More than a “Petty Chief”: Understanding Fijian Chiefship through the Entrance Ceremony and Local History

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Abstract: The diverse nature of Fiji’s chiefship and how its supremacy was strengthened by colonialism have already been closely examined. However, few studies have focused on village chiefs, who have limited authority and are at the lower end of regional chiefly hierarchies. Using both historical and ethnographic materials from a Fijian village, I argue here that its “petty chief,” as the role was called by nineteenth-century Westerners, is a powerful linkage to a past of stability represented by the chiefly title. This is particularly important for communities that have experienced historical turbulence. In this case study, it was mainly the measles crisis that caused population decline. The linkage is materialised by a standardised entrance ceremony in which the chiefly title is routinely acknowledged by foreign visitors through offerings (*i-sevusevu*) and thus elevated to a symbol that holds the community together. I also argue that the entrance ceremony that we observe today may have been prompted by Western contact. Through the analysis of the ceremony and local history, this study shows that the power of “petty chiefs” should be understood not solely by the structure of hierarchy, but also by their significance to historically turbulent communities.

Keywords: Fiji, chief, title, entrance ceremony, measles

Résumé : La diversité de la chefferie fidjienne et la manière dont le colonialisme a renforcé son emprise ont déjà fait l’objet d’enquêtes approfondies. Cependant, peu d’études se sont intéressées aux chefs de village qui disposent d’une autorité limitée et qui sont situés au bas des hiérarchies régionales de chefs. En m’appuyant sur des matériaux historiques et ethnographiques issus d’un village fidjien, je soutiens que le « petit chef », comme l’appelaient les Occidentaux au XIXe siècle, constitue un lien puissant avec le passé de stabilité que représente le titre de chef. Ceci s’avère particulièrement important pour les communautés marquées par des turbulences historiques - dans le cas qui nous concerne, une épidémie de rougeole ayant entrainé le déclin de la population. Ce lien s’incarne dans une cérémonie d’entrée ritualisée au cours de laquelle le titre de chef est communément reconnu par des visiteurs étrangers à travers des offrandes (i-sevusevu) et est ainsi élevé au rang de symbole préservant l’unité de la communauté. Je soutiens en outre que la cérémonie d’entrée que l’on observe aujourd’hui pourrait avoir été engendrée par les contacts avec les occidentaux. À travers l’analyse de cette cérémonie et de l’histoire locale, cette étude montre que le pouvoir des « petits chefs » doit être compris en fonction non seulement de la structure hiérarchique, mais aussi de leur importance pour les communautés marquées par des turbulences historiques.

Mots-clés : Fiji, chef, titre, cérémonie d’entrée, rougeole.

Sa dui cagi ni toba (Each bay has its own kind of wind, each community has its own chiefly authority)

– Fijian proverb

Introduction

In his ethnographic study of Nakoroka, a small inland community located in Bua Province of western Vanua Levu, Fiji, the late American anthropologist Buell Quain went into great detail about an ancient regional empire called “Flight-of-the-Chiefs” and the succeeding “Inland Forest” kingdom of which the Nakoroka people are descendants. According to his informants, “the chiefs of Inland Forest claim a sanctity greater than all the other chiefs of Bua Province” and that “their land is the land of ‘power’ ” (Quain 1948, 33). Quain also frequently referred to those Inland Forest chiefs as “kings” with the chiefly title “King Forest” (*Tui Lekutu*), represented by a whale’s tooth valuable passed down through the chiefly bloodline (Quain 1948, 190–191). This usage of the term “king” nevertheless was questioned by the historian R.A. Derrick in his book review of Quain’s ethnography, in which he wrote, “Mr. Quain’s ‘kings’ were in fact petty chiefs, themselves owing allegiance to the chiefs of Bua, who never ranked high in the Fijian hierarchy” (Derrick 1949, 440).

The local “petty chiefs” mentioned by Derrick are the main subject of this article. Why is there such a disparity regarding the power of these Inland Forest chiefs between Quain’s documentation, which was based on the perception of local community members, and Derrick’s comment, which stemmed from common knowledge of the Fijian system of chiefly hierarchy? Here I present a

similar case study of *Tui Nasau*, the chief of the village Waitabu in the Bouma region of Taveuni Island, Fiji. As with the Inland Forest chiefs, *Tui Nasau* is regarded as a prestigious title by the villagers, whose first holder was said to be one of the great leaders of the earliest settlers of the island and own large parcels of land. On the other hand, in the current regional hierarchy, it is situated on the bottom rung, with minimal influence and authority. Is this a case of local communities "playing up" their past significance and chiefly power, or has the chiefship actually gone through a decline of its paramountcy? In this article I argue that while both processes may be true, they only tell half of the story. The power of the "petty chiefs" lies not just in the structure of hierarchy, however dynamic it may be, but also in their significance to communities that have experienced turbulent historical events resulting in drastic population dispersal and decline. They essentially need to utilise creative strategies to remake their communities and re-anchor themselves in this ever-changing world. This seems to be the case for most Fijian settlements, as they have gone through centuries of fission and fusion from prehistoric times until the late nineteenth century (Field 2005).

I became attuned to this question when conducting ethnographic fieldwork (March–July 2010; November 2010–March 2011; October–December 2012) in Waitabu on the subject of community development projects such as marine conservation and cash cropping. While not directly related to my research, the issue of chiefship gradually loomed large as I was collecting local legends and colonial documents of the community's past, particularly the formation of kinship organisations. I soon discovered two historical aspects that are somewhat hidden from their contemporary identity which is very much built on ecotourism and development. First of all, after a series of migrations toward the coast, the predecessor communities of Waitabu were at one point close to complete dissolution, which may very likely have been the result of the 1875 measles crisis in Fiji. Second, there is a separate layer of identity known as the "Nasau people" in the village, which obviously is connected to the chiefly title *Tui Nasau* and the ancestral settlement Nasau.

One important clue to putting these two aspects together is the "entrance ceremony," which requires visitors to a community to present offerings, often in the form of a bundle of kava roots (*i-sevusevu*), to the local chief as they enter the community. In this ceremony, the chiefly title is recited and relationships are clarified. Afterward, the kava roots are pounded, mixed with water, and consumed collectively by the community members and visitors, signifying the completion of reciprocation and acceptance. While indigenous Fijians themselves also conduct such a ceremony, most of my direct observations of this ritualistic event stem from my own entrance to the village, as well as other tourists' and researchers'. Being a tourist location and marine conservation hotspot, Waitabu actually offers quite a few such opportunities. I would also argue that it may be due to the increasing Western contact with small local Fijian communities from the mid-nineteenth century that a standardised "entrance ceremony" gradually took shape.

As many scholars have pointed out, from the process of preparation to the spatial arrangement of participants, Fijian kava-drinking sessions are a ritual performance of hierarchy and inequality through which the chiefly status is ratified (Toren 1988; Turner 1986a, 1992). In my experience with the entrance ceremony, however, the chief is seldom physically present, and the community as a whole seems to be the ultimate recipient of the *i-sevusevu* offering. Moreover, with the local history of population decline and measles crisis as backdrop, the recitation of the chiefly title symbolically connects the community to the ancestral site and people before such historical turbulences took place, thereby invoking a sense of continuity and stability. As noted by Tomlinson (2004), kava sessions can reproduce signs of the history that serve as social commentaries. Similarly, like "a story they tell themselves about themselves" (Geertz 1972, 26), the entrance ceremony presents an ideal image of community for a community that has in actuality experienced much transformation. Therefore, it does not matter if the village chief is "petty" or not, as long as the title can lead to a stable past that informs the community members who they are.

The Dynamic Fijian Chiefship

Early nineteenth-century travelers made many remarks about the Fijian chiefly polity, which was unique in Melanesia. Coining the very term "Melanesia," the French explorer Jules Dumont d'Urville noted that in this region, the inhabitants "almost always live in very small tribes whose chiefs wield an arbitrary authority that they exercise just as tyrannically as any small African despot. Much closer to a barbaric state than the Polynesians and the Micronesians, they have no governing bodies, no laws, and no formal religious practices" (D'Urville 2003, 169). However, he ranked Fijians highest amongst those Melanesians because "despite their ferocity and their inclination to cannibalism, these natives have laws, arts, and are sometimes organised into nations" (D'Urville 2003, 169).

With the later arrival of traders and missionaries who had more significant interactions with local Fijians, a notion of chiefly hierarchy through Western

gaze gradually emerged. At the top were the regional paramount chiefs such as the *Vunivalu* of Bau, *Roko Tui Dreketi* of Rewa, *Tui Cakau* of Cakaudrove, and *Tui Nayau* of the Lau Islands, all of whom were often referred to as "kings" (see Williams 1858, 23–26). On a lower rung were the chiefs of large islands or districts such as *Tui Bua*, who rose to power through the sandalwood trade during the first decade of the nineteenth century (Im Thurn and Wharton 1922). Further down, there were the local village chiefs, who may or may not have been affiliated with these regional chiefdoms.

Most of these village chiefs bear the traditional title of *Tui*, like the paramount chiefs. Nevertheless, as noted by Hocart (1929), they were "spoken of as 'the old men of the countryside'" (56), reflecting the Fijian power order that situates them as inferior to the paramount chiefs who reign over their communities (Crosby 1994, 73; Sahlins 1981, 119). Although not carrying much weight in the postcontact chiefly hierarchy, the titles of these village chiefs could often be traced back to ancient origins or the senior lines of a chiefly house. The reason they became subjugated to a higher authority was either defeat in a contest or voluntary cession of leadership to achieve symbolic unification with alien power, that is, the "stranger-king" (Sahlins 1981). But this was by no means a stable structure. Their titles were usually considered more prestigious by the community members themselves, resulting in continual grumble against the dominant chiefdoms, particularly in the arena of land rights (Young 2001). The British colonial official J. B. Thurston even observed the "ease with which any petty chief can renounce the … authority of his superior" cited in Scarr 1973, 68.

Not only was the Fijian chiefly hierarchy not a stable structure, it also was not homogeneous throughout the archipelago. Generally speaking, western Fiji and the highland communities of the main island Viti Levu are less hierarchical, with some even lacking chiefly figures (Hocart 1913, 142). On the other hand, eastern Fiji and the coastal region are where the traditional paramount chiefdoms developed and historically where missionaries and traders frequented. Missionary observers have commented that the emergence of these large chiefdoms was due to access to Western firearms introduced through traders, but there was enough evidence to support that they had sophisticated tributary networks and wide spheres of influence long before Western contact (Sayes 1984). It is equally clear that while these chiefdoms had established genealogical succession rules, the struggle for dominance happened constantly among different bloodlines and territorial powers, a situation also manipulated by Western officials in the mid-nineteenth century (Routledge 1985). As Fiji was ceded to the British Empire in 1874, the colonial government essentially reinvented the chiefly system, further empowered the Eastern chiefdoms, and even created many neotraditional chiefly positions and organisations, most notably the "Great Council of Chiefs" (*bose vakaturaga*) established in 1875 (Newbury 2006). Communities that had lost their chiefly titles also had to come up with new ones during government survey (see Hocart 1929, 56). It was through these processes that many chiefly positions were reinvented.

There are several different terms relating to Fijian chiefship. The most generic is *turaga*, which, according to Arthur Hocart, reflects an ancient gerontocratic title usurped by the more recently developed chiefship that stressed seniority in the bloodline (Hocart 1913). This act of usurpation is very common in Fijian chiefship, which brings us to two other chief-related terms in Fiji: *Tui* and *Sau*. As theorised by Hocart, traditionally the high chief is viewed as a god of the land, who brings prosperity to the community. He is the sacred chief, usually bestowed with the title *Tui*, which is often translated as "king." On the other hand, there is a second chief called *Sau* who issues the orders of the first chief and is understood as the "executive chief" or "war chief" (Hocart 1952, 34). There is, however, much room for transformation. While, in some places, the two titles have been held by one single chiefly figure (Sayes 1984, 18; Walter 1974, 316), in others such as Lakeba, the titles *Tui Lau*, *Tui Nayau*, and *Sau* have entirely different origins and only fell into the hands of a single holder in a much later time (Reid 1983, 197). A more salient example can be found in Bau, where the sacred king *Roko Tui Bau* was overthrown by the war chief *Vunivalu* around the early nineteenth century, who began to command all the supreme power in the chiefdom (Sahlins 2004, 64).

While such a dynamic relationship of the dual chiefship between *Tui* and *Sau* is mostly found in areas closest to Tongan influence in Fiji (Reid 1977, 9), the theme of usurpation of power from the elder by the younger brother (Abramson 2005, 335; Turner 1986b, 132) or from the people of the land by foreign conquerors is very common in the local legends or histories of Fijian customary leadership. The latter situation was elaborated by Sahlin's (1981) thesis of the "stranger-king". Expanding from Hocart's theory of the dual organisation, which states that Fijian society (most notably the eastern states) is divided between two sides, the sea (nobility) and the land (commoner), and the chief is regarded as coming from overseas (Hocart 1929, 27), Sahlins went on to discuss how this structure is played out and transformed. His inquiry was about the nature

of chiefly power and he proposed that power itself is a usurpation (Sahlins 1981, 113), which is demonstrated by how Fijian high chiefs became gods of the land, consuming offerings and women from the local people. It is due to this despotic nature of power that it needs to be mediated and ritually unified with the subjugated. This is why, while the chief and the people of the land may seem to be in an asymmetrical relationship in which the latter are required to give tributes to the former, their union is actually based on balanced exchanges between two complementary categories. As noted by Sahlins, it is believed that the fertility of the land is guaranteed by the agency of the chief, which is masculine and potent. On the other hand, the chiefly power needs to be mediated through produce from the land, representing feminine fertility (Sahlins 1976, 25).

This is particularly the case in chiefly installation ceremonies in Fiji. Using the prestigious title *Tui Nayau* in the Lau Islands as an example, Sahlins noted that at the beginning of the ceremony, the ruler-to-be appeared as a stranger to the land and was led to walk along a path of bark cloth of Tongan design, which signified his foreign origin. Later, on the main ritual occasion, his arms were tied with a piece of white Fijian bark cloth, which is considered the preeminent local feminine product, signifying his capture by the land (Sahlins 1981, 117–118). At the climax of the ritual was the kava presentation. Here the pounded kava roots (another feminine product of the land) were mixed with water (chiefly masculine power) and turned into a beverage presented to him. He then imbibed it, entering into a state of intoxication that Fijians call *mateni* (dead from . . .), and was later revived and symbolically reborn as the chief and local god, fully unified with the land (Sahlins 1981, 126–127).

The Dynamic Meaning of Kava Roots

As discussed in the *Introduction*, the entrance ceremony is structurally similar to the installation ceremony, but its logic is very different. To explain this, we have to understand the dynamic meaning of kava roots in both ritual processes. In the installation ceremony, kava roots serve as a powerful index of the land that temporarily encompasses the foreign ruler who comes from the sea. Afterward, when he is formally installed as the godlike chiefly figure, he becomes the receiver of ritual offerings such as kava roots and other produce of the land, for which he must return his kindness and prosperity to the people. As explained by Hocart (1915),

> Though the land is offered up to the chief it does not become his property, but remains the property of the former owners; the land is spoken of as "his," but the possessive used is not that of property (*nona*), but that of destination (*kena*) signifying that it is for his use. He can command the produce for feasts but not the estate. Both chiefs and gods receive a share of all the produce as first fruits (*i sevu*). Whenever a chief visits a subject tribe or returns to his own tribe after a journey he is presented with an earnest (*i sevusevu*) of the land in the shape of a kava root. (643–644)

Here we can see that the offering of kava roots, known as *i-sevusevu*, is intrinsically linked to the land (*vanua*) and land-owning commoners. It should not be confused with *i-sevu*, the first fruits, although they do have very similar meanings and ritual procedures. *I-sevu* originally refers to the annual offering of first harvest, using *uvi* (yams, *Dioscorea alata*) as a token, to the priests on behalf of the ancestral gods for their blessing in times of peace or war (Seemann 1862, 299; Williams 1858, 230; Williams as quoted in Henderson 1931, 256). Because of its almost identical meaning to "first fruits" in the Christian context, the Methodist missionary John Hunt conveniently adopted *i-sevu* in his Bible translation, and today it is mostly practiced and celebrated on "Harvest Sundays" in the Methodist churches of Fiji. In the same light, kava roots as *i-sevusevu* were also traditionally presented to the ancestral gods. Hazelwood (1850) had documented a "heathen prayer" uttered by a native priest as offerings were taken to the temple, in which *i-sevu* and *i-sevusevu* were used interchangeably (71).

Therefore, in many early records of Fiji by missionaries and explorers, *i-sevusevu* was seen offered either directly to the paramount chiefs who represented the sea, or through the priests representing the commoners and land to the local Gods (Waterhouse 1866, 192). Western visitors were also frequently documented as recipients of *i-sevusevu*, rather than as givers as seen in the entrance ceremonies today. The main reason is that these visitors were either high-ranking government officials themselves, or accompanied by regional high chiefs. They were essentially received by a ceremony known as *yaqona vakaturaga*, the chiefly welcome ceremony (Ravuvu 1987, 25–26), which is logically similar to the installation ceremony. For example, when the crew members of H.M.S. *Herald* visited a small town on the Rewa River in August 1856, kava roots were presented to them because they were accompanied by a local high chief by the name of "Ko mai Naitasiri" (MacDonald 1857, 241). The same ritual was conducted for Colonel William James Smythe and his entourage in August 1860 because they were escorted by the high chief of Namosi, Kuruduadua (Smythe 1864, 65). Accompanied by the high chief Ro Saumaka, the Austrian

natural historian and collector Baron Anatole von Hügel also received kava roots when he visited Serea in June 1875 (von Hügel 1990, 39). Finally, in October 1874, when the paramount chief Ratu Seru Epenisa Cakobau ceded the Fiji Islands to the British Crown, he broke off a piece from a kava root and placed it in the hand of Britain's representative Arthur Gordond (Legge 1958, 206, quoted in Toren 1990, 103). Here the kava root is not just a token of submission, but a way to engage in an exchange with the British Crown for retaining chiefly paramountcy in their land (Rutz 1995, 80). In this context, the kava root can also be understood as an *i-sevusevu* from the land even when it was presented by a paramount chief.

On the other hand, the kava roots in the current standard entrance ceremonies, while also called *i-sevusevu*, do not carry such a structural association with "land" as a counterpart to "sea." To begin with, the presentation is initiated by foreign visitors, thus alienating their meaning as a gift from the land. They are also not an attempt at the union of two socio-cosmological categories (land and sea), but more a sign of respect, which is widely used on less ritualised occasions such as asking for favour, making a request or seeking forgiveness, and could involve different social statuses in the society. For example, as noted by the Fijian researcher Unaisi Nabobo-Baba (2006) when discussing culturally sensitive research approaches, each time before an interview is conducted by her, an *i-sevusevu* is prepared and given to the interviewee, even when the person is a close relative. It can also be given by superior high chiefs to their subordinated communities, as documented by the wife of an American trading captain in the early nineteenth century, who observed kava roots being sent by the powerful chiefdom Bau to its faraway subjects as a request for them to cooperate with the capture of *bêche-de-mer* (Wallis 1851, 345). Another example can be found in June 1844: When the Methodist missionary Thomas Williams's infant child passed away in Somosomo, Taveuni, he noted that "early in the morning the chief of a settlement next to us paid us a visit accompanied by another old man. The purpose of his visit was to assure us that he sympathized with us in our loss and to present us with a root of *yaqona* [kava] as a proof thereof" (Williams quoted in Henderson 1931, 276). Williams no doubt had learned about this practice when he was in Lakeba in 1841, because he had used the same method to save a local native seized by the high chief *Tui Nayau* (27). In all of these everyday examples, the kava roots served the same function as *i-sevusevu* in today's entrance ceremonies, which was to demonstrate respect and understanding, as well as to make a request and seek forgiveness for any inconvenience.

How did this less formal, mundane usage of *i-sevusevu* become associated with the highly ritualised "entrance ceremony" that we see today? My hypothesis is that with more and more Westerners entering different tribal territories in Fiji from the early nineteenth century, engaging in a variety of dealings or even permanently settling there, it was possible that *i-sevusevu* as a token of respect and request gradually became more ritualised, particularly toward these local polities. This may be similar to the widening usage of Fijian whale's tooth valuables (*tabua*) in different ceremonial contexts around the same time, which were inflated by frequent contact with Western traders (Thomas 1991, 116). Therefore, in today's entrance ceremonies, especially those in small and less powerful villages, even though *i-sevusevu* is offered to the chiefs or local leaders, they are not the chiefly figure set to consume the land as the "stranger-king," but represent the landowning communities as a whole. The *i-sevusevu* offering is not to deify or ratify the chief himself, as seen in the installation ceremonies, but to acknowledge the communities, thereby empowering their very existence.

The significance of empowerment is emphasised in Karen Brison's (2001, 2002) studies of Rakiraki, a region that does not have a tradition of paramount chiefdoms like Eastern Fiji. She argued that *i-sevusevu* was used to assert their self-worth as guardians of a sacred tradition against the wealthier and more powerful outsiders. This is evident in their insistence on using the local dialect in the ceremonial speeches, as opposed to standard Bauan Fijian, which is associated with the dominant chiefdom Bau in Fiji. As I will demonstrate in the next section, the entrance ceremony in Waitabu has the same implication, and it is through these ritual processes that the significance of its hidden history and identity emerge. Other than the construction of local identities, anthropologists have also recognised other connotations of *i-sevusevu* in Fijian society, such as confirming traditional social order outside the sphere of money (Toren 1989), maintaining cosmological balance and prosperity (Turner 1987), and reflecting a well-established hierarchical structure (Arno 1985). The inclusion of Christian prayers toward the end of the speech is also seen as a way to mediate the tension between the indigenous notion of land (*vanua*) and Christianity (*lotu*) (Toren 2003, 709).

The Title *Tui Nasau* and the Entrance Ceremony in Waitabu

Waitabu is one of the four village tribes/clans (*Yavusa*) located in Bouma Region (*Vanua* Bouma) on Taveuni Island. In the Fijian administrative structure they are under Wainikeli District (*Tikina* Wainikeli) and

Cakaudrove Province (*Yasana* Cakaudrove). In the customary chiefly hierarchy, the chief of Bouma's capital village Korovou, *Vunisa*, leads the other three villages, each with its own village chief. Together they are under the leadership of *Tuei* of Wainikeli and the paramount chief *Tui Cakau* of Cakaudrove.

According to local legends that I collected during fieldwork, the ancestors of Waitabu and its neighbouring village Vidawa were said to be the original settlers of Taveuni, led by the cultural hero Labalaba, who bore the title *Tui Lekutu*. After several moves within the island, he finally settled his people at an inland fortified village called Navuga within today's Bouma Region. His second in command then established another settlement further down the mountain, called Nasau, to protect him. Owing to his position, he became the first holder of the title *Tui Nasau*. Later on, these "forest people," as they were known back then, encountered a "stranger-king" event. A group of migrants from Lau came asking for land and were given a place to stay at the coast, as well as the leadership; thus began the title *Vunisa* and the capital village Korovou (which literally means "new village"). As the people of Navuga and Nasau moved down to the coast in the late nineteenth century, Vidawa and Waitabu were built and *Tui Lekutu* and *Tui Nasau* became their respective chiefs.

There are three lineages (*mataqali*) associated with contemporary Waitabu, one of which is located outside the village at the settlement Wai. The title *Tui Nasau* is passed down in the sublineage (*i-tokatoka*) Vunivesi of the lineage with the same name (see Figure 1). When I first stayed in Waitabu in 2007, the holder of *Tui Nasau* was Sepo. He was well respected in the village for his education and knowledge of the local histories, but after he passed away in 2010 the position was left without a permanent holder. Although still having much symbolic importance at ceremonies and meetings, today the chiefly position holds no substantial power, and as mentioned earlier, is at the bottom of the regional hierarchy. There are no services done for the chief, nor were there particular chiefly respects expressed toward him. Major decision making is no longer controlled by him, but needs to go through various village committees. The government-created position *turaga ni koro* (village headman) and the Catholic Church have also weakened his power. This situation was echoed by the ethnolinguistic investigation in Waitabu in the mid-1980s by Annette Schmidt, who observed that the use of respectful linguistic signals toward the chief in everyday life had significantly declined. She nevertheless pointed out that the only domain where chiefly respect remained were the customary ceremonies, including the entrance ceremony (Schmidt 1988, 157), which is where I want to begin my examination of Waitabu's chiefship.

In late January 2011, my family from Taiwan and a colleague from the United States decided to visit me in the field. Upon learning about their plan, I volunteered to conduct the entrance ceremony for them when they arrived. Taking this matter seriously, my father Mika, who is an expert on ritual speeches himself, decided to train me properly. The speech has a clear structure, with a formalised opening and ending. While the main body is flexible and thus can be subject to much creativity and manipulation (Cretton 2005), the manner should always be humble, apologetic, and affirming established tribal relationships. The speaker therefore needs to be knowledgeable of the proper titles and relationships, as well as the correct metaphors and registers. An entrance ceremonial speech could be lengthy, but people would take notice if it was conducted beautifully. In my case, given my non-native-speaker status, I was taught a "short but sweet" version that had all the necessary formula. Below are the full text and its translation:

> *Au 'ere'ere me 'eitou ca'aca'a ti'o yane*[1]
> *Va'aturaga 'ina vanua ena i-ti'oti'o ni veiliuta'i na gone turaga*[2] *na Tui Nasau*
> *'eitou la'o ti'o mai na we'amuduo mai na matanitu Taiwan vata 'ei America*
> *'eitou mai ca'asoqo ti'o 'ina vanua*
> *Na 'ena yaqona se i-sevusevu yai e lailai sara (levu!)*

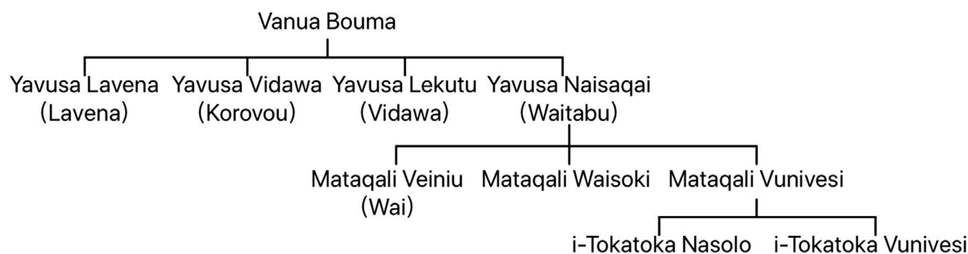

Figure 1: Bouma region's politico-kinship structure.

'eitou 'erea me 'eitou ciqomi na we'amuduo yaco ti'o mai
E qai balavu na vosa ni i-sevusevu
Sa va'aturaga ti'o vua na turaga na Tui Nasau, sosoratu[3]

I beg to let us conduct this ritual to you (clap three times)
In a chiefly manner in the land, to the seat of the child chief *Tui Nasau*
We, your kinfolks, came from the countries of Taiwan and the United States
We came here to hold a gathering in your land
This kava offering is very small (responded with "*levu*!" [it is big])
We, your kinfolks, beg you to accept our arrival
This speech of offering has been too long
In a chiefly manner, I present to the chief *Tui Nasau*, let it be done

In the same way as Brison observed, the whole speech was given in the local Bouma dialect. In this brief text we can easily see the apologetic manner expressed in the words "offering is very small" or "speech is too long," which would immediately be responded to by the *i-sevusevu* receivers. They may seem pretentious to outsiders, but as argued by Miyazaki (2000, 2004), they serve a particular ritual purpose. He called this a temporary "abeyance of human agency" that deliberately creates a moment of fracture that enables participants to be hopeful and appreciative of eventual fulfilment Miyazaki (2004, 104–106). Although in Miyazaki's study the final sense of completion would be provided by the Christian God, the same fulfilment could also be achieved by mention of the local chiefly title, which in this context represents the entire community.

Theoretically the *i-sevusevu* is presented to *Tui Nasau*, with the presence of the leader of the other lineage, serving as the herald. However, in each of my numerous entries into Waitabu, I had conducted the ceremony to different persons. The first time, in 2007, I was received by Sepo. The second time, in 2008, he was absent, so I performed it to another elder in the village, M.T., who inherited this right through his mother from the chiefly sublineage. In 2010 after Sepo passed away, I did it to his eldest son P.T., who took over the *Tui Nasau* position. Shortly afterward, P.T. seemed to have left this position and went to reside in Suva, leaving much confusion behind. For a while, I saw the ritual performed to M.T. or his half-brother E.V. by different visitors. For my second entry of the year 2010, I was taken to the leader of the other lineage Waisoki and conducted it to him. Finally, when my families visited me in 2011, the ceremonial speech illustrated above was delivered to Sepo's daughter M.R.

The situation described above certainly is not uncommon in Fiji, where many prominent chiefly titles were disputed, and as of 2013, over 42 percent of the heads of clan titles remained vacant (Fraenkel 2014).[4] But in the ceremonies, no matter who is the receiver, the content of the speech does not change, particularly the mention of *Tui Nasau*. As noted by Arno in his research in Lau, even when there is no sitting chief on the island, all public speeches are still made in the same respectful manner because "the traditional power relationship still existed between the chiefly lineage and the others" (Arno 1985, 135). In June 2010, when I was going to take a film crew from Taiwan to Vuna, a village in southern Taveuni, my father Mika, ever so conscious of customary etiquette, taught me a ceremonial speech in case I was put on the frontline. In the beginning of that speech, I was told to address both *Tui Vuna* and *Tui Kanacea*, although I would certainly not be able to meet both of them – the former was without a title holder at the time and the latter represented the people of Kanacea who took refuge in Vuna after their island was sold by *Tui Cakau* in 1863. To Mika, the mentioning of the two titles was not just a demonstration of respect, but also a confirmation of the legitimacy and completeness of both communities, particularly for Kanacea as a diasporic community. Entrance ceremonies therefore are able to mediate the constant movements, confrontations, and confusions that are unavoidable realities to most Fijian communities. *Tui Nasau*, not the person, but the symbolic entity, is such an anchorage which holds a neotraditional village like Waitabu still amid modern changes and challenges.

Tui Nasau as a title not only has a stablising quality, it also links the village to a "golden era" in the past when their ancestors were the original settlers of Taveuni, who owned almost half of the island, before there was Cakaudrove, or even Bouma. In the officially documented oral history (*Ai Tukutuku Raraba*) of Waitabu's past, the earliest registered *Tui Nasau*, M.B., traced the history of his people to an ancestral god figure, Latianavanua. It was recounted that they were part of the great migration to Taveuni led by the great chief Labalaba. Their custom was formally established at the settlement of Vurevure, where Labalaba was installed with the chiefly title *Tui Lekutu na Vunivalu*, and the responsibility of the ancestors of Waitabu was to look after the house of the chief. It was after the advent of the stranger-king *Vunisa* and the forming of Bouma that they moved to Nasau and established the title *Tui Nasau*.[5]

Considered the most knowledgeable guardian of Waitabu's history, Sepo left a handwritten document of Waitabu's history before he passed away. In his version of the past, a few notable details were given that would

potentially change the status of the people of Waitabu. For example, Latianavanua, the ancestral god of Waitabu, was said to be the elder brother of the first *Tui Lekutu*, Labalaba, with a third brother called Botowai. The establishment of his leadership was also much earlier, taking place at one of their earliest settlements, called Naibili:

> Then came the time to separate the three brothers. Because he was the *ulumatua* (eldest child), Latianavanua was installed as the *sauturaga*, and became the founder of Nasau. Labalaba became the founder of Lekutu, and Botowai became the founder of Somosomo.[6]

Here an interesting interpretation of the title *Nasau* took place. The position *sauturaga* is a person "whose rank was next to that of chiefs of the blood, and whose function was to carry out their commands and to support their authority" (Derrick 2001[1950], 8). In Fiji's tribal kinship structure there is commonly a *sauturaga* lineage whose responsibility is to install the chief. That is why it is also known by the name "the kingmakers." However, *sauturaga* also has the connotation of *Sau*, a prestigious title that I have discussed earlier. *Sau* and its variant *Hau*, with the meaning of ruler or war chief, are particularly found in the sphere of influence of western Polynesia, including Tonga, Uvea, Rotuma and Lau, as well as Taveuni (Gunson 1979; Reid 1977). In Hocart's theory of dual chieftainship, *Sau* is the active "second chief" issuing orders for the "first chief" *Tui*. Here the order of first and second does not imply precedence in bloodline, as demonstrated in some other founding narratives in Fiji where the eldest son is *Sau* while the younger is *Tui* (Walter 1978a). From these studies it is clear that *sauturaga* and *Sau*, although sharing the same linguistic root, have entirely different political capacities and significances.

The ambiguity of the term *sauturaga* has already been pointed out by scholars (Capell and Lester 1946, 298–300; Scarr 1970, 12 n. 49), but it is through this ambiguity that Sepo was able to add new meanings to the ancestral god of Waitabu. This is even more salient in Sepo's later tale, in which Latianavanua shared leadership with Labalaba in Navuga as two chiefs (like *Tui* and *Sau*), but the latter challenged him to a battle of magical power (*mana*) to decide who could be the paramount. Eventually Latianavanua was able to beat his hot-tempered brother by making fish bones come alive in the river, but still he let Labalaba take over the paramount leadership as *Tui Lekutu*. These stories elevated the status of *Tui Nasau* and empowered the past of Waitabu – he was not merely a second in command, or leader of the people who looked after the house of the chief, but the eldest son of a noble bloodline, who was a supreme ruler himself.

Nasau as Waitabu's Hidden Identity

The title Nasau, nevertheless, is not only a chiefly position, but also a sacred site to the Waitabu people. To appreciate its profound meaning to the community when being recited in the entrance ceremony, we have to explore the migrant history of Waitabu's ancestors and the making of its kinship organisations. It is through this endeavour that Nasau's significance as a hidden identity is revealed.

The earliest documented encounter of the settlement Nasau was by Rev. Thomas Williams, written in his journal in 1844 (Williams in Henderson 1931, 245). The village name Waitabu was later noted by Hocart (1952, 69) during his 1912 research trip. In his final report he wrote an intriguing passage: "Nasau in the village of Waitambu [sic] in Mbouma [sic] in Taveuni is *tauvu* to Nandaranga [sic]" (110). In Fijian custom, *tauvu* relationship denotes two groups of people that have the same ancestral origin. Here Nadaraga (Nandaranga) is a lineage of the Mabuco clan in eastern Vanua Levu, and what Hocart's description indicates is that there was a separate layer of identity known as Nasau within the village of Waitabu. Given that there is currently no lineage in the kinship structure of Waitabu called Nasau, and the actual settlement of Nasau had long been abandoned at the time of Hocart's fieldwork, the expression of "Nasau inside Waitabu" in his statement becomes very interesting.

To solve this riddle, we must go back to Waitabu's official communal system and kinship structure, depicted in Figure 1. This pyramid-like system was based on the British colonial official G.V. Maxwell's native policy, in which *yavusa* is a group of people sharing common ancestry, and its subdivision *mataqali* is a patrilineal descent group and the basic landowning unit. Numerous anthropological studies had already addressed the inadequacy of this model, which restricted the flexibility that local communities actually exercise (Abramson 1999; Clammer 1973; Kaplan 2005; Nayacakalou 1971, 1975; Sahlins 1962; Walter 1978b; Young 2001). Works by historians, geographers, and archaeologists also revealed the wide range of mobility and scatteredness that Fijian societies displayed, which were thought to be the outcome of constant tribal warfare (Capell and Lester 1941; Field 2005; Ward 2007). France (1969) further concluded,

> The tribes of which Fijian society is composed were formed by combinations of independent agnatic families which became linked by ties of marriage and the

> needs of common defense. Their leaders gained power initially through their ability to organize the defense of a settled area. But gradually the unifying theory of common descent transformed them into the descendants of a tribal deity. (14)

Even Maxwell himself recognised the influence of warfare. In his model, he hypothesised that in times of war several *yavusa* came together and formed a *vanua* (confederation) under the leadership of a regional chief. What he did not realise was that such a process occurred much more frequently and was localised even at the *mataqali* level.

The kinship data I gathered from Waitabu conform to what France described above. On paper the structure has a timeless aura but in reality the alliance or recruitment that formed the kinship organisations of Waitabu today was a fairly recent development. Sometime after the Rev. Thomas Williams encountered Nasau and its inhabitants in 1844, they began to move down to a settlement closer to the coast, called Nakade. In 1900, a woman by the name of M.M. was born there (see Figure 2). By the time Hocart was on the island doing research in 1912, the settlers of Nakade had already established today's Waitabu. At this time, the identity of Nasau became very important, because into the twentieth century Waitabu had to recruit people to add to its apparently thin population. For example, a gentleman by the name of M.B. from Naselesele was recruited into Waitabu and assumed the leadership role. His brother P.N. later married M.M. Both of them did not have issue. M.B., however, adopted a son called A.V., to whom the leadership was passed down. Together they founded *Mataqali* Vunivesi. Sometime after P.N. passed away and M.M. became a widow, M.B. brought in a catechist called A.W. from the village Muana in eastern Vanua Levu for the Catholic congregation in the village. He was given several pieces of land and established the *i-Tokatoka* Nasolo. As for *Mataqali* Waisoki, all current members were the descendants of two men: M.R. from Korovou and later L.T. from Vanua Levu, who came and married the widowed M.M. In accordance with the patrilineal logic of the Fijian *mataqali* system, their children belong to Waisoki. With these recruitments, *Mataqali* Waisoki

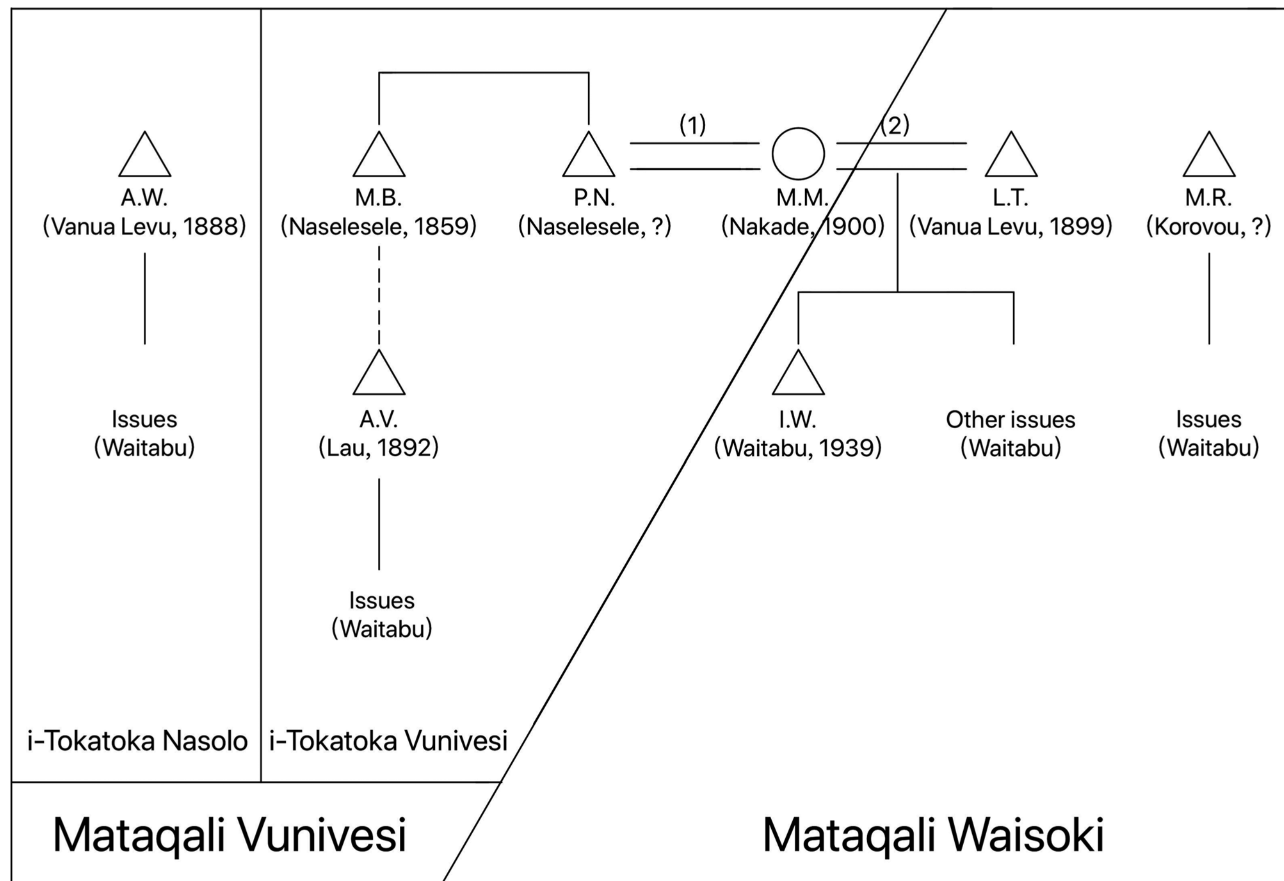

Figure 2: The making of Waitabu's kinship structure.

grew larger, and at one point it had three *i-tokatoka*, as documented in the Native Lands Commission report in 1929, but two of them have since migrated out. As for the third *mataqali*, Veiniu, at Wai, its members were the offspring of one single man, R.L., who came and acquired a piece of land from Waisoki in the early twentieth century.

Although the first registered *Tui Nasau*, M.B., stated in his 1929 account that the current three-*mataqali* (along with nine *i-tokatoka*) structure was already in place when the settlement was in Vurevure in ancient times, it was probably stated to match the official model of Fijian social organisations, as happened elsewhere in Fiji (Nayacakalou 1975, 14). Therefore, when recruited into Waitabu, all these people mentioned above could have either created a new *mataqali* or taken over a dissolving one, both of which were common practices for Fijian tribal society. It should be noted that in Fiji an extinct *mataqali* is referred to as "*sa lala*" (it's empty), implying that it could be filled back in like a container.

As we can see, when the officials of the Native Lands Commission came into Waitabu and recorded their kinship structure in 1929, M.M. and her children were the only ones who had blood ties to Nasau. Today, only one of her children, an elder called I.W., is still residing in Waitabu. He and his children are thus acknowledged by villagers as *'Ai Nasau dina*, the real Nasau people. Their usufruct right to Nakade, the birth place of M.M., is also well protected in Waitabu, which reflects how the community still respects this relationship. This recognition of *dra tabu* (sacred blood) flowed from women was first identified by Sahlins in his research in Moala, where his informant told him, "Brothers are only brothers, but the sister's child is a new path … Brothers are only in the house; they have been there from the past to today. But the descent of my sister is a new line" (Sahlins 1962, 168, quoted in Sahlins 2004, 223). This statement especially rings true for the Nasau people, because their blood and identity were able to survive and live on through their sister M.M. This also shows how the maternal reckoning goes parallel with the patrilineal logic of *mataqali* and how it offers new possibilities for the "stagnant" autochthonous group. The Nasau identity documented by Hocart in 1912 in Waitabu was therefore a way for the community to maintain continuity with its distant past, which was done through the recognition of M.M. and her descendants. The title *Tui Nasau* recited repeatedly in the entrance ceremony also serves the same function.

A History of Crises

But why was M.M. the only descendant of Nasau who made it into the 1929 tribal kinship registry of Waitabu? What happened to her kin from Nasau to Nakade and then to Waitabu? Answering these questions can help us understand why Nasau conveys a sense of loss (cf. Tomlinson 2004) and how the entrance ceremony recreates a sense of wholeness. Warfare certainly is the usual suspect, especially in explaining depopulation from 1800 to 1850 in Fiji, which was also the opinion of the natives themselves. When Rev. Thomas Williams was in Bouma in 1844, he struck up a conversation with a local young man and blatantly told him, "Your race is almost extinct," to which he responded, "we the inhabitants of Feejee [sic] are finished by war" (Williams in Henderson 1931, 245). Similarly, in 1870, noticing the declining native population on the island, Taveuni planter J.B. Thurston asked a local old man, "what has become of the people?" and the answer was "clubbed and eaten" (Scarr 1973, 135).[7]

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the indigenous population encountered an even more lethal destruction: disease. Taveuni first received a taste of it in September 1839, shortly after the missionaries Lyth and Hunt arrived at Somosomo. It was a severe case of influenza that also affected Rewa and Bau in Eastern Viti Levu, where the missionaries had also just established their presence. It was therefore called by the natives the "sickness of the *lotu*" (Cargill in Schütz 1977, 149; Thornley 2000, 132). While many natives, as well as the families of the missionaries, were seriously infected, the death toll was not specified in the missionaries' report. And then in December 1874, after Fiji was ceded to Britain, the former ruler Cakobau and his two sons went on a state visit to New South Wales and contracted measles during the journey. After their return in January 1875, they immediately met with chiefs and tribal leaders from all over Fiji, who intended to learn about their status after the Cession. From then until June, the disease spread with striking speed and intensity to almost every corner of the Fiji Islands. At the end, the death rate was about one-fifth of the total native population, around 40,000 in total (Cliff and Haggett 1985, 35).

Fiji was later again caught up in a much larger scale of outbreak: the global Spanish influenza pandemic 1918–19. It entered Fiji on 4 November 1918 through a steamship called *Talune* travelling from Auckland, New Zealand, where influenza was already a serious matter. It spread out quickly in Fiji and lasted about five to six weeks, eventually causing a total of 8,145 deaths, among which 5,154 were indigenous Fijians, whose death rate was around 5.66%, the highest of all populations in Fiji.[8] Most of the people killed in this pandemic were in the prime of life, which further crippled the operation of the colony (Lal 1992, 58).

I have heard both of these events mentioned in the legends of Bouma. They were said to be the prime

reason that the inland settlements were moved down to the coast:

> And then in 1874, when they gave the Fiji Islands to Victoria, *Tui Viti*, Cakobau, went to [New South Wales]. When he came back, he brought back a kind of sickness … measles … and then the government said all the people should come down to coast … easy for the government to treat them. And another one came in [1918], some villages … like Korovou, I was told only four people left, all sick. Only the four people cook the food and feed them. Nearly every village [was infected]. When they go for funeral, four, five people [were] buried together. That's why they leave the bush and come down … When they are in Waitabu the second one [the one in 1918] came. Only the Catholic Mission in Wairiki nobody sick there. They carry the food to every village they can help, with the priest to anoint the sick. (Aisake Tale, interview 03/12/2010)

This tale was echoed by a couple of elders in Bouma who remembered the devastating situation told of by their fathers. The catechist of Korovou, Fabi, told me that the style of burial during that time was called *bulu vakavudi* (buried like plantains), indicating the vast number of bodies being buried at the time. What they were referring to was no doubt the 1875 measles epidemic, which may have wiped out the majority of the indigenous population in Taveuni or caused them to be displaced. Due to the lack of medical staff and colonial personnel at the beginning of the Cession, the exact situations of the outlying islands amid the spread of measles in 1875 were only partially known. The Methodist missionaries nevertheless were able to provide detailed numbers at the local level where they were stationed. For example, in the Lau Group, the death rate on some islands (Oneata in particular) could reach as high as 75% (Cliff and Haggett 1985, 36). For Taveuni, the only mention of the local death toll I was able to find was on a piece of news report: "Out of a population of 300 at Na Korovou [Vuna], at the south end of Taviuni [sic], 75 have died up to the date our informant left."[9] The proximity of Vuna to a major port of entry on the island at the time probably explained why it was the only place on Taveuni mentioned in the news, but the same devastation could very well be applied to other villages with which Vuna had close contact.

As for the 1918 Spanish influenza pandemic, the situation appeared to be relatively minor in Taveuni. According to the District Medical Officer (DMO), V.W.T. McGusty, after the disease was introduced to the island in early December 1918, 143 cases were treated and there were 11 deaths.[10] In particular, the entire southern part of Taveuni was the only region in Fiji that was not affected, thanks to the European planters there self-enforcing a *cordon sanitaire* (McLane 2013, 141). DMO McGusty later also commented that the communities in Taveuni enjoyed natural advantages of "good water supplies, good drainage, and a plentiful food supply" that maintained a generally healthy environment.[11]

Conclusions

As we can see, the Nasau people were very likely stricken by the 1875 measles epidemic. As the remaining members moved down to Nakade and later to Waitabu in the early twentieth century, they essentially had to reinvent their community and identity entirely. I am certainly not engaging in the debate of the "invention of culture" (Hanson 1989) or implying that their current identity is fabricated. What I want to stress is that the making of Fijian communities has always been flexible and incorporative, endlessly involving new members and ideas. It is also due to this fluid quality that it is in need of finding an anchorage to stabilise itself in a constantly changing world. In Waitabu this sense of stability and wholeness is achieved through continuously acknowledging the significance of its chiefly title *Tui Nasau* in the entrance ceremony, and every time the title is pronounced, ties to the past are renewed, and the contemporary community is empowered. Therefore, chiefly titles, old or new, with or without actual holders, are an important symbolic resource that is able to connect communities to a past of stability and hold them together despite the transformations they had gone through in their turbulent histories. The Inland Forest chiefs and the chief of Waitabu are thus more than just petty chiefs in the regional structure of hierarchy; they are meaningful and powerful symbols to local communities.

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Notes

1. Other than the glottal stops throughout the speech, which are a salient marker of the Bouma dialect, here the term *yane* is also a Bouma term, meaning "to there" (Dixon 1988, 374).
2. The juxtaposition of "*gone*" (child, young) and "*turaga*" (chief) in the title of high chiefs even of old ages had puzzled Hocart, who eventually theorised that it is within a binary against "*qase*" (old), which denotes lower-ranked chieftains (Hocart 1921). Sahlins (1981) saw this as further evidence of the stranger-king who took the wives of the land people and begot the ruling chief, who became symbolically the young sacred nephew to the elderly folks of his mother's brothers. Identifying the outstretched rope on the kava bowl in installation ceremonies as a symbolic "umbilical cord," Turner (1995) argued that the title "*gone turaga*" suggested that the chief was born from the

kava (109). Either way, it is clear that "*gone*" implies the quality of energy and mobility, as opposed to the static and ancient land.

3 "*Sosoratu*" is an expression used at the end of offering speeches. It usually occurs when *tabua* is presented (Quain 1948, 209), but it has been documented that it can also be used in *i-sevusevu* (Lester 1942).

4 It should be noted that there is a difference between titles being vacant and no longer formally installed. In the latter situation, other senior leaders may play the role of the chiefly title for ceremonial purposes (Nayacakalou 1975, 63).

5 M.B. in NLC Final Report Vol.1 Province of Cakaudrove, 1929, 10–11, Native Lands and Fisheries Commission, Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, Suva.

6 Iosefo Cakanacagi, "Na Tawa Vanua Taumada," handwritten document in Fijian, n.d., my translation.

7 It was of the opinion of the geographer R. Gerard Ward that the muskets introduced into Fiji by the early-nineteenth-century traders were responsible for the intensification of warfare in Fiji and had led to an increasing death toll and the destruction of villages and gardens (Ward 1972, 111). This had been questioned by scholars, who argued that early muskets were largely inaccurate and unreliable in the damp Pacific climate and subject to mishandling by the natives (Howe 1974; Sahlins 1993). The use of muskets at the siege of Vuna in 1840 was documented by the missionaries, but was deemed "ineffective" against the fortified fences (Thornley 2000, 144).

8 Colonial Reports – Annual. No.1047. Fiji. Report for 1919, p.15, National Archives of Fiji, Suva.

9 "Late Fiji News." *Australian Town and Country Journal* (Sydney, NSW: 1870–1907) 5 June 1875, p. 21. http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article70491624.

10 "Influenza in Taviuni District," 7 February 7 1919, CSO MP 1671/1919, National Archives of Fiji, Suva.

11 Annual Medical Report, Taviuni. Legislative Council Paper No. 2, 1921, 6–7, National Archives of Fiji, Suva.

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