters of each mission branch. The chairman was charged also with defining the parameters of the Indo-Fijian and Fijian synods.<sup>62</sup> Believing that a centralised system suited Fijian hierarchical social structures, which since the 1860s had elevated Cakobau to the centre at Bau, McDonald's democratic roots made him wary of how missionaries might react if there were any move made to limit their autonomy.<sup>63</sup> Contemplating constitutional change once again, McDonald was concerned that advocating for an increase in his own powers would place him 'in a most invidious position if he has to decide between the desires of European

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58 Ibid., p. 5.

59 Ibid.

60 J W Burton to R L McDonald, 22 April 1926, MOM 524, Fiji 1926, ML, p. 2.

61 Centralised systems of governance had been difficult to establish in Fiji due to the many tiers in the social order from *mataqali* to *tokatoka*. C Newbury, 'Chieftaincy in Transition', *Journal of Pacific History*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2008, pp. 168, 175–76.

62 R L McDonald to J W Burton, 23 June 1926, Fiji 1926, MOM 524, ML.

63 Ibid.

members of synod and the claims of the Indian and Native members according to the terms of the constitution'.<sup>64</sup> McDonald wanted to absolve himself of stirring the racial tension brewing in the colony, and maintain European authority, and thus advised Burton to adopt a 'hastening slowly' approach towards change. Concerned about tipping the existing social balance, McDonald believed that alterations to existing systems of power should be slow but deliberate.<sup>65</sup>

While these debates occurred amongst European missionaries, they were starting to be held accountable for excluding Indo-Fijians from ministerial positions.<sup>66</sup> The first Indo-Fijian minister, Ishwari Prashad, was ordained in 1921, but he had been trained in India at Bareilly College.<sup>67</sup> Davuilevu, the theological college that had been established in Fiji in 1908, was not open to Indo-Fijian candidates.<sup>68</sup> Ramsey Deoki, an Indo-Fijian catechist, constantly challenged the lack of autonomy afforded to non-European Methodists in Fiji. Deoki was from a reasonably successful family of Methodist business owners from the Nausori area.<sup>69</sup> During an illness early in life, Deoki decided to join the ministry, but upon finding that he was barred from theological education at Davuilevu Theological College, was forced to do his ministerial training overseas. His father enrolled him at Melbourne High School at the age of 21.<sup>70</sup> He made an impression on Burton on one of his trips back to Fiji in 1924, when he sighted Deoki's 'shining face' as he delivered a Hindustani service in Suva.<sup>71</sup> Even as a young man, Deoki was clearly identifiable as a rising talent in the Indo-Fijian Methodist community — right at a time when the broader Indo-Fijian community was demanding greater representation in Fijian affairs.<sup>72</sup>

Just as the Indo-Fijian political leadership was rebuked during the mid-1920s, so too were Deoki and John Bairagi. Both catechists were recommended for ministerial training in 1926, but the European synod voted against their acceptance. European missionaries' rejection of their application for ministerial

64 Ibid.

65 R L McDonald to J W Burton, 15 May 1926, Fiji 1926, MOM 524, ML.

66 This is similar to the argument made by John Kelly regarding the colonial administration's efforts to support the continuation of indigenous power structures through the chiefs through indirect rule, but had not done the same with the Indo-Fijian community. J Kelly, 'Fear of Culture: British Regulation of Indian Marriage in Post-indenture Fiji', *Ethnohistory*, vol. 36, no. 4, 1989, p. 374.

67 A H Wood, *Overseas Missions of the Australian Methodist Church: Fiji-Indian and Rotuma*, vol. 3, Aldersgate Press, Melbourne, 1978, p. 67.

68 I K Susu, 'The Centennial Anniversary of the Davuilevu Theological College (1908–2008)', in *Light on the Hill: To Commemorate the 100 years of Davuilevu Methodist Theological College, 1908–2008*, Suva, Davuilevu Theological College, 2008, p. 18.

69 R J Miller, 'Victory in the Constant Struggle: The Life and Times of Reverend Ramsey R H H Deoki', Honours thesis, Queen's College Library, p. 4.

70 A H Wood, *Overseas Missions of the Australian Methodist Church: Fiji-Indian and Rotuma*, vol. 3, Aldersgate Press, Melbourne, 1978, p. 81.

71 J W Burton, diary, 10 August 1924, MLMSS 2899 Add On 990, ML.

72 D Scarr, *Ratu Sukuna: Soldier, Statesman, Man of Two Worlds*, London, Macmillan Education for the Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna biography committee, 1980, pp. 68–69.



training in Fiji revealed the pre-eminence of Fijian interests over those of Indo-Fijians. European members argued that they were 'acting in what they felt were the best interests of Fijian students for the ministry'.<sup>73</sup> The promising Indo-Fijian candidates were therefore forced to seek promotion overseas, or to remain catechists. This limited access to education exacerbated antagonism towards the mission's racist organisational structure.<sup>74</sup> Begrudgingly, Deoki returned to Australia in 1927 to study for the ministry at the Methodist Home Missionaries Training College in Kew, Melbourne, and completed the course in 1929.<sup>75</sup> He received the same basic training as all missionaries coming via Victoria into the Pacific, yet was still not ordained upon his return.

Indo-Fijian catechists were admitted into the synod in 1926, but they were not given any considerable degree of influence. Burton and McDonald ensured European missionaries were able to maintain control over mission business. Burton reminded McDonald that:

the Indian brethren will have no power to vote money, they can merely recommend and their recommendations will have to pass the gauntlet of the United European Session as well as the Annual Meeting of the board. I think that these safeguards will be ample, and I can see that there is a considerable advantage in letting these men see that there is only a limited amount of money that can be expended upon the Indian side of the work.<sup>76</sup>

Burton felt this concession was necessary to 'give much more power to our Indian Laymen on the mission field than they at present possessed',<sup>77</sup> but saw the Indo-Fijian session of the synod as merely a committee. It was interesting that, in the same year, Burton had visited India and spoken with Charles Freer Andrews. Burton had looked to India for inspiration on how to manage anti-European sentiment. He had promised to make 'very strict enquiries while I am in India as to what is the custom amongst the various societies there', suggesting that 'I do not think that there will be any who will say that we should give our Indian Christians in Fiji less opportunity of expression than Christians in India have'.<sup>78</sup>

73 Bairagi had been educated at Dilkusha, see A H Wood, *Overseas Missions of the Australian Methodist Church: Fiji-Indian and Rotuma*, vol. 3, Aldersgate Press, Melbourne, 1978, p. 78, and regarding their being disallowed from ministerial training, see p. 67; P Gaunder, *Education and Race Relations in Fiji, 1835-1998*, Lautoka, Fiji, Universal Printing Press, 1999, p. 88.

74 A L Stoler, 'Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia', in A Brah and A Coombes (eds), *Hybridity and its Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture*, London, Routledge, 2000, pp. 19-20. This had changed by the late 1930s. Both Indo-Fijian and Fijian ministers trained at Davuilevu. R H Green, *My Story: A Record of the Life and Work of Robert H Green*, Melbourne, 1978, p. 240.

75 'Mission Work Exemplified', *Frankston and Somerville Standard*, Victoria, 6 July 1929, p. 4; 'The Churches', *Albury Banner and Wodonga Express*, 20 December 1929, p. 14; 'Shipping', *Examiner*, Launceston, 1 January 1927, p. 1.

76 J W Burton to R L McDonald, 30 August 1926, MOM 524, Fiji 1926, ML.

77 J W Burton to R L McDonald, 7 September 1926, MOM 524, Fiji 1926, ML, p. 1.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 2.



While in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Burton attended the 1926 Ceylon Mission Synod, recording elements of the synod's discussions, including the local missionaries conceding that they felt it would take time to 'build up efficient staff' for self-government.<sup>79</sup> Following the discussions about the Fijian mission, he recognised the struggle to train ministers that European missionaries felt were sufficient for the task of self-governance; the same argument had been used to justify limiting self-governance in Fiji. With Deoki in the midst of ministerial training in Melbourne, Burton's argument would soon lose momentum.<sup>80</sup>

Racial evolutionary theories pervaded Burton's thoughts through this period. In 1927, he told a Darwin newspaper that the Pacific was:

peopled with child races. One must remember that it is childhood with which Australia has to deal and our minds must be oriented accordingly. It is child-vices — black as they have been; child faces — though old and wrinkled; child minds — though cunning and treacherous; and child virtues — neither deep nor strong, which occupies our attention.<sup>81</sup>

Burton had by this time abandoned the idea that the Fijian people were a vanishing race, but still believed that they required European leadership and guidance. He saw Pacific Islanders as not only ethnically distinct, but as lagging behind Europeans in social development.<sup>82</sup>

Burton's paternalism did not extinguish his belief in the potential for 'native' churches, but he continued to limit progress towards Fijian and Indo-Fijian autonomy in both mission branches. In 1927, seeing no opportunities in Fiji, John Bairagi decided to leave his appointment in Fiji and go to India for further training. He offered to pay his own fare and intended to return to Fiji after completing his studies, arguing that training in India would further assist him in his work in the Indo-Fijian community.<sup>83</sup> These plans changed, and he resigned from the Fiji mission the following year. He explained his decision to McDonald:

The hearts and minds of the Missionaries in question, who, by virtue of their ecclesiastical vocation give others the impression that they are the votaries of the Christian religion, are not permeated by the great love of Christ. This is shown in the unjust ways in which the Indians and other coloured races are treated by these Missionaries in their business and other every day dealings with them.<sup>84</sup>

79 J W Burton, 14 October 1926, diaries, MLMSS 2899 Add On 990, ML.

80 S Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, London, Penguin, 1964, p. 522.

81 'Australia's Responsibility in the Pacific', *Northern Standard*, Darwin, 8 July 1927, p. 2.

82 C Weir, 'An Accidental Biographer? On Encountering, Yet Again, the Ideas and Actions of J W Burton', in B V Lal and V Luker (eds), *Telling Pacific Lives: Prisms of Process*, Canberra, ANU E Press, 2008, p. 218; B Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Leicester, England, Apollon, 1990, p. 172.

83 1927 Fiji District Synod minutes, Chairman's notes, CY 3038, shot 42, ML, p. 32.

84 J Bairagi to R L McDonald, 16 March 1928, F/1/1928, NAF.

Bairagi pointed to the inherent contradiction between the mission's goals of equity and inclusion, and the lived reality of European superiority.<sup>85</sup> Missionaries were accustomed to performing their European prestige and acted in a way that allowed them to associate with the colonial cohort.<sup>86</sup> Missionaries had practised a form of 'cultural work' — a way of acting out their racial superiority through practising selected cultural practices — to inscribe difference between them and their Indo-Fijian colleagues.<sup>87</sup> Burton's enthusiasm for the Indo-Fijian branch could not overcome the realities of Indo-Fijian marginalisation. Bairagi ended up staying on in Fiji, becoming a pastor for the Indian Christian Society, but evidently he was utterly disaffected with the Methodist mission because of the slights shown to him and Deoki.<sup>88</sup>

The mission continued to seek European missionaries with prior experience in India — and therefore prior knowledge of cultural practices and language — to lead the Indo-Fijian mission. The Reverend T C Carne was a missionary in India during the 1920s who had influence in Fiji well before he transferred to the Fiji district in 1948.<sup>89</sup> At the 1927 Methodist Laymen's Memorial Lecture in Melbourne, Carne presented a paper, entitled 'Christ of the Indian Mind', in which he spoke about harnessing nationalist sentiments through Christianity, suggesting that 'in Christ alone can national ideals be fulfilled'. Missions needed to link 'our universal message to what is good in the cultural heritage of India'.<sup>90</sup> He spoke of a 'national Christ' and 'a national Christianity',<sup>91</sup> but warned that there were dangers in isolating the church if there was too much emphasis on creating an Indian church rather than connecting it to the church universal.<sup>92</sup>

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85 This is an inversion of the Comaroff's argument about encouraging the adoption of new habits to demonstrate conversion. J Comaroff and J Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, vol. 1, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991, p. 25; A L Stoler, 'Rethinking Colonial Categories', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 31, no. 1, January 1989, p. 138.

86 S Sullivan, *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege*, Bloomington, Illinois, Indiana University Press, 2006, p. 4.

87 E J Popke, 'Managing Colonial Alterity: Narratives of Race, Space and Labor in Durban, 1870–1920', *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2003, p. 250; A L Stoler, 'Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia', in A Brah and A Coombes (eds), *Hybridity and its Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture*, London, Routledge, 2000, pp. 19–20.

88 R L McDonald to W R Steadman, 6 June 1931, F/1/1931, NAF.

89 A H Wood, *Overseas Missions of the Australian Methodist Church: Fiji-Indian and Rotuma*, vol. 3, Aldersgate Press, Melbourne, 1978, p. 83.

90 T C Carne, 'The Christ of the Indian mind', eighth Methodist Laymen's Memorial Lecture, Melbourne, 15 November 1927, Methodist Laymen's Missionary Movement, Victoria, digital.slv.vic.gov.au/view/action/singleViewer.do?dvs=1377806583753~29&locale=en\_US&metadata\_object\_ratio=10&show\_metadata=true&preferred\_usage\_type=VIEW\_MAIN&frameId=1&usePid1=true&usePid2=true, p. 7.

91 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

92 *Ibid.*, p. 9. Ian Breward has recently suggested that Carne was vehemently against syncretism, but this did not deter some engagement with Indian cultures. I Breward, *Dr Harold Wood: A Notable Methodist*, Preston, Australia, Uniting Academic Press, 2013, p. 125.

Carne brought a lot of these ideas with him to Fiji.<sup>93</sup> His theoretical work, sensitive to culture and nationalism, was absorbed into mission policy and practice.

Carne was the sort of deep-thinking missionary Burton hoped his new training scheme would produce, though he never seemed to be quite so personally involved in debates about the acculturation of Christianity as Carne. In 1928, Burton spoke more confidently about the future potential for 'native' churches, but believed that self-support required indigenous communities to undergo cultural and social change. By then, the Methodist mission had invested in a property for its missionary training in Sydney. Instruction included lectures in anthropology by University of Sydney anthropologist A P Elkin, pushing missionaries beyond the bounds of theology and requiring their broader education in the humanities.<sup>94</sup> Burton's 'new' missionary would have higher academic qualifications, and be an amateur anthropologist. Anthropology, he agreed with Mott, could assist missionaries to negotiate cultural and societal change.<sup>95</sup>

That same year, the Reverend T N Deller similarly argued that in Fiji 'it was more a conversion to civilisation than a conversion to Christianity that had to be attempted'.<sup>96</sup> The International Missionary Council promoted agricultural education for converts, as well as industrialisation and mechanised forms of farming as part of this social transition. In 1928, international support for industrial missions affirmed the Fijian mission's efforts at Navuso Agricultural School, near Davuilevu. Navuso students worked a 33-hour week maintaining crops and livestock, growing sugar cane, rice, maize, bananas, on top of which they learnt to take 'care of stock' and studied 'botany, carpentry, drawing, farming, arithmetic, records, English, sanitation and hygiene, geography, and civics'.<sup>97</sup> These subjects provided a general education, but the main objective was to train young farmers. While other areas of the mission celebrated cultural difference, Navuso placed greater emphasis on a western-style education, encouraging the

93 J Garrett, *Where Nets Were Cast: Christianity in Oceania since World War Two*, Suva, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific in association with the World Council of Churches, 1997, p. 243.

94 'Missionary Societies: Conference in Melbourne', *Examiner*, Tasmania, 14 April 1928, p. 14.

95 P Pels, 'Anthropology and Mission: Towards a Historical Analysis of Professional Identity', in R Bonsen, H Marks and J Miedema (eds), *The Ambiguity of Rapprochement: Reflections of Anthropologists on their Controversial Relationship with Missionaries*, Vondalstaat, Focaal, 1990, p. 84.

96 Deller worked in Fiji 1921 to 1935. A H Wood, *Overseas Missions of the Australian Methodist Church: Fiji*, vol. 2, Melbourne, Aldersgate Press, 1978, p. 369; 'Returning to Fiji: Rev D N Deller Farewelled', *The Brisbane Courier*, 26 May 1927, p. 9.

97 *The Missionary Review*, 4 November 1928, pp. 7–8.

acquisition of markers of modernity.<sup>98</sup> The principal, Benjamin Meek, desired to ‘create a Fijian yeomanry, which, by the intelligent and industrious use of idle lands for the production of commercial crops, will obtain the means to satisfy the growing needs of the community’.<sup>99</sup> Ultimately, Meek believed that Fijian farmers would acquire skills at Navuso that would lead to ‘greater positions of trust and responsibility’.<sup>100</sup> Agrarian forms of labour provided a stepping-stone to the next station in the model of social progress, a means of advancement. While this required some alterations to Fijian relationships with the land, farmers continued to practise rituals of the past when planting and harvesting, combining cultivation, tradition and worship.<sup>101</sup> It was a process that did not bring an immediate eschewing of customary farming practices but rather served as a space in which to bring together old methods for land production with new techniques for land management.



Figure 2: ‘Navuso’, Benjamin Meek and students.

Source: Photo by R H Rickard and others for the Methodist Church of Australasia, Department of Overseas Missions, ‘Series 01: Photographic prints of missionaries and Indigenous people in the Northern Territory, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Samoa and India, ca 1885–1938’, PXA 1137, 490-535, pic acc 7061, neg 46, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales. Published with permission of Uniting Church of Australia.

98 Other schools established for indigenous students throughout British colonies functioned in a similar way. For example, see discussion on Lincoln University in South Africa in A D Kemp and R T Vinson, ‘“Poking holes in the sky”: Professor James Thaele, American Negroes, and Modernity in 1920s Segregationist South Africa’, *African Studies Review*, vol. 43, no. 1, special issue on the diaspora, 2000, p. 146; J Comaroff and J Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, vol. 1, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991, p. 15; D Hanlon, ‘Converting Pasts and Presents: Reflections on Histories of Missionary Enterprise in the Pacific’, in B V Lal and P Hemenstall (eds), *Pacific Lives, Pacific Places: Changing Boundaries in Pacific History*, Canberra, Coombs Academic Publishing, 2001, p. 147.

99 B Meek, ‘Agricultural Education in Fiji’, *The Missionary Review*, 5 March 1928, p. 14.

100 *Ibid.*

101 A R Tippett, *Oral Tradition and Ethno-history: The Transmission of Information and Social Values in Early Christian Fiji, 1835–1905*, Canberra, St Marks Library, 1980, p. 53.

Industrial missions elicited discussion about indigenous relationships to land and indigenous engagement in labour. Both were crucial tenets that needed to be addressed as part of the civilising project devised by missionaries. Both land and labour needed to be managed effectively in order to promote social and spiritual progress. Meek wrote an article for the Australian Methodist publication *The Spectator* in 1928, stating:

The Fijian's birth right is his land, but he is in danger of losing it altogether because he has neglected to use it. Great fertile areas have been leased away, and the Fijian has been quite content to draw his rent and to live a life of comparative idleness.<sup>102</sup>

Meek blamed the land lease system adopted by the colonial administration for creating an 'idle' society, as many Fijian could exist on land rent moneys alone. Meek associated low virility with idleness, adopting some of the ideas Burton had espoused in the previous decade regarding the virility of Fijians.<sup>103</sup> 'Everywhere the progressive races of the world are pushing out from their old boundaries', he wrote, 'overflowing into the less densely occupied lands, seeking raw materials for their factories and food for their industrial population'.<sup>104</sup> In such a world, indigenous lands should not be left vacant and unutilised:

Humanity is dependent on the soil for its food, clothing and other necessities of life, and with the increase of population comes the search for new fields of production. The result is, that where we find peoples occupying lands, but not developing them, the urge of civilisation and progress demands that such lands must be cultivated to meet world needs.<sup>105</sup>

Meek perpetuated some of Burton's earlier philosophies regarding the strength of various races and need to target selective groups for selective causes. Meek revealed his concern about what would occur if Fijians left land 'unproductive':

If they cannot or will not produce, then history teaches that others will. Those who occupy and use land eventually become the owners of it. The industrious Indian, since the discontinuance of the indenture system, has leased lands, and is now digging out of the soil wealth that might have gone to the native owner, had he realised his opportunities. Unless the Fijian learns, before it is too late, to farm his lands, he will most surely in the future be the labourer on the land instead of its owner.<sup>106</sup>

102 B Meek, 'Agricultural Education in Fiji', *The Missionary Review*, 5 March 1928, p. 12.

103 C Toren, *Mind, Materiality and History: Explorations in Fijian Ethnography*, London, Routledge, 1999, p. 68. See p. 78 for notes on an interview where an indigenous Fijian man used similar rhetoric in the 1980s.

104 B Meek, 'Agricultural Education in Fiji', *The Missionary Review*, 5 March 1928, p. 12.

105 Ibid.

106 Ibid.



Meek believed that engaging in western forms of farming and turning the land to generate profit would ensure that the *vanua* (land) remained in Fijian hands. Concerns about land were prominent in public discourse about Navuso, and contributed to the increasingly exclusionist rhetoric about Indo-Fijians. The predominance of Fijian students at Navuso, combined with the principal's discourse about the need for Fijians to protect their land, revealed support for Fijian ascendancy that often went unspoken within the mission's daily correspondence. Education in western modes of agriculture was seen as essential to ensuring Fijian land rights in the colony as the Indo-Fijian community increased in size. It was a way of empowering Fijians in preparation for what was being flagged as an inevitable battle for land.<sup>107</sup>

These discourses reinforced ideas about Fijian identity and its connectedness to land: the *vanua*. Meek had specific ideas about the Fijian relationship with the *vanua*, believing that Navuso students would learn much from 'scientific study of the possibilities of the soil'.<sup>108</sup> Meek suggested that 'supernatural agencies have not to be placated, but common sense and thought used instead'. He was not entirely against customary Fijian farming techniques, but wrote:

A stumbling block to true religion is in the superstition and tradition in the native mind about natural phenomena and eternal processes. The simple facts taught in Hygiene, Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, and Nature Study, make him aware that nothing is haphazard or subject to the caprice of evil spirits; but everything is the natural unfolding of laws laid down by a supreme beneficent Being.<sup>109</sup>

Meek's article resonated with similar discussions occurring in Australian anthropology. Two years after Meek published these comments, Elkin published his ideas on the connection between indigenous culture and the land. Indigenous connection to land formed the basis for modes of inclusion and exclusion in Fiji.<sup>110</sup> Meek's comments suggest a fluid movement of ideas between mission and anthropology in Australasia in the late 1920s.

Meek's vision of a 'Fijian yeomanry' was realised when Navuso graduates started to secure their own plots of land for agricultural production. In October 1929, Mr Young of the Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR) wrote to the Reverend Leslie M Thompson, principal of Dilkusha school, to offer CSR's assistance in 'placing on farms any who complete their course [at Navuso], if they desire to start out for themselves'.<sup>111</sup> This provided additional incentive for Fijian men to

107 B V Lal, *A Time Bomb Lies Buried: Fiji's Road to Independence, 1960–1970*, Canberra, ANU E Press, 2008, p. 10.

108 B Meek, 'Agricultural Education in Fiji', *The Missionary Review*, 5 March 1928, p. 12.

109 Ibid.

110 J Lane, 'Anchorage in Aboriginal affairs: A P Elkin on Religious Continuity and Civic Obligation', PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2008, p. 288.

111 Young to Thompson, 8 October 1929, F/1/1930, NAF.

finish the course. Ten Navuso graduates accepted this offer, acquiring blocks of land of seven or eight acres the following year at Baulevu, north of Nausori.<sup>112</sup> The mission and CSR thus collaborated in the training and deployment of Navuso students after their graduation, enabling Fijian and Indo-Fijian land acquisition. With low numbers of Indo-Fijian students at Navuso, however, the efforts of CSR and the school only sharpened the image of Fijian paramountcy evident in Meek's earlier comments.

At the same time, the structures of the mission reinforced the categories for and perceptions of Indo-Fijian identities. Missionaries advanced their explicit calls for a separate 'indigenous Indian church' for the Indo-Fijian Methodist community. G H Findlay wrote encouragingly to T C Carne about his hopes for an Indo-Fijian church. Findlay hoped that devolution would 'offer our Indian Christians a fuller opportunity of self-expression in Church life'.<sup>113</sup> Progress towards this goal was slow, leaving some Indo-Fijian mission members disillusioned. European missionaries voiced their desire to eventually establish an autonomous Indo-Fijian church conference, but in the next breath offered a multitude of reasons why it was not yet possible: it was not financially feasible; they had not 'won' enough converts; and they did not have adequate 'native' leaders. The concept of a self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating Indo-Fijian church was still entirely academic.

It was perhaps not surprising that conversion rates in the Indo-Fijian community remained low at the end of the 1920s. Burton continued to push for European ascendancy in missions when he published a blueprint for native churches in his 1930 publication *The Pacific Islands Survey*. While he argued that European missionaries were not 'integral' to the 'native church', he said that Europeans were essential for training indigenous peoples in all matters theological, administrative and financial. The foreign missionary:

should be there as a helper and advisor, rather than as a superintendent and an administrator. He should be regarded as on loan from the Home Church to be withdrawn whenever the Native Church is strong enough to do without him. If that were the acknowledged policy and objective of missions throughout the Pacific, there would be doubtless greater responsibility laid upon native shoulders which would grow stronger by having to bear it.<sup>114</sup>

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112 To V Clark, 14 May 1930, F/1/1930, NAF.

113 G H Findlay to TC Carne, 8 November 1929, F/1/1929, NAF.

114 Burton used terms such as 'native' and 'indigenous' broadly to discuss the 'three selves' church concept. He was essentially referring to all 'non-Europeans'. J W Burton, *The Pacific Islands: A Missionary Survey*, London, World Dominion Press, 1930, p. 21.



In Burton's opinion, missions were still in the process of preparing indigenous peoples for self-governance. The missionaries would play an essential role in coordinating and driving the devolution of power. He favoured increased responsibility for *talatala*, but also suggested that ongoing European missionary presence was justified by the poor quality of indigenous ministerial training. He did not believe that the local ministry as it existed in 1930 was adequately qualified to stand equal to Australian and New Zealand-trained colleagues. This stance reflected his perspectives on class and race. Burton wrote:

In the early days of missionary enterprise in the Pacific, ministers were ordained much too easily. Their education was scanty, and their knowledge of Christian truth was wholly inadequate. The test was character rather than attainment, and none would plead that the test of spiritual fitness should ever be lowered, but equipment is important, and steps, all too tardy, are now being taken to remedy this state of things.<sup>115</sup>

Burton projected that autonomy would elude indigenous ministers for some time yet. It certainly appeared to be the case for Fiji. Europeans had managed to maintain certain aspects of hegemony through the construction of the Fiji mission's 1926 constitution. European missionaries could still veto decisions made in synods, effectively diminishing the voting power of any non-Europeans present. The president general — based in Sydney — had ultimate control over mission affairs, despite fielding recommendations from the Fiji district synod and the mission board in Sydney.<sup>116</sup> Increasing Fijian and Indo-Fijian representation in the district synod therefore did not concurrently increase their power.

Burton used ideas similar to those of anthropologist George Pitt Rivers to describe what he saw in Fiji. Pitt Rivers' *The Clash of Culture and the Contact of Races*, published in 1927, outlined a Darwinian theory of one racial group contributing to the destruction of another.<sup>117</sup> Burton continued to write in terms of 'primitive' and 'advanced' societies, retaining an evolutionist paradigm as

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115 J W Burton, *The Pacific Islands: A Missionary Survey*, London, World Dominion Press, 1930, p. 21; A Thornley, 'Custom, Change and Conflict: Fijian Wesleyan Ministers, 1835–1945', in R J May and H Nelson (eds), *Melanesia: Beyond Diversity*, Canberra, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, 1982, p. 127.

116 Constitution of the Fiji District: Amendments, see pages 48 and 49 of 1929 General conference minutes; Constitution of Methodist districts in Samoa, Fiji, Tonga and New Britain, 1936, p. 2, General conference minutes, p. 145; Constitution of the Fiji district: Amendments, see pages 48 and 49 of 1929 General conference minutes and constitution of Methodist districts in Samoa, Fiji, Tonga and New Britain, 1936, Book of laws, p. 140, MOM 317, ML.

117 G H L Pitt Rivers, *The Clash of Culture and the Contact of Races*, New York, Negro Universities Press, 1927, p. 1.

his theoretical anchor.<sup>118</sup> He believed that the institution's Eurocentric structure inhibited the development of an indigenous church, but could not yet see a way to overcome it. In his 1930 publication, Burton wrote:

Perhaps the most serious criticism of missions in the South Pacific is that they have institutionalised the Native Church after our more advanced European fashions instead of following the simpler and more natural ways of primitive life. This tendency to huge expenditure on elaborate plant still goes on, and while, from our European point of view, it means efficiency, yet, if it stultifies native initiative and native control, it is ineffective in the end.<sup>119</sup>

Richard McDonald had become chairman of the Methodist mission in Fiji in 1925, and from his vantage point in Suva felt that there were already several indicators that Fijian culture was reflected in the mission, or, to use Burton's words, that the mission had been fashioned 'following the simpler and more natural ways of primitive life'.<sup>120</sup> McDonald pointed to visual and material manifestations of Methodism in the landscape and the people, writing to benefactor Robert Smith in 1930: 'Without any urging from us he [Fijian Methodists] erects the House of God in his own town and pays for it and in most cases it is far and away the best house in the village.'<sup>121</sup> If European missionaries were withdrawn from Fiji, McDonald argued, 'it would have an effect on his advance and progress in the Christian way; but I am convinced that his spiritual experience is a real one, and his religion is the mainspring of his whole life'.<sup>122</sup> Finally he told Smith: 'He is a child in the faith and needs help and guidance, but he is developing at a great rate and the progress of the last decade gives us much hope.'<sup>123</sup>

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118 J Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1983, p. 17.

119 J W Burton, *The Pacific Islands: A Missionary Survey*, London, World Dominion Press, 1930, p. 20.

120 R L McDonald to R Smith, 4 July 1930, F/1/1930, NAF, p. 1.

121 Ibid.

122 Ibid.

123 Ibid.



**Figure 3: Richard McDonald in front of Methodist Mission Office, Suva.**

Source: Photo by R H Rickard and others for the Methodist Church of Australasia, Department of Overseas Missions, 'Series 01: Photographic prints of missionaries and Indigenous people in the Northern Territory, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Samoa and India, ca 1885–1938', PXA 1137, 327535, pic acc 7061, neg 2, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales. Published with permission of Uniting Church of Australia.

There were a variety of ways in which European missionaries addressed the question of self-support during the 1920s. The promise of greater autonomy was extended as an olive branch to appease anti-colonial sentiment. This became increasingly important as Indo-Fijians demonstrated their discontent with inequitable work conditions. This was as much an issue within the mission as it was on the streets of Fiji's towns. By the end of the decade the Methodists had already lost John Bairagi, one of its talented Indo-Fijian ministers, due to missionary attitudes. These mission structures, supposed to cater to culture, had concurrently given 'natives' something to rail against. When categories were clear, the 'natives' were better able to define the processes of exclusion, and to unify in their efforts against them.

Despite this quiet protest from the mission's non-European staff, European hegemony remained in place. European missionaries struggled to respond to anthropology's criticisms of the mission's use of race and culture to design mission strategy throughout the 1920s. Opinions varied about the place culture should take in the mission — whether change should be enforced, and how.

Most opinions depended on an essentialised view of the culture the missionaries were working within. Yet, the debates between mission leaders McDonald and Burton illustrated the various ways in which concepts of culture were enlisted to respond to the 'three selves' church policy. The self-supporting church concept continued to provide an avenue by which European missionaries could promise greater autonomy to Fijian and Indo-Fijian people. However, the theories about 'race' and 'culture' informing their approach to the 'three selves' church concept, and their experience in the field, made them reluctant to increase indigenous authority, particularly in the 'Indo-Fijian' branch.

