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# **Tradition, Politics, and Change in Contemporary Fiji and Tonga**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of  
The Australian National University

July 1995

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# Contents

Abstract	v
Notes on pronunciation	vi
Glossary	vii
Fijian	vii
Tongan	viii
Abbreviations	viii
Currencies	viii
Maps	ix
Tonga	ix
Fiji's confederacies	x
Fiji	xi
Acknowledgements	xiii
1. Introduction: the paradoxes of tradition in the Pacific	1
Why Fiji and Tonga?	2
The aim of my fieldwork	6
Outline of the thesis	9
2. Tradition in Pacific politics: the academic debate and a new theory	11
Political scientists and the study of tradition	12
The concept of politics	15
The 'invention of tradition'	21
The evolution of tradition	29
Political consequences of tradition	42
3. Definitions of tradition: some local opinions	45
The concept of tradition	45
Fijian and Tongan traditions	56
Tradition and identity	61
'Invented traditions'	65
4. Tradition in the political process	71
Fiji's political system	73
The Council of Chiefs	77
The chiefly system	82
From Mara to Rabuka	86
Provincialism and party politics	90
Tonga's political system	94
The King	97
The nobles	103
The government	110
The Pro-Democracy Movement	113
5. Education's effects on tradition and politics	121
Higher education	121
Education in schools	130
Celebration as education about tradition	139

6.	Money: a vehicle for change	147
	Land and community	147
	The concept of indigenusness	148
	Indigenusness and the land	150
	Issues relating to the land	155
	Trends towards business	164
	Tradition as a barrier to business success	168
	The desire for economic success	172
7.	Further signs of change in family and society	183
	The importance of family	183
	Change in the family	187
	Women in politics	192
	Differences between city and country	194
	Expatriate and external influences on society	199
	The church in politics	204
	The media	208
	Fiji's media	209
	Tonga's media	212
	Television	218
8.	An awareness of difference: postmodernity in Fiji and Tonga	223
	What <i>is</i> postmodernism?	225
	Truth, truth, and 'truth'	231
	'But what about Hitler?'	236
	Tradition, postmodernity, and postmodern traditionalists	238
9.	Conclusion: politics as the negotiation of change in tradition	245
	Changes that people want but don't want	245
	Challenges to existing traditional authority	248
	Why political scientists should study tradition	252
	The spirit of Burke and the spirit of Paine	254
	Appendix 1. How interviews were used in this study	257
	Selected bibliography and reference list	261
	Interviews	262
	Secondary sources	265





## Abstract

The subject of 'the politics of tradition' has attracted increasing attention in Pacific islands studies over recent years, particularly from historians and anthropologists. The contemporary politics of Fiji and Tonga are considered to be particularly significant in this regard: Fiji has experienced the reinforcement of chiefly politics since its 1987 coup; and in Tonga, calls for democracy have presented a challenge to traditional authority for over a decade. This study draws on interviews conducted in 1993 with sixty people involved in government and politics in Fiji and Tonga (among them Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Bishop Patelesio Finau, and 'Akilisi Pohiva) to compare the issues tradition raises for politics in both countries, and thereby to demonstrate the importance of considering matters of tradition within political science.

The study examines the concept of tradition, its interaction with the contemporary politics of Fijians and Tongans, and the forces for change affecting tradition and politics. It is argued that debates about 'the invention of tradition' and questions of authenticity in tradition, while useful, have diverted attention from the need for theories about how tradition works. The theories of the mind of neurobiologist Gerald Edelman are then used to advance one such theory: that tradition should be seen as a system of group knowledge subject to evolutionary change — change driven by a selectionary process involving individuals' thought-processes. Further discussion explains how this process gives rise to political conflict and hence is of importance to political science.

The role of tradition in contemporary government and other political processes in Fiji and Tonga is then examined. Two major social forces, it is argued, are currently influencing and changing Fijians' and Tongans' traditions and politics: education and money. A third force, the media, is becoming increasingly influential. These forces and others are examined, along with the sites for change in which they are at work. Land, indigenous rights, language, ceremony, provincialism, urban/rural divisions, race relations, religion and the family are all discussed within this framework.

Finally, the study notes the useful parallels of this discussion of tradition and politics with discussions of postmodernism, particularly those of Walter Truett Anderson and pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty, and how some Fijians and Tongans could be said to have embraced a postmodern worldview. It outlines other matters of interest to political scientists which might be better understood in the context of tradition, and notes how Edmund Burke viewed the politics of his day in this light two centuries ago.

Key words: tradition; traditional; custom; customary; politics; political; change; evolution; neuronal group selection; invention; Fiji; Tonga; Pacific; chiefly; indigenous; government; modernity; postmodern; postmodernism; postmodernity.

## Notes on Pronunciation

Written versions of the Fijian and Tongan languages have various special conventions regarding the pronunciation of certain letters of the Roman alphabet. Fijian spelling is totally phonetic — each letter has only one sound, and each sound only one letter. Tongan is essentially, but not absolutely, phonetic.<sup>1</sup>

In Fijian, the following consonants represent sounds different from their sounds in English (note also that 'r' is rolled as in Scots):

<i>Letter</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Similar sound in Standard English</i>
b	mb	number
c	th	the (never as thin)
d	nd	lender
j	ch	choose
g	ng	singer (never as finger)
q	ngg	finger (never as singer)

Tongan also contains the soft **ng** sound, but spelled as in English. It contains the glottal stop, represented by an apostrophe.

Vowel sounds in both languages are as for Italian or German, and there is only one sound for each vowel. In Fijian, when in combination each vowel retains its separate sound. In Tongan there may be a glide.

<i>Letter</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Similar sound in Standard English</i>
a	ah	jar (never as cat)
e	eh	fellow (never as scene)
i	ee	machine (never as tin)
o	aw	more (never as dog or cove)
u	oo	put, pool (never as cut or fume)

Stress is often on the penultimate syllable (except a glottal stop before a vowel indicates that stress should be placed on that vowel). Thus, to give examples of Fijian names, 'Qarase' is pronounced 'nggah-rah-seh', 'Cakaudrove' is 'tha-cow-ndraw-veh', and 'Sokonibogi' is 'saw-kaw-neem-baw-ngee'. For Tongan, 'Vaea' is pronounced 'vie-ah', 'Vea' is pronounced 'vey-ah', 'Eua' is 'eh-wah', and 'Uliti Uata' is 'oo-lee-tee ooah-tah'.

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<sup>1</sup>Thanks to Rod Ewins for his help with Fijian linguistic matters here and in the glossary. Throughout this study I have also relied upon Capell (1968); Schütz (1979); Thompson and Thompson (1991; 1992); Tu'inukuafe (1992); Geraghty (1994); and glossaries from other academic works.

# Glossary

## Fijian

Adi	honorific used for high-born women
Bose Levu Vakaturaga	Great Council of Chiefs
itokatoka	extended family (also spelled <i>i tokatoka</i> )
kai valagi	European; white person (also <i>vavalagi</i> )
kerekere	practice of borrowing from kinsmen and/or close friends, properly resorted to only in cases of genuine need; not strictly reciprocal, but obligation persists on both sides
koro	village
lotu	Christian religion and church
luve ni wai	19th century rituals involving rituals associated with the worship of water spirits
mana	effective(ness); aura; spiritual force
matanivanua	herald; spokesman for a chief
mataqali	clan; basic land-owning group consisting of one or more <i>itokatoka</i>
meke	traditional dance
Ratu	honorific used for highborn males
sa!	interjection; expression of surprise, disapprobation
Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei	Fijian Political Party
tabua	whale's tooth (used as ceremonial object)
Tagi ni Vanua	Fijian religious/political pressure group whose name means 'cry of the land/people'
talatala	Fijian Methodist minister
taukei	Fijians; land-owners
tikina	district, containing one or more <i>vanua</i>
Tui	high chiefly title
tulou	'excuse me'
turaga	gentleman; chiefly person
vakavanua	in the way of the land; traditional
vanua	place; land (including people and customs); group of socially-connected <i>koro</i>
Vanualevu	second-largest island in Fiji (also spelled Vanua Levu)
Viti	Fiji
Vitilevu	largest island in Fiji (also spelled Viti Levu)

Vola ni Kawa Bula	official Fijian patrilineal birth register, on which is based Fijians' entitlement to land and membership of <i>mataqali</i>
vulagi	visitor; guest; stranger
yavusa	social group normally comprising two or more <i>mataqali</i>
yaqona	narcotic drink made from the roots of <i>kava</i> , a pepper plant

### Tongan

faikava	informal gathering at which <i>kava</i> is drunk
fono	meeting at which a noble communicates his wishes to his people
kainga	kin or village group under a noble
kava	narcotic drink made from the roots of a pepper plant
Kele'a	newsletter named after conch shells used as trumpets
mana	effective(ness); aura; spiritual force
matapule	talking chief; spokesman for a noble or royal family member
'ofa	love
'ofa aki	mutual or reciprocal love
palangi	European; white person (also <i>kau papalangi</i> )
ta'ovala	mat worn around the waist
Tu'i	high chiefly title; king

### Abbreviations

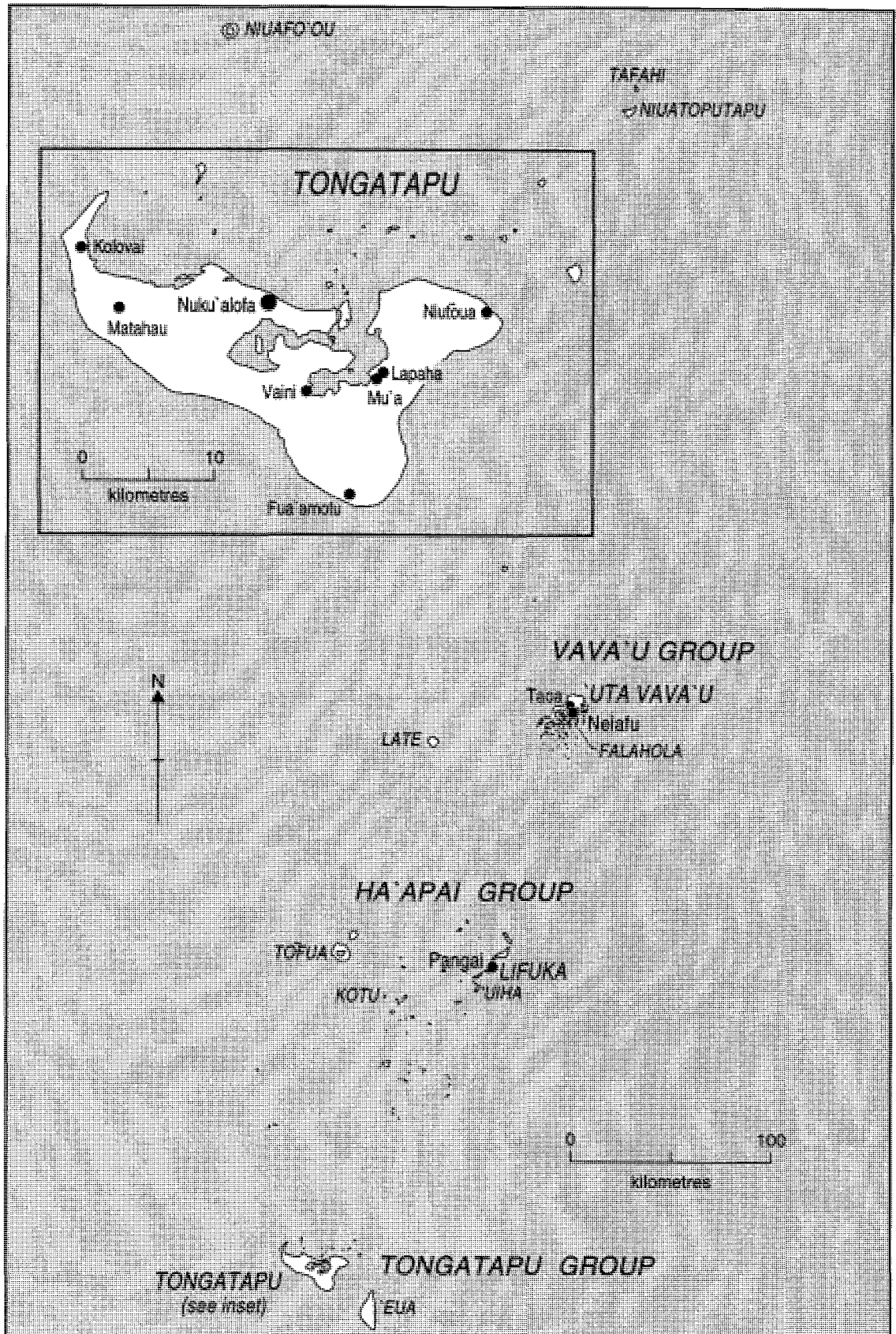
FDB	Fiji Development Bank
FLP	Fiji Labour Party
FNP	Fijian Nationalist Party
FNUF	Fijian Nationalist United Front
GNU	government of national unity
NFP	National Federation Party
NLTB	Native Lands Trust Board
PDM	Pro-Democracy Movement
SVT	<i>Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei</i>
TDB	Tongan Development Bank
USP	University of the South Pacific

### Currencies

In mid-1993, one Fiji dollar (F\$1) was worth slightly under A\$1.00, and one Tongan pa'anga (T\$1) was worth approximately A\$1.10.

# Maps

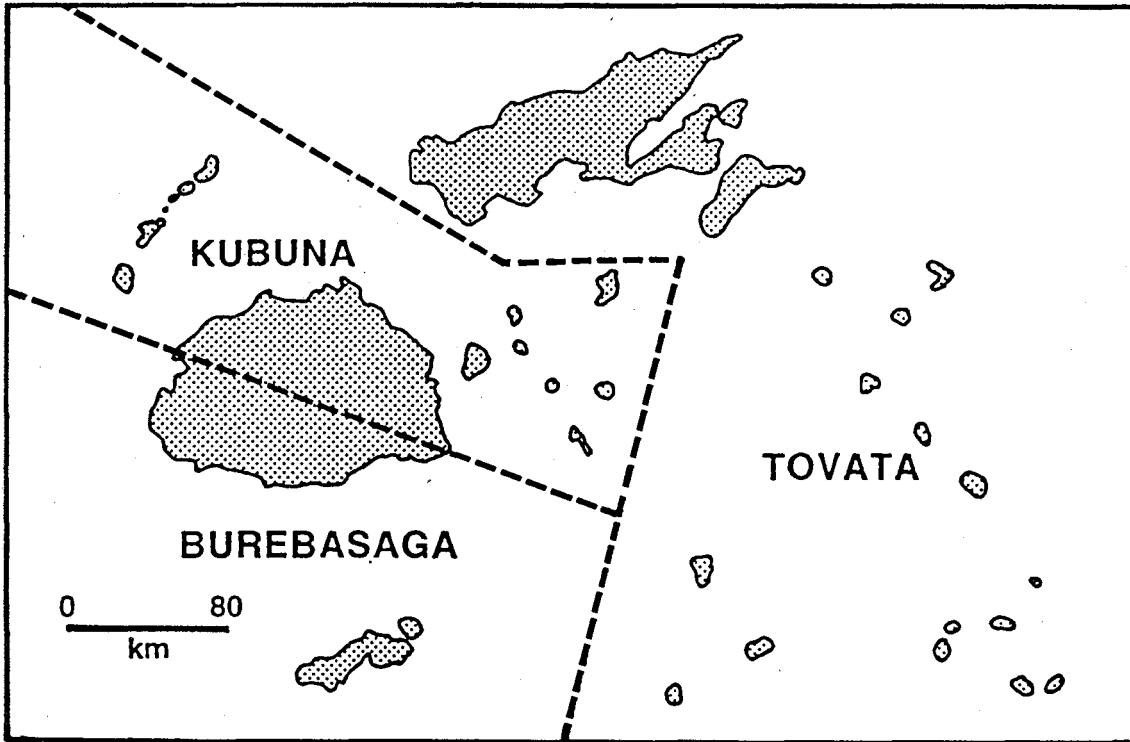
## Tonga



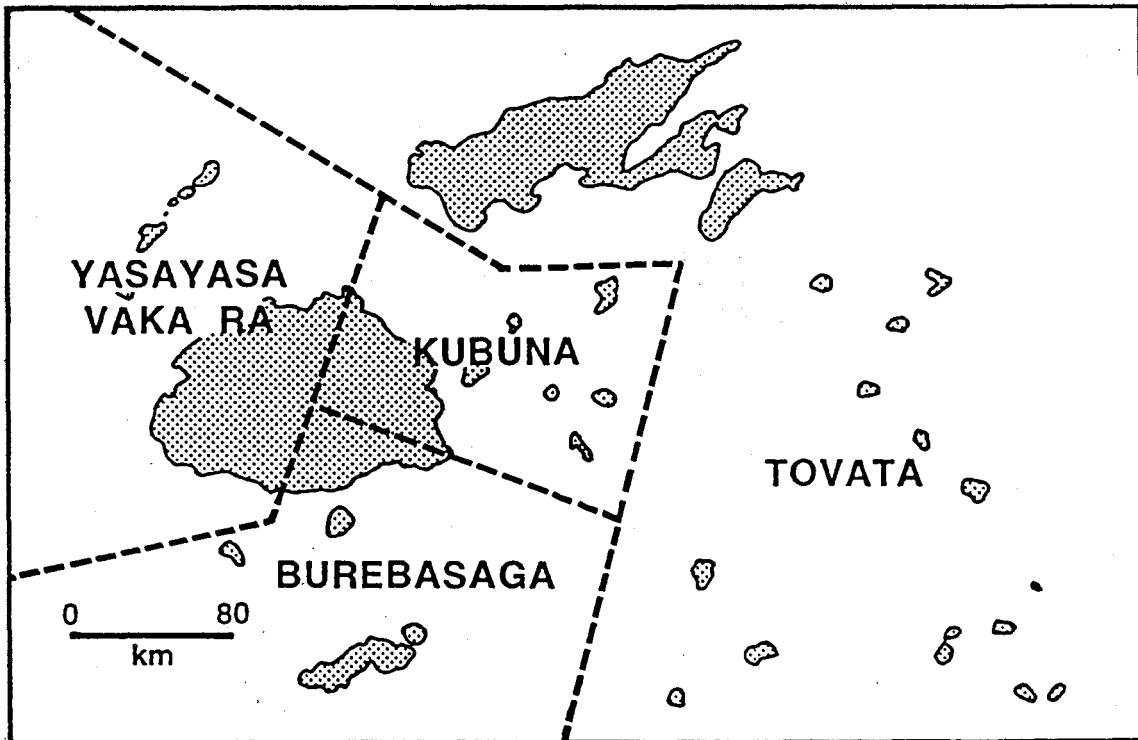
Source: Cartography Unit, RSPAS, ANU

# Fiji's Confederacies

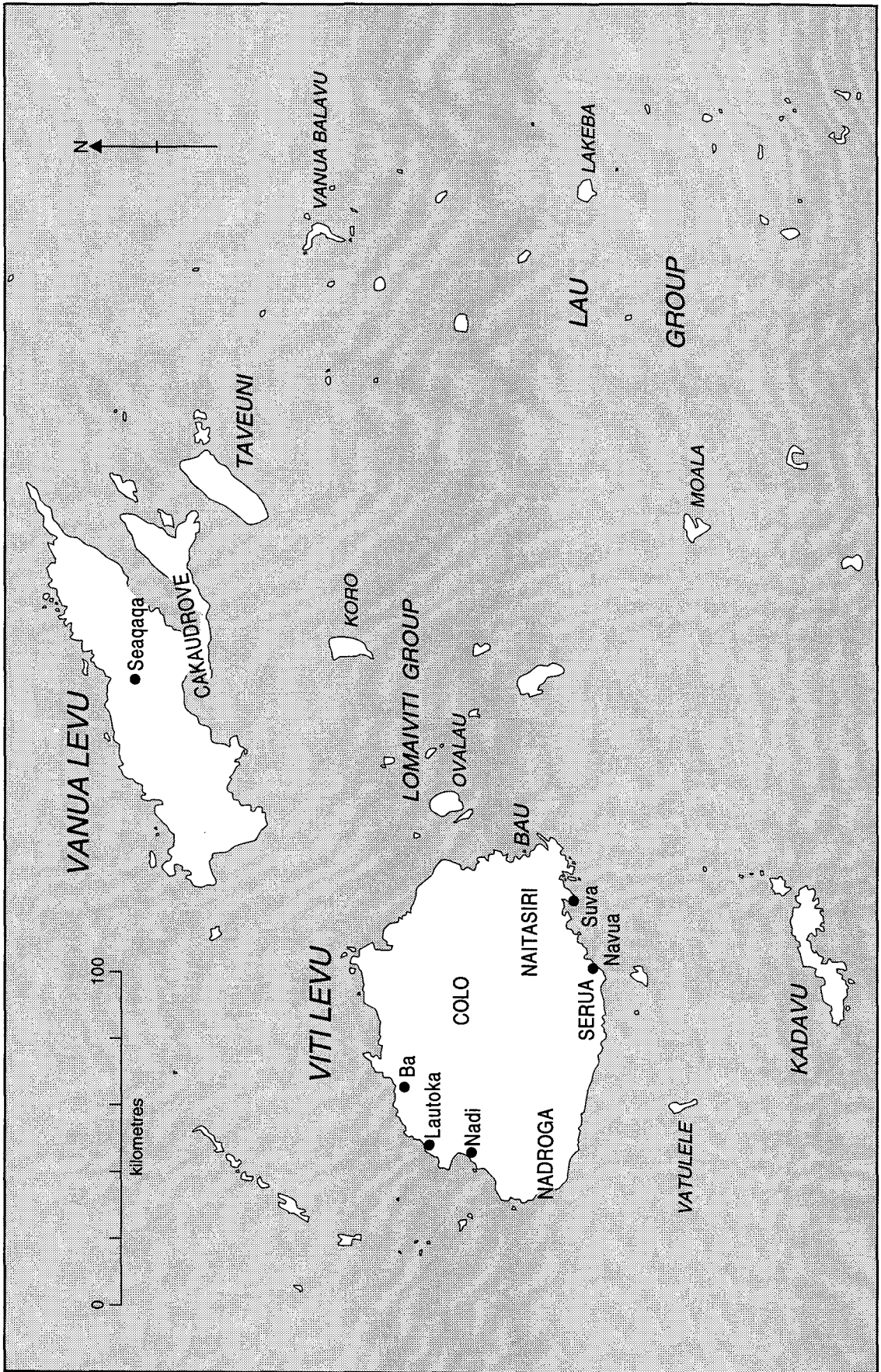
## Existing Boundaries



## With Proposed Fourth Confederacy



# Fiji



Source: Cartography Unit, RSPAS, ANU





## Acknowledgements

Every Ph.D. thesis is the end-product of years of extensive reading, intensive thought, and much hard work on the part of its author. Mine is no different in that regard, though at times in the years since I began in 1991 my thoughts and efforts roamed so far from my main field that I wondered if they would ever return. That they did is due to the support of those colleagues, friends and family members who make up the final essential ingredients in any doctoral recipe.

But as this thesis is about Fiji and Tonga, one group deserves special thanks from the outset: the many people I interviewed or otherwise spoke with in each country. Without them this would have been a completely different work, and, I suspect, a lesser one. I have listed my formal interviewees in the Bibliography, and my thanks go to them all; among their number I would like to single out Jone Dakuvula in Fiji for his (unfortunately unsuccessful) efforts to get me an interview with the Prime Minister, and Dr Langi Kavaliku for ensuring through his efforts that the Tongan cabinet approved my research permit in time for my arrival in Nuku'alofa. In addition, I would like to thank Frank Yourn of the Australian Embassy in Suva and Jennifer Rawson of the Australian High Commission in Nuku'alofa for their informal discussions with me, as well as Doug Munro of History and Politics at USP and William and Helen Sutherland for making me feel welcome in Suva; and especially Kiti Makasiale of the Fiji Department of Women and Culture, a good friend to two generations of Ewinses. And to Sai of Beach Road and Salote of the Beach House, *vinaka vakalevu* and *malo e lelei*.

And so to colleagues. ANU Ph.D. students are fortunate in enjoying a system where a panel of three partake in our supervision. I have been even luckier in having four. William Sutherland, my initial supervisor, returned to Suva to work at the end of 1992; he and Ron May, Bill Standish and Greg Fry have all helped in my intellectual and practical progress in significant ways, and I am grateful to them all for that, as well as for tolerating my periods of preoccupied seclusion for just long enough before they became periods of isolated panic. Other members of the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies and related areas in the ANU (and other universities) have also been a valuable source of comment, advice, and inspiration; I have benefitted from talking with and listening to many people, academics and fellow students alike, among them Jenny Anderson, John Ballard, Tom Clarke, Donald Denoon, Neil Gunson, Stephen Henningham, Margaret Jolly, Brij Lal, Peter Larmour, the late Sione Latukefu, Stephanie Lawson, Vicki Luker, Craig Meer, Guy Powles, Robbie Robertson, Deryck Scarr, Asofou So'o, Tim Tedbenschel, Nicholas Thomas, Wendy Timms, and others my overcrowded mind has forgotten to mention. Lastly here I should not neglect to thank Ben Kerkvliet and all the other members of Political and Social Change, as well as past

colleagues in Political Science at the University of Tasmania (especially Richard Herr) and in the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Cambridge.

This Ph.D. would not have been completed without the support of others. My deepest thanks in this regard go to my mother, Bev, and my father, Rod, for all the love and support they have given me over the years. To Dad I owe a particular debt for being not only father and friend but also colleague. He has been completing his own Ph.D. on Vatulele in Fiji while I have been doing mine on Fiji and Tonga, and over the years we have had many invaluable discussions on scholarly issues of concern to us both, prompting each of us to explore new fields of thought. It is no exaggeration to say that without his continuing research interests in Fiji from 1979 onwards, my own interest in the Pacific would never have been kindled. I could not have done this without him.

Equally, although I started my studies without her, finishing them would have been much more difficult without my partner, Jane Gould. Jane has helped to keep me sane through the two most important years of my Ph.D., and through her presence in my life has made Canberra feel like home. For a non-political-scientist she has been remarkably willing to listen to the intellectual ramblings of a political scientist, and has always been ready to offer thoughts of her own. But more importantly, she has given me all I could have hoped for in life beyond the halls of the Coombs building. I love her a lot.

Another person also deserves a special guernsey for helping to keep me going over the four years I've spent on- and off-course, and that is Scott Campbell. Our work together on the Tasmania University Union student magazine in 1987 has led to an ongoing e-mail correspondence as Ph.D. students in ANU and UNSW, and throughout it all Scooter has been a good friend. As have, in Canberra, Rohan Firminger, Greg and Juliet Johannes, and the 1991-94 committee members of the ANU Film Group; in England, James Bachman and the other members of Three Men and a Penguin; in Tasmania, Stuart Witton, Tim Beck and Brett Oates and their families; and in that state of flux which seems to overtake any group of old friends who were once in one place, Leanne Hills, Craig Smith and Mark Gregory, as well as Rhys Jones and Sean Ramia. My brother Grahame, his wife Sou Fun, and other family members from the Ewins, Dunham, and Gould tribes have also been a great support; and I am determined to be the first doctoral candidate to thank the Mike Oldfield mailing list on the Internet ([oldfield@damp.apana.org.au](mailto:oldfield@damp.apana.org.au)) for proving such an entertaining diversion.

All mentioned above can share in the credit for what follows, but no one is to blame for it except for myself. Older and wiser people than me are justifiably cautious when commenting on subjects as controversial as the contemporary politics of Fiji and Tonga, and I have no desire to be seen as the brash young Aussie telling Fijians and Tongans what to do; I am not a politician. Political scientists can, however, influence politics,

especially in small communities, and it is possible that some of what follows will offend some people — perhaps even some of those I interviewed. For any offence given, I apologise, for none is intended. I found every person I talked with to be pleasant and agreeable company for the hour or so that we talked; unfortunately it is impossible to talk with sixty people, some of whose views are diametrically opposed to others', and please all of them with the conclusions one draws from those discussions. Here I can only echo the words of O. H. K. Spate, who wrote perceptively on Fiji thirty-five years ago:

It would be folly to expect that a serious examination of so controversial a subject, in which the feelings of a people are so deeply involved, will not appear to many sincere persons to be biased and partial. But, just because it is so serious and controversial a subject, it is impossible, unless one were content to be a moral and intellectual eunuch, to avoid choosing a part. (Spate 1990: 103.)

I only hope that this work is taken in the spirit it was undertaken: out of a genuine desire to look at *what* is happening in Fiji and Tonga and to try to explain *why* it is happening. Naturally I have my own views about where each country might go from here, but ultimately that is a matter for the people of each to decide, not Western academics. This is not a prescription for Fiji and Tonga — merely a partial attempt at diagnosis. As everyone concerned wishes to find the former, I hope that everyone equally will welcome attempts at the latter.



## Chapter One

### Introduction: The Paradoxes of Tradition in the Pacific

*People, professions, and artifacts all have roots that continue to feed their greenest shoots. (Petroski 1993: 17.)*

Not long ago, while skimming through a Sydney music newspaper, I came across the following breathless statement:

Even as I write the traditional music-only CD is being rapidly supplanted by things like CD-ROM's and it's perfectly reasonable to expect that within a few years every CD released will come with lyrics, images, and a whole swag of extras.<sup>1</sup>

It wasn't the news of this future technological feast which caught my attention — it was the language used to announce it. The compact disk, that symbol of our digital age, has been on the market for just over ten years, and that is apparently long enough to make it 'traditional'.<sup>2</sup>

Few better examples could be found to illustrate the flexibility and ambiguity of the concept of 'tradition'. We refer to it regularly in our everyday lives; the word crops up in news broadcasts, sports coverage, political speeches, and light-hearted family jokes about birthday rituals. In all these familiar contexts, references to 'tradition' are intended to evoke such concepts as stability, continuity, and changelessness. When we praise the 'traditions of cricket' (for example), we wish to emphasise both the long history of the sport and the recklessness and short-sightedness of those who would seek to ignore that history by going against tradition. In doing so, we reinforce the popular perception of tradition as something ancient and unchanging.

But at the same time, talk of tradition implies an inherent recognition of the constantly changing nature of our social world. Without ever-present change, tradition would not stand apart as something worthy of praise or condemnation. And behind tradition's facade of stability we may sometimes glimpse a shifting form uncomfortably similar to the 'change' it is meant to oppose. It is a blurring of boundaries to which we ourselves may be unwittingly contributing. Examples such as the 'traditional CD'

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<sup>1</sup>Stuart Coupe, *The Drum Media*, 23 August 1994, p. 46. 'CD-ROM' stands for 'compact disk with read-only memory', a CD which contains not music (or not only music) but graphics, text, and/or computer programs.

<sup>2</sup>I was reminded by this of the proud boast on a poster advertising a student revue at the ANU in 1993: 'A tradition of 0 years and still going strong.'

suggest that in our search for contrasts to continual change we end up labelling anything which is not new 'traditional' in the hope of lending it an air of venerability. Increasingly, however, the process may be working in reverse, with the connotations of the word being altered the more it is applied to the questionably 'traditional'. A decade ago, it was the long-playing record which enjoyed 'traditional' status, thanks to its thirty years of use. Now its successor, the CD, is a 'tradition' at age ten. Surely these uses of the word cannot mean the same?

The word 'tradition' is not so much a useful clear-cut term as a trap waiting to catch the unwary. I am one who stumbled into that trap; I hope that what follows shows one way out. Political science, as I will argue, has neglected tradition as part of its store of analytical concepts. Thus, when political scientists study parts of the world considered to be 'traditional', they find they are missing their most relevant intellectual tool. I found just this when I began studying the Pacific islands; my political science background had not equipped me to explain why tradition played such a strong role in both the rhetoric and the practice of the region's politics. In order to explain satisfactorily the political events of countries such as Fiji, I first had to explore the concept of tradition and determine how to use it in a political science context. Thus, although this study is concerned with many aspects of life in contemporary Fiji and Tonga and how they interact with these countries' politics, it is above all about tradition: about what the word means; about the concept's paradoxically fluid nature; and about how it affects all of our lives.

For tradition undoubtedly does affect all of our lives, and the Western reader would do well to keep that in mind while reading this account of its effects on the lives of Fijians and Tongans.<sup>3</sup> This is not meant to be a portrait of the 'other', of two small countries of little concern or relevance to Westerners; in many ways, a discussion of tradition speaks more to Westerners than it does to those they regard as being more 'traditional' than themselves. Indeed, as I will demonstrate, those 'traditional' peoples define the term more flexibly than Westerners often seem to; in some ways, then, it is Westerners who need to be educated about 'tradition'. But because the West has had such a strong influence on so many elsewhere, Western confusion has partially undermined their understanding of the concept. This study is one attempt to dispel some of that confusion on both sides.

### **Why Fiji and Tonga?**

The selection of countries as cases for study is bound to be a somewhat arbitrary process, reflecting as it does the history of the development of a researcher's personal

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<sup>3</sup>I use the term 'the West' loosely, taking it to mean North America, Western Europe, and Australasia. (See Chapter Two.)

ideas. An interest in the broader subject of tradition often stems from an initial interest in rather more specific events and questions. So it was with myself. My interest began in 1987, when Lieutenant-Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, third-in-command of the Royal Fiji Military Forces, conducted a military *coup d'état* against the recently-elected government of Dr. Timoci Bavadra, head of a coalition of the Fiji Labour Party (a two-year-old left-leaning party) and the National Federation Party (Fiji's longstanding opposition party of predominantly Fiji Indian character). The coup was arguably the most prominent and significant political event in the South Pacific of the 1980s. As a young student of political science, from a family which had lived in Fiji when it was a British colony, I could not help but take notice.<sup>4</sup>

The coup, as I have discussed elsewhere (Ewins 1992b),<sup>5</sup> was initially typecast by the world's press as the outcome of a racial struggle between indigenous Fijians and the descendents of immigrant Indian labourers, the first of whom had arrived in Fiji 108 years earlier.<sup>6</sup> Before long, however, this view was contradicted by various (mainly academic) observers, many of whom focussed instead on internal power struggles among Fijians — struggles which were largely motivated by conflicting opinions about the

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<sup>4</sup>Before the reader becomes overly irritated by the persistent intrusion of personal pronouns into this narrative, I should explain the logic behind this approach.

All writing is inevitably influenced by the writer's personal background; no truly objective vantage-point is available. To pretend otherwise is to create an illusion: a valuable illusion, often, in that it focuses the reader's attention on ideas rather than potentially distracting contextual details, but an illusion nonetheless. Many academics today are questioning the effects of (and hence the justification for) maintaining such illusions; the debate is closely linked with the postmodernist shift in thinking discussed in Chapter Eight.

The illusion of objectivity might not be particularly objectionable where subjects, writer, and readers all share similar backgrounds. But it becomes problematic when that assumption cannot be made, and this becomes particularly clear when writers from one culture study subjects from another. In such cases the assumptions a writer brings to his or her 'objective study' must be deduced and taken into account by readers, as graphically illustrated by Derek Freeman (1983) in his famous study of the work in Samoa of anthropologist Margaret Mead. But accounting for another writer's inbuilt assumptions is not always easy; one must first know something about his or her background.

The simplest way to deal with this is for writers to tell readers more about themselves and to place themselves more clearly in their narratives. Of course, too much becomes intrusive, and a balance must be found; but that balance is, I believe, somewhere beyond the objectivity to which many writers still aspire. I have tried to strike my own balance in this work.

Doing so brings additional benefits. In this study I argue that tradition is of concern to us all, not to 'traditional peoples' alone. One way of demonstrating this is by occasional reference to examples from other cultures, and the cultures with which I am most familiar are those of the West — in particular, those of Australia and its smallest state, Tasmania (where I was born and raised), but also England (where I lived for a year in 1991-2 after having travelled there in 1985-6) and the United States (where I lived for six months in 1980 and travelled in 1992), both of which countries exercise a powerful influence over Australian culture. I hope that as a result this work can be seen as something of a dialogue between Fiji and Tonga and the West and among the people of each, rather than as a 'scientific study' by an 'objective' outsider.

<sup>5</sup>This paper was a published version of my honours dissertation, although the concluding chapter was expanded with new material written during my Ph.D. study in 1991. A small amount of that new material has been incorporated, in an altered form, into Chapter Two.

<sup>6</sup>For comments on the rationale behind my use of the collective terms 'Fijians' and 'Fiji Indians', see Chapter Four.

degree of political influence traditional Fijian chiefs should continue to enjoy.<sup>7</sup> Even those who continued to argue for a racial explanation paid much attention to matters of Fijian tradition in their analyses of the coup.<sup>8</sup>

Here was a way of explaining a country's politics — in terms of its people's traditions — that was different from the more familiar explanations of race and class. Certainly, some were treating tradition as part of race- or class-based explanations; but my feeling was that the question of tradition should be examined separately. The more I studied Fiji and then the rest of the Pacific, the more tradition appeared to be the key to understanding political events where race and class, while obviously not insignificant, were not the most important factors at work.

Thus, when I wrote my honours dissertation about the explanations that had been offered for the coup, I concluded that tradition (in the form of the chiefly system and its supporters) provided the best framework for explaining the coup and its success. Only when commencing doctoral study on the subject of the politics of tradition in the Pacific did I really begin to investigate what the concept of 'tradition' meant — to Fijians, to other Pacific islanders, and to us all.

The coup and its aftermath, it is fair to say, left many observers inclined to be suspicious of the concept of 'traditional authority' — that is, authority conferred on a person by virtue of his or her traditional status, such as chiefly status — at least as it was operating in Fiji. When, at the beginning of 1991, I began to examine that concept (and the one behind it of 'tradition'), I probably thought that the evidence I would gather would show that traditional authority no longer has any place in Pacific nations; that the people have outpaced their chiefs in adapting to the modern world; and that these countries should move on, very much as Western countries had, and progressively leave behind some of their archaic political structures.

Unfortunately, where many Pacific countries were concerned, the facts appeared to ruin a perfectly good hypothesis. Fiji, of course, had made strong moves since the coup to incorporate even more tradition into its political structures than had existed beforehand. It was possible, however, to see these developments as being directed by a traditional elite, perhaps without the support of most Fijians and almost certainly without the support of others (Indians being the biggest losers under Fiji's new constitution). Without any sort of referendum on these developments, and with the prospect of an election a distant one, it was impossible to tell how popular the changes were.

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<sup>7</sup>See, for example, Lal (1988); S. Lawson (1991a); Norton (1990); Robertson and Tamanisau (1988); Robie (1989). I make no attempt to comprehensively survey the coup literature here, having already done so in Ewins (1992b).

<sup>8</sup>For example, Ravuvu (1991); Scarr (1988a).



But attempts were being made to incorporate more tradition into the political systems of other countries, too, and it was difficult to see every case as one of manipulation from above.<sup>9</sup> In the Solomons in 1988, for example, a constitutional review committee proposed a greater role for traditional chiefs in politics and the legal system (Jennings 1990a: 19). In Vanuatu, a similar committee was established to consider, among other things, adapting Vanuatu's eleven local councils to accommodate participation by chiefs, and possibly making the 'highest traditional custom Chief' the country's president (*ibid.*: 21). Some articles discussing Pacific nations which had attained their independence during the 1970s noted how tradition was being used as a tool for nation-building.<sup>10</sup> It is hard to imagine its usefulness for such a purpose if the concept did not have widespread support within the nations concerned. And even in Bougainville, where Papua New Guinea's attempts at nation-building were conspicuously failing, secessionists had been considering a strong role for tradition in their plans for a new state.<sup>11</sup>

Certainly, there seemed to be evidence of moves in the other direction. In Western Samoa at that time, a long-standing electoral system in which only the heads of traditional units (or *matai*) enjoyed the franchise had just been replaced by universal adult suffrage; and in Tonga's 1990 elections, pro-democracy candidates had increased their profile. Both countries, along with Fiji, were for many years the most prominent examples of Pacific nations with strong traditional elements incorporated into their political systems, which made it reasonable to speculate that they would be among the first to lead the way away from tradition. But the overall picture was a confusing one, with no readily discernable trend. I began to wonder if it would be possible to draw any general conclusions about the place of tradition in the politics of the region.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>For a useful brief overview, see Meller (1984). See also Ghai (1988b: 23-25); Hassall (1990); Larmour (1994: 384-385); Powles (1982, 1990b).

<sup>10</sup>For a recent example (which also discusses current Australian attempts at 'nation-building'), see Foster (forthcoming). See also Babadzan (1988); Latukeyu (1988); Philibert (1986); Tonkinson (1982b); White (1992). Betel-nut chewing in Papua New Guinea provides a fascinating example of the interaction of tradition with contrary 'modern' pressures, and how that relates to nation-building; see Foster (1992); Hirsch (1990).

<sup>11</sup>See Sabin (1988).

<sup>12</sup>Nor were these issues of concern simply to Pacific islanders and those who studied them. The politics of tradition is an issue, to varying extents, in many countries. A series of resonant points is to be found, for example, in an article discussing modern Nepal (written by a local):

The chemistry of Eastern values and Western life style never makes a good combination. The relationship of tradition with modernity suggests that there is rarely a spirit of harmony and coexistence between them. (Sharma 1989: 3.)

Politics is a critical area, and a traditional outlook on it blocks our progress in almost everything. The present system behaves as if it were afraid of the very idea of political

Early in my research it became clear that to examine the Pacific as a whole in any sort of rigorous manner was an impossible task in the time available to me. It seemed, however, that useful conclusions which might have wider applicability could be made by comparing the broad political picture of two or three countries. A limit of two seemed most practical, in order to do each sufficient justice in the space of a dissertation. Obviously, Fiji, being most familiar to me, would be one of those. The choice of Tonga as a second was not entirely arbitrary. Tonga has strong historical links with Fiji (as well as Samoa). As the sole surviving kingdom in the Pacific, it prides itself on its traditions; its tourist brochures proclaim it as 'Ancient Polynesia' (a claim which might make Samoans, Hawaiians, Tahitians and Maoris wonder exactly where that leaves them). And as 'the only island country to have escaped formal colonization during the period of European expansion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' (S. Lawson 1994: 1), it has fewer of the colonial legacies which complicate the political picture in Fiji, allowing one to draw out the themes shared by the two countries — those concerning tradition — in a comparative study.

### The Aim of My Fieldwork

In all that had been written about the contemporary 'politics of tradition' in Fiji and Tonga, nobody had systematically interviewed their key political figures to ask what the concept of 'tradition' meant to them and precisely what role they thought it should play in their politics. Certainly, Western academics had considered the matters involved — but it seemed that those most affected had been excluded, however unintentionally, from the debate.<sup>13</sup> The task I sought to achieve during fieldwork was to bring as many as I was able into that debate.

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modernization. . . . However, modernization through Coca-Cola, jeans, pop music, and now video and television sets, has been warmly welcomed. (*Ibid.*: 14.)

It is rather distressing to find that the modernizing elites in many third world countries think with confusion and incoherence on the problems of modernization. . . . The unity and integrity of the state should provide a useful value in today's nationalism . . . , but must it be sought by resorting to an appeal to tradition each time? (*Ibid.*: 19.)

<sup>13</sup>This is not to say that no comprehensive studies exist of contemporary Fijian and Tongan society. Anthropological studies, of course, draw extensively on the views of locals: see, for a recent example on Tonga, van der Grijp (1993). A distinction should also be drawn between academics working outside the Pacific and those working at, for example, the University of the South Pacific (USP): the work of Pacific islanders is often strongly grounded in their extensive experience of life in the region. That work, however, often presents only the voice of a single author; and even edited volumes, which present a larger number of views, present them in an unintegrated form. Contemporary discussion by Pacific locals about the concept of tradition is sporadic, often unfocussed, and rare throughout the literature: an unpromising starting-point for those researching the subject.

To do this, I conducted a large number of formal interviews over a period of four months in 1993; I was in Fiji from May to June and Tonga from July to August.<sup>14</sup> In each country the subject of tradition was in the air even more than usual. In Fiji in May the Council of Chiefs met for the first time since the 1992 elections, and discussed a proposal for a government of national unity. Around the same time a furore erupted over the *Vola ni Kawa Bula* (the register of who constitutes a 'legitimate' Fijian for land and electoral purposes), and the Fiji Labour Party staged a walkout from parliament, prompting further debate on the constitution. In Tonga in July the King celebrated his 75th birthday and his silver jubilee,<sup>15</sup> which prompted an outpouring of traditional ceremony and celebration — a strong political symbol for some.

I interviewed about thirty people in each country, drawn from the ranks of cabinet, parliament, media, academia, churches, civil service, trade unions, business, and the traditional elites of chiefs and nobility.<sup>16</sup> My aim in searching for interviewees was to identify people in public life who either were known to have spoken on issues of tradition and politics or were in positions of responsibility where they would be likely to have encountered such issues and formed opinions about them.

I decided to limit myself to public figures for several reasons. Although some had recommended that I 'get out and talk to the grassroots' to discover the opinions of ordinary Fijians and Tongans, this was not a practical option for me. First, I do not speak Fijian or Tongan, and even though English is widely spoken in both countries, language difficulties may have proved greater when dealing with people who had less day-to-day call for speaking English.<sup>17</sup>

Second, my limited time in each country would have severely constrained the amount of information I could gather from the grassroots. Extracting political information from people unused to discussing political issues to the same extent as those in public life would have required time to allow for an establishment of trust, time which the practical limitations of my research did not allow me; and the thoughts so extracted might have been less developed than those of people dealing with such issues every day.

Third, my political science background has focussed my attention, for better or worse, on larger-scale issues. My primary concern was thus not the details of life in a

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<sup>14</sup>In Fiji I was based in Suva, while in Tonga I was based in Nuku'alofa. I did not travel to the other main island groups of either country on this occasion.

<sup>15</sup>Taufa'ahau Tupou IV was crowned in 1967, so his silver jubilee (or *siupeli siliva*) should have occurred in 1992; but the Tongan government decided to postpone the celebrations to coincide with his 75th birthday on 4 July 1993.

<sup>16</sup>I also had a few off-the-record discussions with members of foreign embassies and the like.

<sup>17</sup>This was certainly my problem and not theirs, but the solution of learning Fijian and Tongan to a standard suitable for conducting interviews in them was not a practical one, given the time available to me. I travelled to Fiji after only fourteen months on-course (from February to August 1991, and from August 1992 to May 1993).

single village but the over-arching political picture in two countries. The people I wished to talk to, then, were those most involved in national politics. While it may be charged that a fuller picture would have been gained by a broader sampling across all sections of society, the restricted scope of my interview sample has, I believe, its own value (over and above its value in overcoming the practical limitations mentioned above). My study may be seen as complementary to the ethnographic studies undertaken by anthropologists and sociologists concerned with different sections of society and somewhat different questions. I was aware that the perspectives of my politically active interviewees may not be the same as the wider public's, in the same way as Australian parliamentarians' views may sometimes be at odds with Australian public opinion. But since those who are most involved obviously affect politics the most, I considered it would certainly be valuable to learn their opinions, and their perceptions of public opinion (which may not exactly match public opinion). This seemed an ideal contribution, furthermore, for a political scientist to make: researchers with other backgrounds would be unlikely to ask the same questions, to the same extent, of a similarly large number of politically prominent people, as I did.

A full list of interviewees is included in the Bibliography. Together they comprise a comprehensive sample of politically-active members of the Fiji (particularly Fijian) and Tongan communities. (Although most were publicly prominent in some way, it should be noted that they were by no means uniform in their political views, their social or educational status, their urban or rural origins, or various other distinguishing features; thus, while it would be a mistake to consider them wholly representative of their societies, it would also be unjust to consider them unrepresentative.) While I was unable to see everyone I wished, this rarely seemed to be due to reluctance on their part (more often it was due to obvious constraints on their time). Most were surprisingly approachable and open. I attempted, of course, to see the people at the very top, but there I met with little success (with some exceptions).<sup>18</sup>

These interviews form the heart of my study; I have used the words and thoughts of my interviewees to guide my own. This in itself represents a break with doctoral tradition, and as such requires justification. In writing this dissertation I had to decide whether to make best use of my wealth of interview material by drawing upon it heavily throughout the core empirical chapters, or to limit my use of it and draw more upon

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<sup>18</sup>The most notable exception was my meeting with the elder statesman of Fiji politics, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. Probably I was fortunate to be in Fiji at a time when he was 'between roles', being no longer prime minister but not yet president; also, of course, the matters I wished to discuss are close to his heart. My failure to reach other noteworthy individuals (such as the late President of Fiji Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, the King and the Crown Prince of Tonga, and the prime ministers of each country) was naturally disappointing (although as an unknown young foreigner I had not expected to receive a royal welcome from everyone); but I felt I had seen more than enough people to make their absence less problematic. As they and their actions and views were often discussed and interpreted by others, I felt it quite possible to draw some conclusions about how they were seen without actually speaking with them.

secondary sources. I chose the former path, since the primary material (coming from Fijians and Tongans themselves) offers certain insights that a literature survey cannot, and being the main foundation for my arguments it had to be included in some form.<sup>19</sup> I have, however, incorporated comments on relevant secondary material into the main text in places, and throughout the dissertation in footnotes; and published sources naturally form the basis of the theory chapters. The inclusion of interview material has therefore not reduced my own input of ideas and argument into the text, but rather has resulted in a somewhat longer work than is usual.

In presenting this material, I have decided to keep to a reasonable minimum any description of, and comment upon, the background, political preferences, and opinions of the interviewees themselves. I prefer, where possible, to allow such information to emerge from their own words rather than to risk misrepresenting their positions through words of my own. I have, naturally, been thoroughly aware of the possible biases inherent in my interviewees' statements, and have constantly striven to take them into account in the selection and presentation of this material. I have also been cautious, however, about adopting an overly critical approach towards others' biases, because I am aware that like anyone else I too am biased. I have thus wished to free myself from certain preconceptions so as not to reject prematurely what any one person might be saying. As my focus here is on broad social and political themes rather than specific personalities, I believe that this is an appropriate approach. To have digressed too often into discussions of the background and biases of each interviewee would, I believe, have undermined the clarity of my discussions of those broader themes.

Another effect of using interviews has been to locate the study in time as much as in place. Interviewees often gave recent or contemporaneous examples to illustrate their points, and some of those are given here (expanded, where necessary and possible, with details drawn from press reports). Essentially, then, I am presenting the reader with a snapshot of a particular time and place — Fiji and Tonga in mid-1993 — in order to illustrate the longer-term, more general concerns discussed throughout.<sup>20</sup>

## Outline of the Thesis

This study attempts to fulfil several goals (one of which, as mentioned above, is to provide a document of contemporary Fijian and Tongan opinion on matters of tradition and politics). First, it attempts to explain the concept of tradition and thereby its

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<sup>19</sup>I chose to use direct quotations rather than to paraphrase interviewees' comments in my own words, again because their words were more immediate and authoritative than any rephrasing could be, and also to avoid any unintended perception that I was presenting their thoughts, opinions, and insights as if they were all my own.

<sup>20</sup>The use of interviews raises various technical matters of style, as well as questions of attribution and anonymity. I discuss my approach to these matters in Appendix One.



## Chapter Two

# Tradition in Pacific Politics: The Academic Debate and a New Theory

*Tradition is a guide and not a jailer. (Maugham [1938]: 150.)*

In June 1994, reports reached Australia of moves afoot in Fiji to 'turn back the clock, to colonial days, by reviving village law':

From next year, the proposed Fijian court system not only will punish minor criminal offences but also lay down a moral code and reinforce chiefly control over many day-to-day aspects of village life. As well as jail or fines, proposed punishments will include flogging for offences such as sorcery and witchcraft. . . . The criminal code also prohibits women more than six months pregnant from fishing, working in food gardens or carrying firewood or water.<sup>1</sup>

Such measures seem draconian to Westerners, and to more than a few Fijians: while the Ministry of Fijian Affairs considers them necessary to curb lawlessness and 'disregard for the local chiefs in the villages', women's groups in particular see this as 'a return to outdated and oppressive traditional values'. It is hard to imagine that the 'revival of village law' will proceed smoothly. If any more evidence were necessary than the events of 1987, surely this shows that 'tradition' is a concept which can cause profound political problems.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>AAP article, 'Return to law of chiefs worries Fijian women', *The (Hobart) Mercury*, 14 June 1994, p. 32. The move is being proposed in order to 'combat rising crime and a breakdown in chiefly authority' (after a nine percent increase in major crime over the first ten months of 1994 compared with 1993). Fiji's Minister of Information, Ratu Josefa Dimuri, says he believes the chiefly system could 'help steer young Fijians away from crime' (Radio Australia external service, 0800 GMT 14 December 1994, Reuters Newsbriefs Article Ref. 000566238523). See also, on the revival of 'Fijian customary law', Fiji Labour Party and National Federation Party Coalition (1991: 39-40). On public opinion regarding the punishment of crimes in Fiji, see Sisarich (1987).

<sup>2</sup>Attempts to distinguish between 'tradition' on one hand and 'custom' on the other seem to have achieved little; many of my interviewees made little distinction between the two, referring almost habitually to 'traditions and customs'. I have previously attempted to distinguish between them myself (Ewins 1992b: 10) in order to avoid dealing with the complications of the concept of tradition, but am now convinced that such attempts achieve little more than such avoidance. Even though one word may not be an *exact* synonym for the other, they are closely related and each can lead to the same problems of analysis. All of what follows here, I believe, can apply more or less equally to either. (This is not to say that different people's traditions and concepts of tradition cannot be compared and contrasted, as Jolly (1992a) does with Vanuatu *kastom* and Fijian *vakavanua*; but Jolly herself implicitly acknowledges that there is a core concept of 'tradition' when she uses the term to discuss each of these kinds of tradition in her concluding remarks.)

But 'tradition' can also cause problems for political scientists. Before determining tradition's political significance, it is necessary to have some idea of what the traditions *are* in the societies being studied, as well as some theory about how tradition *works*. And while many studies exist of the former in the case of Fiji and Tonga, as with other so-called 'traditional' societies,<sup>3</sup> there remains a great need in all cases for the latter — despite considerable debate on the matter. In this chapter I will address that need.

### Political Scientists and the Study of Tradition

The task of cataloguing Pacific traditions has largely fallen to anthropologists and to a lesser extent historians. As a result it is mainly anthropologists, so far, who have attempted to solve — or at least to discuss — the theoretical problems raised by tradition. In the past decade they have contributed to a considerable body of academic literature on the subject of 'the politics of tradition in the Pacific', a label bound to attract the attention of the passing political scientist.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately that literature does not contain many answers to the questions political scientists are likely to ask, for the simple reason that it was not written by them.

I have no wish to cast aspersions on other academic fields; only to note that the questions which concern anthropologists are unlikely to be the same as those which concern political scientists, even when the source of those questions — tradition — is the same. Political scientists tend to be concerned with larger-scale societies, states, and nations, whereas anthropologists often spend long periods in small places in an attempt to describe their subjects' traditions as thoroughly as possible.<sup>5</sup>

This is not to say that valuable points have not been made by anthropologists (some of which I will discuss later), but simply that the study of 'the politics of tradition' will be better served if more political scientists bring their perspective to the issue. Some have, but only some. I suspect the reluctance of others has to do with development politics,

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<sup>3</sup>I say 'so-called' because I dispute the implication that other societies are not 'traditional', as I will explain later.

<sup>4</sup>I cite examples of the literature throughout this study (and this chapter in particular); other contributions of note are included in the Bibliography. Note also three special issues of anthropological journals (*Mankind* 13(4), August 1982; *Oceania* 62(4), June 1992; and *Anthropological Forum* 6(4), 1993), all of which are devoted to the politics of tradition and provide a valuable starting-point for those researching the Pacific debate.

<sup>5</sup>Anthropologists sometimes even make a clear distinction between their interests in the subject and the interests one might expect of political scientists. For example, the author of one article on the politics of tradition says in his opening sentence: 'In this paper I am not concerned with national political ideologies but with everyday practices and representations in a Papua New Guinean village' (Otto 1992: 264).



and in particular 1950s modernisation theory.<sup>6</sup> This product of post-war Western optimism held, in its extreme form, that there was a linear progression from traditional to modern societies, and if Third World countries wished to successfully develop (which it was assumed they naturally all would) they had to abandon their traditions, which were thought to stand in the way of modernisation, and replace them with 'modern' practices — in other words, they had to become more like the West. (In fact the terms 'modernisation' and 'Westernisation' were often used interchangeably; and the process was proposed for all spheres of life, from farming methods, to popular culture, to politics.) Modernisation theory has since fallen out of favour, partly because of 'disillusionment over the actual performance of new states in the post-independence period' (Higgott 1983: 18); and many people now shy away from referring to traditional societies as 'backward', for reasons of 'political correctness' or merely common courtesy. It may be that for political scientists any potentially negative discussion of tradition in other countries is too reminiscent of modernisation theory, and too open to charges of cultural insensitivity, making it a subject best avoided.<sup>7</sup>

Another possible explanation is more prosaic. When examining the topic of tradition, one is confronted with a large number of case studies which require some familiarity with the societies concerned; more general (abstract) discussion about the subject is relatively scarce. Western political scientists are likely to be less familiar with 'traditional' societies than anthropologists would be, and consequently may find them less appealing prospects for study than the societies and countries they know.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>On modernisation theory, see Higgott (1983: 15-21). As will be noted, its roots go back much further than the 1950s.

<sup>7</sup>Although, notes one writer, there are dangers in 'cultural sensitivity' as well:

Insistence on the cultural uniqueness of different peoples is beset by dangers. It has been used to legitimize an unjust international division of labour and to maintain the current international economic (dis)order. . . . The history of the Third World is full of examples that should inspire the greatest caution in those who call for the respect of specific cultures. This may explain the progressive circles' relative silence on the topic. (Verhelst 1990: 17.)

<sup>8</sup>One must also keep the history of different academic disciplines in mind. As John Gledhill points out,

Anthropology crystallized as a discipline within an institutional framework in which sociology, law, economics and political philosophy were already established fields. In the eyes of practitioners of these specialisms, anthropologists should deal with the exotic peripheries of European colonial expansion, the 'peoples without history' whose distinctive ways of life were shortly to be expunged by the relentless march of a truly universal Western modernity. (Gledhill 1994: 9-10.)

This 'us and them' attitude of political science towards anthropology has no doubt deterred some political scientists from studying 'traditional' societies. But it would be unfair to lay all the blame on political scientists, for anthropologists may be exceptional in being interested in other people's traditions; many people have only a passing interest in the details of life in other countries, and may even find them derisory (as one commentator has said, 'one nation's hallowed traditions are to another nation pretentious, gaudy nonsense' (Williams 1990: 113)).

This aside, it remains regrettable that more political scientists are not working specifically on the politics of tradition, because a broader approach, such as that seen in political philosophy and many other areas of political science, would seem to suit the subject well.<sup>9</sup> This is not to say that detailed case studies, even of the smallest social groups, cannot tell us anything about tradition; but I would suggest that it is as difficult to extrapolate broad truths about tradition in Pacific politics from the experience of one village as it would be to say something about the Australian national character by studying the town of Tumberumba.<sup>10</sup>

How, then, should political scientists approach the issue? The problem may at first appear a daunting one, which may be a result of the definition we assume applies to tradition. I would suggest that a generally-accepted 'everyday definition of tradition' is 'those beliefs and practices which have been handed down from generation to generation', a definition which implies that traditions have remained unchanged for as long as can be remembered or for as long as is worth remembering.<sup>11</sup> In the Pacific context, to speak of something as 'a tradition' further implies that it derives from pre-colonial (or pre-European-contact) beliefs or practices. The umbrella terms 'tradition'

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<sup>9</sup>Some have made attempts to alert political scientists to the importance of tradition. One relatively early voice was McFerson (1979), writing from a Fiji perspective, who noted the potential utility of 'racial tradition' in comparative politics for revitalising the study of racial politics, which had previously focussed on 'racial-physical' characteristics:

The spectrum of possible positions on the role of race in comparative political analysis can be simplified in the following three statements: (i) "Race alone matters"; (ii) "Race matters"; (iii) "Race doesn't matter". Many modernization and plural society theorists, having demonstrated that it is not true that "race alone matters", then proceed as if they had thereby established that race doesn't matter at all — a clear *non sequiter*. (*Ibid.*: 478.)

In noting the value of studying different traditions to determine whether 'race matters', McFerson 'sought to develop a preliminary theoretical framework for the analysis of race relations on a cross-national and comparative basis' (*ibid.*: 491) — a somewhat different project than the examination of the impact of tradition within particular cultural groups. And in her 'notes toward a theoretical framework' she did not provide the theory of tradition which, as will be discussed here later, is wanted.

<sup>10</sup>Worth noting here are the opinions of anthropologists Clifford Geertz and George Marcus:

The notion that one can find the essence of national societies, civilizations, great religions, or whatever summed up and simplified in so-called 'typical' small towns and villages is palpable nonsense. What one finds in small towns and villages is (alas) small-town and village life. If localized, microscopic studies were really dependent for their greater relevance upon such a premise — that they captured the great world in the little — they wouldn't have any relevance. (Geertz 1973: 22.)

It was clear to me [from three months of fieldwork on a Tongan estate] that Tongan villages were not microcosms; they were not parts replicating a holistic pattern or model of Tongan society and culture. (Marcus 1979: 137.)

<sup>11</sup>That this is not just a Western conception of tradition or custom is evidenced by Margaret Jolly's quotation (1982: 338) of the words of a Vanuatu village leader: 'Our *kastom* has been here, like a banyan tree, since the world broke open. It was here at the start.' See also Narokobi (1989: 59-60).

and 'traditional' collect these individual traditions into a single whole, a unique 'belief-system' or 'way of doing things' which has the weight of history and experience behind it.

Such a definition would certainly cause one to question the logic behind my previous example of 'traditional CDs'. It might also cause political scientists to wonder whether tradition and politics are difficult or maybe even *impossible* subjects to reconcile; whether, like oil and water, tradition and politics simply do not mix. For if tradition — that is, the body of traditions — is supposed to be unchanging, where does it fit into politics, which is all about change? If we see a society attempting to manage pressures for change, what possible advantage can be gained by some of its members by arguing for an unchanging tradition? The questions cry out for a thorough examination of the concepts involved. Most of this chapter will examine the concept of tradition; but first I will clarify what I mean by 'politics'.

### The Concept of Politics

'Politics' is often defined in terms of power relationships. Harold Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan, for example, defined the discipline of political science as the 'the study of the shaping and sharing of power' (Lasswell and Kaplan 1950: xiv). Robert A. Dahl extended the term by defining a political system as 'any persistent pattern of human relationships that involves, to a significant extent, control, influence, power, or authority' (Dahl 1984: 9-10). If we focus on power when discussing politics, then traditional authority as we see it occurring in the Pacific would seem to fit neatly into the realm of politics, and questions of their incompatibility would disappear. Traditional hierarchies and chiefly authority are methods of locating power which one might argue are as valid as Western methods of elections and appointments made on the basis of merit. In fact, whether they are or not should be one of the main questions of the 'politics of tradition' debate.

The problem faced by Western political scientists in particular in discussing the validity of traditional methods of locating power in the Pacific is the difficulty in avoiding an apparently paternalistic stance. We (that is, Western political scientists) might start by examining a country like Fiji or Tonga, and questioning what we see as 'imbalances' caused by the presence of traditional elements in the political arena. Chiefs and nobles may appear to us to have too much power relative to their position in society, because we tend to play down their traditional status, with which we foreigners are relatively unfamiliar, and focus instead on, for example, their numbers in the total population: thirty-three nobles out of one hundred thousand Tongans, clearly (to us) a minute and unrepresentative sample, elect a third of the Tongan parliament. That fails to meet Western egalitarian standards, which leaves us with two options: we question our own

standards; or we start to search for possible reasons why these traditional authorities should not be as involved as they are in politics.

Unfortunately for those opting for the latter path, if our definitions of 'politics' revolve only around the concept of power then traditional authority and politics would seem to mix very well. In the Pacific these traditional figures are regarded by many, if not all, as figures of authority and power. Therefore there seems to be no avoiding their role in politics. One might even conclude that it would be pointless to exclude them from politics — or more accurately, to exclude them from structures of government, because there is no way of excluding power figures from politics. To exclude traditional authority from a role in government may merely create two spheres of politics, with the governmental sphere struggling to hold its own against the traditional.<sup>12</sup> Certainly in Australia and other Western countries concern exists about problems which might arise when powerful people operate outside the realm of government; we even sometimes attempt to contain powerful forces within official political structures in order to monitor their behaviour.<sup>13</sup>

From this perspective, then, it could be argued that traditional authority figures should be included in some way in official political structures. This is obviously favourable for traditional authority figures, but what options does it leave their critics, especially Western ones? (I use the term 'critic' here in the oppositional sense.) I see three basic possibilities.

If all one is criticising is, first, that their authority is based on traditions which one considers to be irrational, one will not get very far. Tradition cannot be dismissed in this way, for reasons I will discuss later. Even if one did see tradition that way, however, a Westerner would not get far in criticising Pacific islanders in such terms; such criticism would seem insufferably paternalistic, as mentioned before.

It may be that one is critical, instead, of the actions of these traditional authorities, actions which may conflict with such values as human rights. In Fiji, the post-coup regime initially restricted freedom of movement and of speech, sometimes justifying those restrictions in traditional terms (the 1990 constitution, for example, limits the possibilities for public criticism of chiefs (Government of the Republic of Fiji 1990: sec. 13 (2)(d))). In a similar vein, some in the Pacific argue that concepts like 'democracy'

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<sup>12</sup>The Chief Justice of the Solomon Islands, John Muria, has spoken of similar difficulties judges there are facing in trying to reconcile customary law with official laws. (Seminar at the Australian National University, 17 September 1992.) On similar problems in Papua New Guinea (concerning which there is an extensive literature on 'law and custom'), see Aleck (1990); Kaputin (1989); Narokobi (1989); Sack (1987; 1990).

<sup>13</sup>A clear example in Australia is our system of industrial arbitration, which monitors both unions and employers.

are Western impositions which fail to take indigenous traditions into account and therefore should be rejected.<sup>14</sup>

Such differences in opinion require an examination of the positions of all sides, including one's own. After examining my own position on human rights and whether they can be regarded as universal (Ewins 1992a) I ended up convinced of the value of most of what we call 'human rights', if not with an unqualified belief in their universality.<sup>15</sup> So in asking whether one can criticise traditions which conflict with human rights, my answer would be 'yes'. The whole point of human rights is that if they are truly universal then they form the 'ground rules' for human behaviour which nobody may properly break; tradition is no excuse. It is important to make clear to anyone who objects that we are 'destroying their traditions' that we are not attacking the concept of tradition but rather defending human rights. Of course, in doing so, we will be forced to offer a convincing argument in favour of human rights, but it seems fair that if we are the ones asking others to change, we should be the ones arguing the case for change. We must also, however, recognise the limits of human rights: they offer little direction in methods of government or electoral systems. If a country's people clearly demonstrate support for the idea of rule by chiefs, then they are clearly exercising their right to self-determination, and that is that.<sup>16</sup>

Of course, measuring popular support for chiefs may prove a difficult task; which brings me to the third way to criticise the presence of traditional authority figures in politics, which is to argue that they are not actually the figures of power and authority they are claimed to be. That is, one might attempt to show that chiefs or nobles are no longer as important within their societies as they presumably once were. This was certainly a popular tactic among critics of the chiefs' role in the Fiji coup (Ewins 1992b: 31-34); it harks back to the idea of the 'people outpacing their chiefs'. But it brings its own difficulties. How does one measure the importance of chiefs? By the level of protest votes in elections? By conducting a popularity poll? By conducting interviews (my own method)?

Even if one finds signs that the importance of traditional authority figures is declining, that does not necessarily make them *unimportant*. All that one is able to say then is that maybe they should not play as major a role in politics, not that they should have no role. And who determines what this new lesser role should be? And, given that knowledge about their current status in society will necessarily be imprecise, how will

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<sup>14</sup>See Larmour (1994a).

<sup>15</sup>See also Berger (1977) and Renteln (1990).

<sup>16</sup>In Fiji, of course, the presence of other racial groups complicates the situation; as I have previously argued, 'a political system which can only satisfy Fijians is therefore unsatisfactory' (Ewins 1992b: 62). My aim here, however, is to examine the dynamics of tradition and politics within *Fijian* society (although because Fijians currently dominate Fiji politics, those dynamics affect everyone in Fiji).

that new role be determined in a way which will properly reflect their importance? It is fair to say that most Tongans respect their King and will not publicly dispute his words. Even if more people are emerging who publicly question the King's role, and even if many Tongans might be privately questioning his role, does that mean that he should be relegated to a back seat? Tupou IV remains someone whose wishes are for all intents and purposes followed without question. Even if this does not suggest total, absolute, unquestioned power, it still sounds like a fair description of someone who should be called a king.

It should be clear by now that criticising the role of traditional authority in politics is not as straightforward as it might seem. Certainly, if one is to have any claim to objectivity, if one finds no reasonable grounds for making such criticisms one should stop, or at least accept that it is not their traditional character that one is criticising, but something else. But that is not the end of the matter, for, as I will show, the concept of tradition is far more complex than its everyday definition allows, and this has important consequences for the study of the politics of tradition. Furthermore, to backtrack slightly, there is more to the concept of 'politics' than simple statements about power relationships would suggest.

While I certainly do not wish to deny the role of issues of power, there is another element to the concept of 'politics' which is worth exploring. Recall here Dahl's definition of a political system as 'any persistent pattern of human relationships that involves, to a significant extent, control, influence, power, or authority'. The key term here is 'influence', because it seems reasonable to say that control, power and authority correspond to varying degrees of influence (although control perhaps goes beyond influence, as I will discuss shortly). Every political player wishes to exert his or her influence over others, and although one becomes more influential if one controls others, wields power over others, or is an acknowledged authority, these conditions need not be met for one to influence others. More importantly, these conditions need not be met for one to *attempt* to influence others. Such attempts, I believe, are the major feature of all politics.

Political scientists, who tend to see every human relationship as being political in some way or another, will, naturally enough, consider a conservative, authoritarian society to be as political as a dynamic, egalitarian one. If one focuses on power relationships, one might consider the former as being in some way *more* political than the latter. In authoritarian societies, chains of command are clear-cut, and the question of who is 'in control' and 'wields power' has for the time being been solved, if not to everyone's satisfaction. If politics is all about power, then the central importance of strong figures of authority in such societies helps explain why those in less authoritarian societies may sometimes feel that people who lived in Brezhnev's Russia, Pinochet's Chile, or Hitler's Germany must have had little else on their minds than politics.

Such people may indeed have had politics on their minds, but they had few opportunities to put their ideas into practice, because their position within a strong power relationship gave them little hope of exerting influence, and usually made the attempt to do so downright dangerous. In a dictatorship the rulers have great influence over the ruled and many ways to exert it, and the ruled have little influence over their rulers. Indeed, dictatorial power seems to go beyond 'influence' into the realms of coercion. Coercion involves the use of apparently irresistible force, while to successfully influence someone is to leave them with the impression that they chose to acquiesce to you when other choices were available. If, as I have suggested, influence should be considered central to politics, at least as important as power relationships, then it follows that conservative and/or authoritarian societies are in one sense *less* 'political' than societies where more and better opportunities to influence others exist.

We can see the same effect at work in Western democracies. Periods of history when a comparatively large proportion of the population is involved in attempts to influence others are those we consider the most 'political', and our political systems guarantee such periods at least every few years in the form of elections. But even elections can be considered 'less political', 'more political' or, in politician-speak, 'the most important election since the War'.<sup>17</sup> In our opinions, too, of what makes a politician a politician, it is skill in influencing others, not coercing them, which is the important feature.<sup>18</sup> This can exist quite independently from institutional or coercive power; a person powerless to directly affect any change can still be a good politician; and, furthermore, possessing all the power in the world does not necessarily make one a good politician.

Other definitions of politics offered by political scientists allow for at least some of the focus to be shifted from issues of power towards issues of influence (which is not to say, of course, that issues of power are unimportant). Political scientists such as Miller (1962) and Ball (1993) examine questions of power only as part of a larger process; they consider politics to be foremost about the *resolution of conflict*:

Politics . . . is about disagreement or conflict; and political activity is that which is intended to bring about or resist change, in the face of possible resistance. (Miller 1962: 14.)

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<sup>17</sup> What we might call the 'least political' federal election in Australia of recent years, in 1984, followed its previous landslide Labor victory after a mere twenty months, giving no time for anything to arise which might undo that safe margin, and therefore putting little pressure on the government to make further significant attempts to influence voters it could safely assume would vote its way again.

<sup>18</sup>In making this point, I do not mean by 'politician' only those people in prominent elected positions of authority, or those prominent in political parties, but also those to which the term is informally applied. A particularly active and persuasive member of a university board, for example, might be referred to by his or her peers as a 'good politician'.

Political activity . . . involves disagreements and the reconciliation of those disagreements. . . . There is conflict and there is the need to resolve that conflict. (Ball 1993: 20-21.)

Disagreement is, naturally, a universal and inescapable result of the differences among people; we each have different needs and desires depending on our circumstances. In order to satisfy or maintain their own particular needs or desires, some will seek change while others will oppose it.

The definition I propose is that politics is the art (or process) of *negotiating change* — negotiation in the sense of persuasion, not navigation. Such a definition can be seen to parallel Miller's and Ball's. There cannot be conflict where there is no change or proposal for change. Furthermore, change — and therefore the potential for conflict — is ever-present, so there will always be a need for politics. For that reason I prefer the word 'negotiation' over 'resolution' in any general definition of the term, as the latter implies that an end to conflict can be reached whereas the former implies an ongoing process. (That is not to say that *specific* conflicts cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of all involved.)

One should not infer from this that conservatives who favour the status quo should not be considered political, because they are as involved as anyone in this process of negotiation: if everyone was in favour of a particular change there would be no conflict over it and no need for negotiation.<sup>19</sup>

This definition helps to explain why some societies or periods of history seem more or less political than others. When change is at a minimum, or when most people agree with the prevailing direction and pace of change, there is less need for negotiation and therefore less politics. It is when negotiation about change is at its most heated that we as political scientists or 'fans of politics' become interested: one need only compare the flood of articles about Fiji politics following the coup to the relative trickle before.<sup>20</sup>

Such a definition of politics may also initially appear to offer fresh reasons to believe that tradition in politics is a case of oil and water. Tradition is often seen as the antithesis of change. The whole idea of negotiating change would appear inimical to a worldview which sees tradition as an unchanging continuous heritage from the past and as the most important value of all. And, indeed, there might appear to be some tension between these two concepts, 'unchanging tradition' and politics, everywhere in the Pacific. Proponents of change may seek to play down the importance of tradition and remove it from the political sphere. (Political scientists are often proponents of change, which may explain the inclination of some to be wary of traditional authority.)

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<sup>19</sup>One could even say that conservatives do seek change, in that they seek to change the minds of those who favour change.

<sup>20</sup>One might consider a military coup to be an extreme form of 'negotiation' — as indeed it is. But it is still a form of negotiation, even when one side is strongly advantaged over the other.



Traditionalists may see politics, the negotiation of change, as a threat, and seek to curb it by forcing it to comply to their own rules — that is, by maintaining or increasing the role of traditional authority. Or they may go in another direction and deal with this threat by removing tradition from politics in order to maintain its purity. During Western Samoa's debate about the adoption of universal suffrage, the government argued that the role played by *matai* in Samoa's political system was adversely affecting their traditional role, and that moving to universal suffrage would remove this pressure on Samoan tradition (So'o 1993: 4).<sup>21</sup>

But this last example holds the clue to why the 'politics of tradition' is a much more complex business than one of change versus lack of change: it shows a people confronting the fact that their tradition is not standing still, but changing. To explain that process, one must examine the concept of tradition itself.

### The 'Invention of Tradition'

For some years historians and anthropologists have questioned the simplistic 'everyday' view of tradition. This questioning, in fact, has been at the heart of the debate on the politics of tradition in the Pacific as it has been conducted so far. A considerable body of literature has emerged on the subject of 'the invention of tradition'. Central to all of this work is the observation that many traditions (and hence much of tradition) in any one society had their beginnings not in the mists of long-forgotten eras but instead during recent history. Many examples have been given of traditions which originated in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. This seems at first glance to reduce the value of the label 'tradition'. How, it may be asked, can any practice be traditional, in the sense that it is linked to the distant past, if it can be shown to have been invented or significantly changed at some stage in the last one or two hundred years? Furthermore, why is it important to some in the Pacific that invented elements of systems of government and other aspects of the political process be seen as genuinely ancient?

The latter is a key question in any discussion of tradition in Pacific politics. For now it should suffice to observe that for many people (in the Pacific as elsewhere) the issue of invented traditions is unfamiliar, if not unknown, and that consequently questions about the invention of tradition do not occur to them. They may be more familiar with the everyday concept that anything labelled a 'tradition' is long-standing and not of recent origin.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>See also Lindstrom (1993: 509) on Vanuatu.

<sup>22</sup>For more discussion of this in the Fijian and Tongan context — including some necessary modification of this generalisation — see Chapter Three.

The concept of 'the invention of tradition' gained prominence upon the release of the edited volume of that name (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), although its discussions of changing tradition are anticipated in earlier works, such as those of Eisenstadt (1973; 1974a) and Shils (1981).<sup>23</sup> For example, in a collection edited by Eisenstadt (1974b), we see pieces dealing with 'the reactivation of tradition in a post-traditional society' (Zghal 1974), and statements such as this:

We may view tradition as the way society formulates and deals with the basic problems of human existence. . . . Tradition . . . has to be bound up with the ever-shifting present. Hence [its] irritating flexibility and fluidity. (Heesterman 1974: 97.)

While Heesterman is certainly right in calling that fluidity 'irritating' from the perspective of the theorist attempting to explain tradition, it is an essential aspect of the concept. If tradition were not fluid, we would be unable to continue using some individual traditions while discarding or altering others; we would have to either live exactly as we had always lived (in maintaining tradition) or continually change everything we do and think (in rejecting it). Now that the theoretical discussion of tradition has become well established, and the polarised model of tradition and modernisation<sup>24</sup> has long been open to question, an academic awareness of the fluidity of tradition is widespread. Practically everyone who writes on tradition these days opens their discussion, much as I have, with some sort of statement of its paradox, the conflict between the 'everyday' definition and this fluidity.

But the 'invention of tradition' debate has had somewhat different and more problematic emphases. The problem begins with the explanation of the term given by Hobsbawm:

'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. (Hobsbawm 1983: 1.)

That, as might already be clear, is a reasonable description of 'tradition' itself. The addition of the term 'invented' is somewhat redundant in a way that the term 'the invention of tradition' is not. The latter nicely draws one's attention to the process of invention which is an inevitable part of all fluid tradition, but the former singles out

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<sup>23</sup>See also Bendix (1970: 250-314), and an early and important contribution by a Tongan:

[Those] who, today, advocate the preservation of traditional culture at all cost fail to realize . . . that you can only preserve that which is dead. You cannot preserve a living culture, for it is ever changing, ever developing, shedding old skins as new ones burst into life. . . . Once innovations become established, and the results accepted, they then become tradition — a part of the culture. (Latukeyu 1972: 4.)

<sup>24</sup>Seen in such works as Lerner's *The Passing of Traditional Society* (1958) (see discussion in Bendix (1970: 270-273)).

'invented tradition' in a way which suggests that there is some other kind which is somehow more 'real' or 'authentic'.<sup>25</sup> That distinction has opened up Pandora's box where the Pacific debate is concerned, and at the same time obscured some more subtle questions — precisely those of interest to political scientists.

Much of *The Invention of Tradition* is given to historical accounts of processes of invention. Perhaps its most often-quoted chapter is Hugh Trevor-Roper's on the highland tradition of Scotland, which leaves most readers surprised to learn that the kilt is not a direct link with Picts and Celts of old, but was invented in around 1730 by an English Quaker, Thomas Rawlinson, for the workers at his charcoal furnace at Invergarry, as a more convenient form of dress than the swathes of plaid they wore (Trevor-Roper 1983: 21-22). It was later adopted by lowlanders wanting to encourage national pride, and has never gone away.

Details such as these, while certainly interesting, seem to have no great implications for today's politics (though kilts, one might note, are a Scottish nationalist symbol). Rather more interesting in its implications is Terence Ranger's chapter on the invention of tradition in colonial Africa, where he examines, for example, how 'British administrators set about inventing African traditions for Africans' (Ranger 1983: 212).<sup>26</sup> The question of the imposition of traditions by one group upon another (and indeed, the question of whether this was a matter of imposition) seems far more politically significant than a simple awareness that traditions change (though that too, as I argue in Chapter Eight, has its importance). It raises questions about legitimacy which are at the heart of political science, and may be at the root of many contemporary problems.

Ranger's approach was prefigured by a landmark work on Fiji, one widely cited in the Pacific context in recent years: Peter France's *The Charter of the Land* (1969).<sup>27</sup> France examined how Fijian tradition had been amended by the colony's early governors, particularly its first, Sir Arthur Gordon, who professed a wish to preserve Fijian traditions and Fijian ownership of land (France 1969: 102-106).<sup>28</sup> Gordon convened an annual 'Council of Chiefs', a feature of Fiji politics to this day, despite the fact that 'the high chiefs rarely met in council until the imported institutions of government required

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<sup>25</sup>It has led one writer to distinguish, for example, between invented tradition and 'older, "purer," more traditional tradition' (Burke 1990: 276). But what, apart from a fairly tautological tautology, is 'more traditional tradition'?

<sup>26</sup>See also Migdal (1988: ch. 3):

For the Limba chiefs of northern Sierra Leone, for example, the traditional institution of chiefship had very little traditional about it. . . . Only with the dangling of British resources did the informally defined rulers of the earlier period become the chiefs of the protectorate. (*Ibid.*: 109.)

<sup>27</sup>See also, from the same period, Clammer (1973), and, on somewhat tangential but related matters, Belshaw (1965).

<sup>28</sup>See also France (1968); Knaplund (1958).

them to do so' (France 1969: 109). When they met as the Council of Chiefs, Gordon had great difficulty getting them to reach agreement on the nature of 'Fijian customary law' —

the chiefs seem to have been not at all sure of the 'immemorial traditions' which governed the distribution and exercise of land rights in Fiji (*ibid.*: 110)

— while one chief, 'when asked to explain the custom of his tribe in the matter of chiefly succession, replied that the custom was to fight about it' (*ibid.*: xiv).

Confusion over matters of land was only resolved, observes Henry Rutz (1987: 537-538), when Gordon threatened that unless a decision was made Fijians' land would be given to Europeans. The chiefs suddenly reached agreement, and so from a new Council of Chiefs acting under duress came the tradition of the *mataqali* as the universal Fijian land-owning unit.<sup>29</sup>

Fijian tradition was also subject to what Martha Kaplan (1989b) has termed 'the invention of disorder'. Some genuinely local practices were actively suppressed by the new colonial masters. Fijian practices and institutions 'had to show social utility in relation to colonial goals and purposes' to qualify as 'traditional' in British eyes; those that did not were categorised as superstitious, heathen, or criminal (*ibid.*: 359). In the extraordinary example of *luve ni wai* rituals (rituals revolving around the worship of water spirits which the British considered subversive) these newly-proclaimed 'disorderly' practices were also claimed to be unacceptable to Fijians themselves (*ibid.*: 352). The suppression of *luve ni wai* was therefore not merely the suppression of a tradition, but the invention of a negative tradition.

The search by historians for 'invented traditions' in the sense of colonial impositions has been a fruitful one in the case of Fiji (and other Pacific countries), and the results are powerfully suggestive that something of importance to contemporary politics is at stake. But the Pacific debate has also picked up the other process flagged in *The Invention of Tradition*, that of 'the invention of tradition' by a people for themselves. Roger Keesing, in his key article 'Creating the past: custom and identity in the contemporary Pacific' (Keesing 1989), questioned aspects of that process. In 'what purports to be [the] study and revival of cultural traditions', said Keesing, Pacific peoples, particularly Fourth World minorities, 'idealize and mythicize the cultural past as a Golden Age' and 'edit out human sacrifice, chiefly oppression, bloody wars [and] patriarchy' (Keesing 1991: 169). This process of idealising and editing, said Keesing, is prompted by *Western* values of right and wrong, and draws on 'Western-derived countercultural critiques'. Keesing's criticism of this process of ideology-construction — perhaps his main one — was that 'such ideologies become self-delusory if they are

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<sup>29</sup>For more on early colonial attitudes toward Fijian tradition, see Kaplan (1989a); N. Thomas (1990b).

not interspersed with visions of 'real' pasts that cast into relief not simply their idealized virtues, but their cracks of contradictions' (Keesing 1989: 36).

Keesing's article drew a rash of criticism sometimes approaching vituperation. Haunani-Kay Trask railed that 'among Hawaiians, people like Keesing are described as *maha'oi haole*, that is, rude, intrusive white people who go where they do not belong' (Trask 1991: 160), while the rather less heated Jocelyn Linnekin criticised his remarks about 'spurious pasts and false histories' (Linnekin 1991b: 175), pointing out that no one can hope to know 'the' true history of a people. The response was reminiscent of that which greeted Allan Hanson, who had written a similar article in which he dared to suggest that anthropologists had a hand in the invention of contemporary Maori traditions (Hanson 1989). Hanson's article was relayed to the New Zealand popular press, giving him much more to worry about than academic criticism; it drew a storm of protest. One Maori critic 'characterized Hanson's discourse as hegemonic and presumptuous' (Lamb 1990: 667).<sup>30</sup> In an apologetic spirit, Hanson observed:

As effective as it may be as a rhetorical device, the response to my essay in New Zealand has led me to the conclusion that *invention* when applied to culture and tradition is a systematically misleading expression that should not be perpetuated. (Hanson 1991: 450.)

While I am tempted to agree (if only out of consideration for academics' personal safety), I believe that to categorically reject the term 'invention of tradition' (as opposed to 'invented tradition') would be to obscure an important aspect of tradition-as-process. Linnekin has suggested that we reject the word 'invention' and use a 'more neutral or less inflammatory word, such as "construction"' (Jolly and Thomas 1992: 243; Linnekin 1992), but that, I suggest, merely sidesteps the issue. We might, however, avoid difficulties simply by eliminating all qualifiers and talking of tradition, full stop. No tradition was not invented, constructed, or whatever, by somebody.<sup>31</sup>

Their mere use of the word 'invention', however, cannot explain away all of Keesing's and Hanson's difficulties; much of the hostility they encountered stemmed

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<sup>30</sup>For a discussion of the 'politicisation and rationalisation' of Maori tradition, see Sissons (1993).

<sup>31</sup>Linnekin (writing with Richard Handler) anticipated many of these issues in an earlier article containing a discussion of the work of Shils:

[Shils] differentiates real and "fictitious" traditionality. . . . As in the work of prior theorists, tradition in Shils's framework has the qualities of givenness and boundedness. In spite of Shils's insistence that tradition continually changes, there is no doubt that in his formulation a real, essential tradition exists apart from interpretations of that tradition. . . . We suggest that there is no essential, bounded tradition; tradition is a model of the past and is inseparable from the interpretation of tradition in the present. (Handler and Linnekin 1984: 276.)

from objections to the concept behind that word — that somehow the tradition that exists now is 'inauthentic'.<sup>32</sup> As Nicholas Thomas has said:

Assumptions have clearly become more sophisticated. . . . It is now emphasized that created identities are not somehow contrived and insincere. (N. Thomas 1992b: 213.)

It is nonsense to talk of 'inauthentic' traditions, some have argued, none more comprehensively than Margaret Jolly. She wishes to see an exorcism of these 'spectres of inauthenticity':

First because a notion of true tradition entails a way of seeing Pacific cultures as unitary essences; second because it concords with a view of Pacific peoples as peoples without history before the West brought "social change," progress, and economic development; and third because it equates unself-consciousness with authenticity (and by implication self-consciousness with inauthenticity). (Jolly 1992b: 49.)

These are certainly all important spectres deserving of exorcism, but the last point deserves closer attention. What is going on in the debate (though not perhaps with sufficient clarity, or else these problems would not have arisen), is not an equation of self-consciousness with inauthenticity but questioning about whether in *some* cases self-consciousness implies inauthenticity. The problem is exacerbated by an inadequate distinction between aspects of the concept of tradition. It certainly is nonsensical to talk of 'inauthentic' tradition, I agree — but only when we are talking about *present* traditions. While present traditions are fluid, the traditions which existed in the *past* are a matter of historical record. Keesing's remarks about 'spurious pasts' *do* have relevance if indigenous peoples are idealising a *history* they know is spurious, and while one may not be able to find 'the' truth about history (or as Jolly says, 'I doubt that scholars any

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<sup>32</sup>In a 1981 discussion of anthropology from a historian's perspective, Bernard Cohn pointed out that questions of authenticity were central to the discipline:

Anthropologists cling to the idea that a people must have an "authentic" culture and their verification of this authenticity comes from studying the natives' point of view. This verification is the counterpart of the positivist historians' conviction that the study of documents is the means by which a true or real account of what "actually happened" can be constructed. (Cohn 1981: 240-241.)

As he also points out, this has long led anthropologists to distinguish between the 'authentic' and the 'invented':

Why did Sahlins report that, when the Moalans [in 1950s Fiji] told him that they had originally come from Tanganyika, it was "an erroneous piece of history" and the "product of recent manufacture"? . . . Anthropologists have no trouble reporting as authentic, i.e., very real to the people being studied, all sorts of "improbable and erroneous ideas" held by peoples everywhere. For the anthropologist authenticity, like chronology for the historian, is something natural — it has always been, therefore it has no history. Hence when the anthropologist is confronted, as was Sahlins, with something he knows was introduced from "outside," this is seen as an invention of particular persons whose intentions are knowable and can be dismissed as not being true or authentic in a particular native culture. (*Ibid.*: 240.)

more than Pacific peoples can tell "real pasts" (*ibid.*: 63)), one is on much firmer ground talking about what is *not* the truth. If historians can find clear evidence of the time, place, or even person, that a particular tradition stems from, they can say with some safety that whatever present idealisations of that tradition as 'ancient' may signify, they do *not* signify an accurate statement of historical fact.

Keesing was essentially asking whether or not it is important that such conscious misrepresentation is occurring today; what I call the 'tradition as smokescreen' question. This prompts the question, 'is it occurring?' — or more precisely, is the past being misrepresented, is it being *consciously* misrepresented, and if so, why? These are *all* important questions for the political scientist.<sup>33</sup>

As Jolly says, 'Western scholars might look more carefully and comparatively at the encoding of past-present relations in the variety of symbolic constitutions of tradition' (Jolly 1992b: 63). She recommends we stop using the language of inauthenticity, as it dichotomises tradition into the genuine and the spurious. I agree that we should exorcise that unhelpful dichotomy; a living tradition is either and neither (and not always what any one individual thinks it is). But I disagree that we should abandon all talk of inauthenticity. We should merely be more precise: contemporary representations of past tradition may be inauthentic; if so, why? These questions, too, may be controversial, and may draw the same attacks from infuriated islanders. But their fury, I suggest, may then be more a case of shooting the messenger than refuting the message. People do not like being told that much of what they 'know' may be wrong. That does not mean that it is unimportant to tell them. One might argue, for example, that the planned revival of 'village' law in Fiji may reflect a mid-twentieth-century tradition, but that there is no such tradition today, and that there was no such tradition in pre-colonial times;<sup>34</sup> such points may be of great importance in the political debate in Fiji over those regulations.

I will offer one last example, for now, of how 'spurious pasts' and their conscious misuse can have serious consequences. It concerns not the people of the Pacific Ocean, but some of the creatures that swim in it: whales. The cessation of whaling has for two decades been a major item on the agenda of the international environmental movement, and their main obstacle has been Japan. As one writer on the 'whale war' has observed, 'in hard practical terms, without the Japanese whale meat market, whaling would cease worldwide overnight' (Day 1992: 143). As he continues,

Japan makes much play of its ancient tradition of whaling. However, historic records reveal that from the seventeenth until the twentieth century the average annual catch was less than 20 whales. (*Ibid.*: 140.)

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<sup>33</sup>For more on the importance of such questions, see S. Lawson (forthcoming-a), especially the first chapter.

<sup>34</sup>For example, the Fijian view of pregnant women implicit in those regulations is quite different from that which existed last century (Vicki Luker, personal communication).

Only in 1934 did Japan acquire a modern whaling fleet, the sole purpose of which 'was to supply foreign currency for the army at war in Manchuria' through the sale of whale oil to Europe, as 'it was forbidden to be imported into Japan' (*ibid.*: 141). And only in the straightened times immediately after the Second World War did the consumption of whale meat develop in urban Japan, 'although at no time did whale meat exceed 2 per cent of the animal protein in the Japanese diet' (*ibid.*). The industry would have died out in the 1960s had the government not, in order to keep political factional interests on-side, begun subsidising it:

The government bought the majority of the meat at artificially high prices for government food programmes. The meat was fed to groups who had no choice in their food: convicts, soldiers and schoolchildren. (*ibid.*: 142.)

In doing so they gave the industry time to develop a 'high-quality exclusive restaurant market'. They also effectively established a new tradition of whaling and whale-eating in Japan, a tradition which for most Japanese only 'extends back as far as 1950' (*ibid.*: 139).

In a case such as this, where an 'ancient tradition' is given in defence of the indefensible, the exposure of 'spurious pasts' is essential. The same should be true in every such case of inappropriate rationalisation.<sup>35</sup>

The most prominent among the few political scientists to have engaged in the 'politics of tradition in the Pacific' debate so far is Stephanie Lawson. In *Tradition Versus Democracy in the South Pacific: Fiji, Tonga, and Western Samoa* (S. Lawson forthcoming-a),<sup>36</sup> she examines the concept of tradition in detail, making some similar points to those I have made above. A particularly significant contribution has been her highlighting of the importance of the question of 'traditional inauthenticity' to the subject of political legitimacy:

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<sup>35</sup>A recent newspaper report shows that even this example is specifically relevant in the Tongan context:

Tongans used to kill small numbers of whales from tiny open canoes until 1979, when it was stopped by royal decree. Some Tongans oppose the ban, and backed by Japanese interest groups want to re-open the issue. The Japanese . . . have recently been shut out of the Antarctic whaling grounds by the creation of the Southern Ocean Whaling Sanctuary. Tonga lies outside that area, and persuading this tiny country to start whaling again would be a considerable coup for Japan. For the moment the whales remain under royal protection in Tonga. The king has set his face firmly against lifting the ban, saying he would far rather Tonga became the Pacific's best location for whale-watchers. (*The Times*, 31 October 1994, Reuters Newsbriefs Article Ref. 000542687365.)

<sup>36</sup>Quoted here with her permission. See also articles which overlap in content with this book (S. Lawson 1990a; 1993d; 1994; forthcoming-b), as well as her previous book (S. Lawson 1991a).



Idealizations of pre-colonial or pre-contact pasts . . . must also be recognized as devices by which some political leaders can legitimate their own authority while at the same time suppressing political opposition. . . . We can see that it is not so much a matter of bringing 'the past into the present' — that is, of resurrecting past practices and making them meaningful in the contemporary sphere — as it is a case of projecting some current state of affairs back into the past and thereby seeking to legitimate it by invoking the traditionalist refrain 'it has been this way since time immemorial'. (S. Lawson forthcoming-a: ch. 1.)<sup>37</sup>

I have made similar points myself in the past, though I would word them more subtly today (as one might be able to tell, my position on the use of the word 'tradition' — including when one should put it in inverted commas — has changed):

In the political context . . . the task of exposing inauthenticity remains a valuable one. In political systems, problems arise when invented 'traditional' political institutions — such as the Great Council of Chiefs, or the pre-eminence of Eastern chiefs over all Fiji — are portrayed as authentic, because *they gain a large measure of their legitimacy from that false authenticity. . . .* This false authenticity can actually afford these institutions much protection from attack, particularly in a community, such as the indigenous Fijian community, which values tradition highly. In effect, these inauthentic traditions are conferred an unfair advantage over alternative arrangements, and 'traditional' figures, such as chiefs, gain a similarly unfair advantage over their commoner rivals. (Ewins 1992b: 61.)

This search for whether or not conscious misrepresentation (or indeed any misrepresentation) of the past is occurring remains an important one. But I now feel that I overstated its relative importance. The concept of tradition has greater significance to political scientists in other ways. To demonstrate that, I must turn to the most difficult task of all: establishing a theory of tradition.

### The Evolution of Tradition

It is possible to detect a sense of superiority in some Western discussion of 'traditional' societies — a sense which is reflected in the uncritical use (such as my own up to this point) of the term 'Western'. Much has been written on the intellectual problems created by the dichotomising of East and West,<sup>38</sup> and similar categorisation difficulties arise from the term 'Third World'. I cannot argue that matter here, only apologise for my own use of 'the West' as a form of convenient shorthand for 'Australasia, North America and Western Europe'. But of relevance here are the

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<sup>37</sup>See also Standish (1992: 44-45). Note, too, Lawson's mention of *traditionalism*, the ideological stance which promotes those aspects of tradition valued by its adherents. Lawson pays particular attention to making this distinction in order to avoid giving 'the impression that tradition *per se* is the major target' (forthcoming-a: ch. 1). I have chosen different ways to make similar distinctions in this thesis.

<sup>38</sup>The most celebrated discussion of this dichotomisation is Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978); see also N. Thomas (1994: 23) on how this dichotomy has encouraged a perception of tradition as being fixed and unchanging over millenia.

implications of the 'West/Third World' dichotomy for discussions of tradition. Often, says H. T. Wilson (1984: 100), that dichotomy is overlaid upon another, the dichotomy between innovation and tradition. As Lawson has pointed out, 'a significant change in the perception of "tradition"' arose out of the influential work of sociologist Max Weber:

The manner in which Weber contrasted traditional authority with that derived from legal-rational sources relegated it to the realm of the intrinsically 'irrational' and placed it in direct opposition to ideas about 'modernization'. (S. Lawson forthcoming-a: ch. 1.)<sup>39</sup>

Weber, says Wilson, 'effectively stupefies tradition and daily life by treating them as borderline manifestations of rational behavior *at best*' (Wilson 1984: 99-100).<sup>40</sup>

The consequence has been that we in the West sometimes imagine we 'know better' than those who follow traditions 'blindly', because we reflect upon, analyse, and think rationally about our actions. In some Westerners this belief then reinforces (and, perhaps, is reinforced by) unspoken prejudices towards other peoples (usually tribal, Third World, 'underdeveloped' peoples).

But as many who have examined the concept in any detail point out, such a dichotomy between 'rational' West and 'traditional' Third World is unjustified, in that the people of the West (whatever that may be) are as traditional as people anywhere else; they merely have different traditions. Perhaps the best implicit statement of this view could be said to be Edward Shils's entire book, *Tradition* (which also contains explicit statements of it; see, for example, 1981: 10): Shils bases his discussion almost entirely on Western examples. Lawson also wishes to see this point acknowledged in the Pacific context; 'the idea of tradition', she says, 'is, in fact, an important part of the West's classical heritage of democratic thought' (S. Lawson forthcoming-a: ch. 1). Others still feel that such views are problematic:

It seems difficult to sustain these intellectual acrobatics which try — desperately — to reconcile the irreconcilable in going to the point of

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<sup>39</sup>As noted, these ideas were at the heart of modernisation theory in political science, for which Weber and similar-minded sociologists provided initial inspiration (Higgott 1983: 16).

<sup>40</sup>Social theorists who distinguished between the traditional and the modern reinforced this when implying that modern societies had 'outgrown' tradition:

When referring to traditional society they usually meant to include everything that was thrown into the graveyard of social history since the coming of the industrial age: impermeability of social strata because of inherited social status; . . . authoritarian vs democratic system of politics; . . . static vs dynamic conception of societal development. (Randall and Strasser 1981: 36-37.)

Such a dichotomy could be seen in the political science of, for example, Kenneth Minogue, who said (when discussing African chiefs, Middle Eastern sheiks and Malay sultans) that 'in each case, we find a customary world in which social relationships remain static, and the political structure is cemented by an established priesthood' (Minogue 1967: 84). He found Japan noteworthy in that it achieved rapid and successful modernisation 'entirely within a traditional framework' (*Ibid.*: 86).

pretending that traditional societies, contrary to what we had believed, were completely open, or that . . . contemporary society is no less traditional than others, insofar as they practise tradition and innovation.<sup>41</sup>

In siding with the intellectual acrobats, I only wish to point out that the alacrity with which many 'traditional' people (such as Fijians and Tongans) have taken to 'modern' goods and lifestyles (cars and televisions, paid employment and school education) suggests no great difference between 'them and us' in the *will* to embrace innovations which appeal to them, only in the means or opportunities to do so.

One might suggest, then, that the 'tradition versus modernity' dichotomy with its connotation of an inferior position (tradition) which can over time be changed to a superior one (modernity) has caused a great deal of confusion in our everyday thinking about tradition. This confusion might increase when we consider the 'common sense' position which exalts the 'tried and true' and, one therefore assumes, tradition; there would seem to be common sense, one might say, in following a thoroughly-tested path which has been found adequate by previous generations.<sup>42</sup> This 'common sense' explanation may also explain the certain degree of comfort that people gain from traditions, that is, from continuing to do things as they have been done for many generations. In the Pacific, a similar explanation may also apply to the emphasis given to the *indigenous* nature of local traditions; traditions are seen to come from pre-colonial ancestors rather than from colonial outsiders, and hence are seen as being more in harmony with the local people, having been developed under and for local conditions.<sup>43</sup>

The objection to such an explanation is that it is not very intellectually rigorous, or very useful, to talk about 'common-sense'. We need a more analytical theory of tradition.

Unfortunately, as Pascal Boyer describes in his important work *Tradition as Truth and Communication: A Cognitive Description of Traditional Discourse*, such theories are rather scarce. Boyer claims that 'there is no such thing as a *theory* of tradition in social anthropology' (Boyer 1990: vii). By that he means that there is no theory to explain why

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<sup>41</sup>My thanks to Rod Ewins for translating the original from the French, which reads:

Il paraît difficile de suivre les acrobaties intellectuelles qui essaient — désespérément — de concilier l'inconciliable en allant jusqu'à prétendre que les sociétés traditionnelles, contrairement à ce que l'on croyait, étaient complètement ouvertes, ou que . . . les sociétés contemporaines ne sont pas moins traditionnelles que les autres, en ce sens qu'elles pratiquent la tradition et la novation. (Poirier 1988: 70.)

<sup>42</sup>That people value the 'tried and true' is obvious when one considers the extraordinary success of uniform and predictable international fast-food chains, success which would otherwise have been impossible. As one commentator has said, fast-food chains 'supply in large measure modern man's apparent need to obliterate the difference between "this place" and "that," and to make as irrelevant as possible the distinction between "now" and "then"' (Visser 1989: 118).

<sup>43</sup>Roger Keesing wrote a great deal on the impact of colonialism, and on tradition as a defence against colonial intrusion. See Keesing (1982b; 1982a; 1992; 1994).

people repeat those kinds of behaviour they call 'traditional', which he sees as 'the main question a theory of tradition should address' (*ibid.*: 120). Confusion, he argues, stems from the anthropological use of the word 'traditional' to describe not only the *events* involved but 'the organisation of people's ideas, the social organisation of the place, people's emotional involvement in the ritual, and so on' (*ibid.*: 1); he confines himself to a consideration of actual events. (Boyer also limits his discussion on questions of stability and change in tradition so that he may focus instead on the cognitive process involved in the repetition of traditions (*ibid.*: 8).) He questions what he calls the 'common' (anthropological) conception of tradition in which 'the question of repetition is almost always coupled with another one, which concerns the "cohesiveness" of the institutions considered, i.e., what keeps them together' (*ibid.*: 3), and in which that cohesiveness is said to be supplied by 'underlying intellectual objects' such as 'world-views'. The 'common assumptions' which he challenges, then, are —

- (i) that traditions are conserved because people want to transmit them unchanged, and (ii) that they are held together by some underlying ideas which constitute a general description of the world (*ibid.*: 5)

— which leads, he observes, to such tautology as 'Skorupski . . . writing that a traditional believer sticks to his creed "precisely because he is traditionalistic"' (*ibid.*: 4).

I agree on both counts with Boyer's identification of the problems with such assumptions. But whereas Boyer limits his discussion in a way which avoids engagement with the question of worldviews, I will be discussing tradition's implications for those in later chapters. I do so, however, along Boyer's lines: not by assuming that Fijians' and Tongans' worldview is 'traditionalism' (and that that explains why they follow traditions), but instead by considering how changes in traditions are affecting their worldviews. On that count, then, I find Boyer somewhat disappointing when he says 'such intellectual objects may well exist, but they are not of any descriptive or explanatory value in the interpretation of traditional interaction' (*ibid.*: 120); I believe they are of value when considering tradition's significance for politics.

Boyer concludes his book with a challenge to others, an outline of what he feels has not been done and should be:

An empirically significant theory of tradition should explain why some specific situations acquire a special psychological salience, how they are interpreted in different ways by the different participants, and how these different processes of memorisation contribute to the reiteration or repetition of the interaction considered. . . . I have not given such a complete theory. I have tried to give it some foundation, however, by laying stress on the cognitive processes involved in the representation of traditional contexts. (*Ibid.*: 120.)

Boyer's is a challenge I will attempt to meet here in the briefest of sketches (though I deal with a somewhat broader concept of tradition than that of 'repeated event' to which he limits himself); I expand that sketch in subsequent chapters. I take his book and that

other seminal text of the genre of 'tradition as concept', Shils's *Tradition*, as starting points for my ideas, as well as the literature outlined in the preceding section of this chapter, and the discussions with interviewees elaborated in following chapters.<sup>44</sup> But a large proportion of those ideas stems from another place entirely, and so must be considered relatively hypothetical — though I believe, and hope to show through empirical evidence hereafter, that these hypotheses are supported by observation. These ideas derive not from sociology, anthropology, or some other social science, but from biology — specifically, from the theories of Nobel Prize winner Gerald Edelman (1987; 1992).

Edelman is a neuroscientist: he is concerned with the human brain, the mind, and the way we learn. To explain how the formless young human brain masters speech, vision, and a wide range of other behaviours, Edelman has created the 'theory of neuronal group selection', or neural Darwinism. It is a powerfully persuasive theory which promises to revolutionise the study of the mind, and which casts new light on the concept of 'tradition'.<sup>45</sup> Edelman's theory of neuronal group selection to explain the fact that humans learn directly parallels Darwin's theory of natural selection to explain the fact that species evolve. I will attempt to portray it as simply as possible. First, however, it is necessary to make some points about Darwinian evolution.

In the late nineteenth century, Darwin's theory of natural selection was misinterpreted by many (including, it seems, by Darwin himself)<sup>46</sup> as a process of improvement implying an evolutionary *progression*, from inferior to superior, with human beings the superior end-result of that progression.<sup>47</sup> This misconception was then taken up by social theorists, who applied it to human society and labelled the result Social Darwinism, the most horrific application of which was Nazi Germany's programme of genocide (Kaye 1986; Koch 1984). The theory was summed up by its leading intellectual exponent, Herbert Spencer, in the phrase he used to describe biological

<sup>44</sup>Shils's ideas have contributed much to my (and many other people's) understanding of tradition; his comprehensive book deals with many of the matters I outline later. The novelty of my own theory comes, as will be seen, from amalgamating Shils' and other social scientists' ideas with scientific theories which give those ideas an even stronger foundation.

<sup>45</sup>Here I believe I am directing my thoughts in the direction Boyer believes is warranted and wanted: 'Theories of tradition necessarily imply some claims about mental representations and processes. . . . It is difficult to put forward a plausible theory of tradition without having some clear psychological assumptions' (Boyer 1990: 108) — though my own ideas are derived from the discipline of biology, not psychology.

<sup>46</sup>See Greene (1981: 128-157). As he points out, debate over this point has been heated, but he convincingly argues his case with the support of many passages from Darwin's writings. However, as he quotes a colleague, Ernst Mayr, as saying, 'what evolutionary biologists now call Darwinism is not identical with Darwin's beliefs' (*ibid.*: 154).

<sup>47</sup>As Richard Dawkins has said, there was a 'Victorian idea of the inexorability of progress, each generation better, finer, and braver than its parents', but 'the reality in nature is nothing like that' (Dawkins 1988: 181). My own understanding of evolution is largely based on a reading of his excellent overview of neo-Darwinist thinking.

evolution, 'the survival of the fittest', a phrase which has persisted in popular conceptions of biological evolution but which is fundamentally a misconception.

Before discussing evolutionary ideas in any context, it is essential to dispel that misconception.<sup>48</sup> The species which exist in the world today are not the 'fittest' for their environments; they are simply *a fit*. When the environment changes, they may no longer fit, and so they will have to adapt or perish. We tend to think of those species which have perished as somehow inferior to our own; but can we really say that the dinosaurs, which lived on Earth for hundred of millions of years, were inferior to or less successful than humans, who have managed only a few million? Had it not been for the chance collision with the Earth of a meteor sixty-five million years ago, the dinosaurs may well have survived to today, and we might never have existed.

Changes in the environment (which can include the introduction of new species, or the disappearance of old ones) eliminate those organisms not adapted to the new environment, causing their species to change. Or a species can change not as a result of environmental change but through the chance appearance in some of its members (through genetic mutation) of a trait which proves advantageous in the present environment, enabling the offspring of those with the new trait to survive where others may not. Neither situation confers any guarantee on a presently successful species that it will survive into the future, or will not be superseded; for as the dinosaurs found out, *anything* can happen.

Edelman applies the concept of evolution directly to the way in which we learn (he also ties his theory to Darwin's by discussing the place of the conscious mind in the theory of natural selection, as a source of adaptive advantage for those individuals which possess it).<sup>49</sup> The basic physiological structure of the brain is the end result of the evolutionary path which has led to us via the genes passed on by our parents: a complex mass of vast numbers of neurons. But our brains are not computers pre-programmed with information about the world and how to behave in it. Rather, our neurons (actually our neuronal groups) work in competition, testing out different behaviours and thoughts, and those which succeed are favoured thereafter over those which do not. When a baby girl first tries to grasp an object, she randomly moves her arms and legs around in a wide variety of ways. By chance, one of those ways will eventually bring her into contact with the object. When this goal is achieved, the neural pathways which led to the action

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<sup>48</sup>For another discussion of misconceptions of evolution as the concept is used to describe social systems, see Sanderson (1991).

<sup>49</sup>In portraying Edelman's ideas here I encounter the problems facing anyone who attempts to communicate the ideas of one academic field to people in quite different fields. While I have cited two works by Edelman here, neither would prove particularly accessible to non-scientists, even though one (Edelman 1992) was written for a wider audience. For this reason I outline the concepts behind Edelman's theory (or those which are useful for my purposes) in my own words, rather than quote extensively from his works. For the briefest sketch of his theory given in the most strictly scientific language, see Edelman (1987: 5).

which achieved it are *chemically reinforced* in her brain, making it more likely that she will act the same way next time. Over time, that becomes 'her way' of grasping an object (provided that way continues to succeed). Her brain has selected for that behaviour by testing a wide range of behaviours in a given environment. The chemical process seen in this simple example occurs whenever we learn something new. Ultimately, Edelman posits, it may have implications not only for *how* we think but for what we are able to think:

We may well be limited in our thought by the way in which we are constituted as products of evolutionary morphology (Edelman 1992: 161).

Edelman's theory is a striking explanation of how we learn, and offers an appealing combination of both 'nature and nurture' as well. His theory explains not only how we, as individuals, become the idiosyncratic, individual human beings that we are, most definitely the products of our time and place, but also why we often find it difficult to adjust to sudden changes in our environment or our personal circumstances. Our brains are chemically prepared for our *previous* surroundings, and it will necessarily take time to adjust to the new.

For my purposes it is not crucial whether Edelman's theory is correct in every respect in describing the physical processes at work in the brain when we learn. The central concepts I have used as my starting point are that learning is itself *evolutionary*, and that an individual's knowledge evolves through a *selective* process.<sup>50</sup> We learn by trial and error — that is, by testing for what works (or fits) in our physical, social, and intellectual environment. It is this concept which sheds new light on the processes at work in tradition.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>This concept was anticipated by Donald Campbell, who in 1960 'suggested that all learning processes are analogous to the process of natural selection' (Boyd and Richerson 1985: 132). On the context of a child's initial learning, see Shils (1981: 169-175).

<sup>51</sup>Almost a year after writing the first draft of this chapter, a reference in Edelman (1992) has led me to the work of Boyd and Richerson (1985), two ecologists who, on finding 'no systematic theoretical argument for cultural behaviour that paralleled the Darwinian theory of biologists' (*ibid.*: vii), set about constructing one. Their book offers a detailed (but tentative) scientific theory which parallels some of the themes I outline here: what they call (in reference to the dual forces of genetics and culture) the 'dual inheritance model of human evolution'. As with the work of other scientists (such as Edelman), its writing-style and content may prove somewhat inaccessible to non-scientists, and as a result it may be slow to be taken up by any social science, let alone political science or Pacific studies (I have found no references to it in the literature of either field); but if one is not too alienated by its pages of mathematical symbols there are many valuable ideas to be found there (see, in particular, pages 1-18, 32-60, 81-94, and 280-299). My own theories are concerned only with a subset of culture (that is, tradition) and so do not tread identical ground, but I share their concept of the process of cultural evolution as being closely analogous to Darwinian natural selection.

Also worth noting is the distinction between my approach and that of sociobiologists, who examine the interaction and implications of human biological evolution with and for social behaviour, neither of which am I concerned with here. (On sociobiology, see Beckstrom (1993); Kaye (1986); as well as Boyd and Richerson.)

We often find ourselves under pressure to change our thinking; and the forces at work are similar to those involved in the evolution of species. An individual is under pressure to change what he or she 'knows' when changes in the environment show that knowledge to be irrelevant, no longer useful, or downright wrong. He or she may resist that pressure, but only with difficulty; and like an embattled species facing extinction, there is no guarantee of success. If a man learns that he must quit smoking or risk dying of cancer, he continues smoking at his peril.

A parallel also exists for the process whereby genetic mutation produces a better-adapted individual in a constant environment. That parallel is the capacity in all of us for creativity — coming up with a better way of doing something — or at least being willing to take advantage of the creativity of others by recognising a better way when shown one.<sup>52</sup> Within individuals, this is an all-or-nothing affair; if we refuse to incorporate a creative alternative into our personal thinking or behaviour, we carry on much as we did before (though knowledge of the alternative may subtly alter our behaviour). But not all knowledge is vested in the individual. There is a body of knowledge which we share in but which is greater than the knowledge which lies in our heads alone: tradition. As Shils says,

Reason and tradition are the two main means of struggling with [important] problems; neither alone is sufficient and both together are insufficient. Nature is a problem-generating system; man is a problem-engendering animal. (Shils 1981: 323.)

Shils takes some twenty-one pages to construct an initial definition of what tradition is and is not (*ibid.*: 12-33). I do not have room to do the same here, though the

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<sup>52</sup>On the process of creativity, see Storr (1991). This ties in with what I believe is a mistaken view of cultural evolution — i.e., that cultural evolution is 'Lamarckian'. The term has arisen in the Pacific context — see, for example, Linnekin and Poyer (1990a: 7-9), as discussed below — but I have also heard the claim from biologists (specifically, from Stephen Jay Gould, speaking at the DIST Science Forum in Canberra on 10 May 1995). Lamarck was a predecessor of Darwin: he attempted to explain evolution in terms of the inheritance of acquired characteristics. His theory also involved concepts of progress and striving: giraffes, for example, supposedly passed on longer necks to their offspring by 'striving' for higher leaves. (For a fuller account of Lamarckism, see Dawkins (1988: ch. 11).)

From there one might speculate that, because people 'strive' to improve their practices and therefore their culture, cultural evolution is Lamarckian. But striving for some desired result does not necessarily deliver it, as countless scientists, engineers, artists, and other creative people who have failed to realise their visions would attest; otherwise, our present world might resemble the science-fictional dreams of the 1950s. All we have is the capacity (and sometimes the will) to innovate; some innovations work or 'catch on' (i.e., are selected), and that process of selection drives cultural change. Creativity can therefore be regarded as the cultural evolution analogue of genetic mutation in biological evolution.

Neither do children automatically inherit the culture (the 'acquired characteristics') of their parents, or even those aspects that their parents would wish to see passed on; ultimately, *they* select what they will keep and what they will reject, as the social upheaval of the 1960s in the West amply demonstrated. (Those using the term in the Pacific context, as mentioned above, use it somewhat differently, basically taking the term 'inheritance' to include 'learning'. That misrepresents Lamarck's concern with *inborn* characteristics. Though Linnekin and Poyer admit to 'a degree of distortion' of the concept (1990a: note 6), I believe they and others would have done better, in that case, to avoid the term.)



preceding discussion will have gone a long way towards such a definition. More useful, for my purposes, is Eisenstadt's earlier encapsulation of Shils's views:

Emphasizing the distinction between tradition and traditionalism, Edward Shils, followed by Hoselitz and Spengler, has defined traditionalism as a more extremist negative reaction to the impingement of forces of modernity, and tradition as a society's reservoir of behavior and symbols (Eisenstadt 1974a: 2-3).

My own conceptualisation echoes this. I see tradition (the collective body of traditions, as opposed to individual traditions) as a system of group knowledge — a means of extending that which an individual is able to learn in the manner Edelman has outlined. Here I speak of knowledge as not only that which the individual or the group 'knows' (in the sense of a collection of beliefs about 'truth') but also that which they know *works* — that is, a collection of behaviours. (Beliefs influence behaviour, and vice versa. My beliefs will influence how I behave; and I will continue to believe particular beliefs if behavior based upon them 'works' for me.) It should also be stressed that tradition is not the only such group knowledge, a point which will become clearer later.

Following Edelman, then, we place trust in the 'tried and true' because testing for what works is the very way we learn. And a similar explanation, I suggest, extends to the trust we place in tradition — for there is so much for us to learn, and so short a life in which to learn it, that we are compelled to take many things on trust, based on no other knowledge than that they have proven useful for others.

We are careful, however, about what we take on trust. As an Australian living in a medium-sized city in a temperate environment, I would be foolish to mimic the behaviour of a Tongan living in a village in the tropics: I would freeze during winter, for a start. Hence we will naturally look to those who are closest to us — or (perhaps more accurately) to those whose circumstances are most similar to our own — to show us how to behave. And as we often consider our environment to be basically quite similar to the way it was in the past, we will look not only to those around us, but to those who came before us.

Shils says 'a rational judgment is not a tradition' (Shils 1981: 31); but also that 'in all the rational calculation and cognition, there is . . . much that is traditional' (*ibid.*: 33). Following tradition — group knowledge — is entirely rational.<sup>53</sup> But it is not the *only* rational way to behave; and there may come a time when to follow a particular part of that tradition becomes *irrational*.<sup>54</sup> Here one should again keep evolution in mind (and, I contend, not merely as an analogy). The most obvious way a particular tradition may be

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<sup>53</sup>See Wilson (1984: 137-141) for a discussion of past views (and the problems with such views) about the relationship between tradition and rationality.

<sup>54</sup>Shils, again, says, 'A tradition has to "work" if it is to persist. A tradition which repeatedly brings disaster, or which repeatedly turns out to be obviously wrong, will not persist.' (Shils 1981: 203.)

made redundant is when the environment — physical, social, or intellectual — makes it so. One of the most spectacular examples of such an environmental influence has been the continuing effect the introduction of the contraceptive pill has had on traditional Western sexual behaviour (one could also cite the effect of the discovery of HIV/AIDS);<sup>55</sup> there are many other examples, and I will give more throughout this study.<sup>56</sup>

But there is also the second path towards change mentioned above: creativity. The physical environment may stay the same, but someone may come up with a better idea, or be shown one. One need only think here of the changes in Pacific societies which occurred after their initial contact with the West but before there were enough Westerners around to constitute a change in the physical environment. Missionaries effected mass-conversions to Christianity not because islanders felt outnumbered by Christians — they obviously were not — but because they became convinced (for many and various reasons, probably as many of which were practical as spiritual) that Christianity was a better thing to believe. Indeed, periods of change occurred many times in Pacific island societies before any contact with the West, as various groups of people interacted with (and sometimes conquered) others.

An evolutionary perspective explains not only why following tradition is rational, but also why paradoxes exist about the concept and why problems arise from it. To take the everyday conception of the term first: it is necessary for us to believe that tradition and traditions are unchanging if we are to adopt them (as we do) on the grounds that they constitute beliefs or practices which are 'time-tested' and consequently rational (for the reasons outlined above) for us to adopt. As that is tradition's primary value, constancy (or unchangingness) is the primary feature that we associate with the term 'tradition'.<sup>57</sup>

But we *also* recognise the rational reasons for change outlined above, and so implicitly understand that any behaviour or belief, whether ours alone or (such as

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<sup>55</sup>Sexual behaviour is often discussed in terms of 'sexual mores'. 'Mores', interestingly (and relevantly), is defined by the *Pocket Oxford Dictionary* (Sykes 1981: 568) as 'customs or conventions regarded as essential to or characteristic of a community', from the Latin plural of *mos*, 'custom'.

<sup>56</sup>On the adaptive nature of traditional practices, see also Wilson (1984: 72-73).

<sup>57</sup>The central question in a theory of tradition must be 'why do we attach importance to constancy and therefore tradition?' — in other words, 'why are we reluctant to change?' This echoes Boyer's question about why traditions acquire a 'special psychological salience'. The answer, I believe, can only come from a theory such as Edelman's which describes the physical processes involved in the brain when we learn. The process Edelman describes will inevitably involve a transitional period between the moment we are required to change (which involves changing our thinking) and when the results of that change seem 'normal' (i.e., when our brain has adapted to this new way of thinking). The more momentous the idea, and the more the aspects of our thinking it requires us to change, the longer that transitional period will be. During that transitional period we will *not be well-adapted* to our new intellectual environment; we will not be 'functioning smoothly', or as smoothly as we function when our thinking is settled. Most of us, I believe, wishing to function at our best, would seek to avoid such unsettled periods unless they appeared unavoidable; hence our desire for constancy and tradition.

traditions) shared by many, must have had a beginning, and can have an end.<sup>58</sup> Unfortunately, this awareness that traditions can change contradicts their supposed primary feature (that is, that they are constant and therefore well-tested), and so some people might tend to suppress it in their *everyday* discussion of the concept; only if they stop and think will they acknowledge that of course traditions change.<sup>59</sup> Traditions, we know, are not all ancient, but we may sometimes wish that they were, because an ancient belief or practice which has survived until today is unlikely to be superseded by some chance discovery tomorrow; if it hasn't been yet, it probably won't be.

The paradox arises from the fact that the new practice replacing the old tradition in time gets called a tradition itself. This problem is unavoidable; if we gave innovations a new label every time they arose, there would be nothing to call a 'tradition' — or the tradition would be that we all live in caves and hunt mammoths (insert your own paleolithic stereotype here). But there must be deeper reasons why we are so ready to apply the label of 'tradition'. One, I think, is that we do not often wish to think of ourselves as the 'testers' of new practices; we are much happier if someone else has done the testing (or at least if we can convince ourselves that someone has), as they have then carried the risk of failure, not us. Of course, human history has seen its share of revolutions in all fields; if circumstances show an old way to be insufficient for our needs, we are prepared to try a new one — just as we as individuals often find ourselves forced to embrace new ideas when old ones fail us. But it is not always something we undertake lightly.

A second reason is an obvious consequence of human mortality: new generations are constantly being born, the members of which do not often know whether a particular practice is new or old. It was there when they arrived, so for all they know, it's old, and therefore a 'tradition'; only if they discover otherwise will they think of it as a 'new' or 'modern' practice, and that will only occur in some cases.

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<sup>58</sup>Some behaviours shared by many fall outside the realm of tradition. These include the most basic human bodily functions, like breathing, which are inborn in everyone and end only at death.

<sup>59</sup>One point worth stressing is the *unconscious* nature of much change in tradition. Not all individuals will be aware (or would approve, if they were aware) that their personal deviation from a particular tradition may contribute to change in that tradition. And not all individuals will have the same ideas about which practices and beliefs are traditional and which are not. Thus, change in tradition is often (usually?) unconscious and inexplicit, and many such changes are only identified as such in hindsight. Linnekin's definition that 'tradition is a conscious model of past lifeways that people use in the construction of their identity' (Linnekin 1983: 241) does not paint the whole picture, as traditional practices continue to be used consciously and unconsciously, and are changed consciously and unconsciously. Asking someone to *identify* their 'tradition' — to 'model' it — will require them to consciously think about it. But at that moment of identification they may also realise that the tradition has changed since they (or someone else) previously consciously identified it. (The processes associated with conscious identification of tradition — known as 'objectification' and 'substantivisation' — are discussed in, for example, Linnekin (1990); N. Thomas (1992c).)

In the West, where some pride is taken in our capacity for innovation (Wilson 1984), we may find ourselves stressing the 'modern' character or newness of a practice long after other societies would have started calling it 'traditional'. Thus, 'modern' practices may exist in the West which are older than some 'traditional' practices of other countries. This difference in linguistic emphasis does not necessarily mean that a great difference exists between the West and elsewhere in rates or degrees of change.

The newness of a particular practice may be stressed for a different reason: resentment over its imposition. The 'invention of tradition' literature identifies many examples of practices imposed, formally or informally, from outside — say, upon a colony by a colonial power. Awareness of that imposition may make it difficult for that practice to become a tradition; it might persist for many years, but on sufferance rather than by choice. But this, too, is subject to shifting generational perceptions; a subsequent (say, a postcolonial) generation, who have less reason for resentment, may finally embrace an imposed practice as 'traditional'. This suggests one reason why the idea of 'invention' is significant not only to Western scholars but also to some among Pacific peoples (as Lawson says, 'it features regularly in the discourse of Pacific islanders and clearly has a political salience' (S. Lawson forthcoming-a: ch. 1)). Those people are becoming newly resentful of past impositions of which they personally were previously unaware.

In many cases, then, assuming that it is not superseded first, a new practice will become a 'tradition', and thus, justly or not, will acquire a reputation for having been time-tested by the group who share it. But being part of group knowledge, rather being part of an individual's knowledge alone, tradition and traditions create problems the individual does not face when a reason for change arises.

Individuals building up their personal stores of knowledge are the ultimate arbiters of what to accept and what to reject. They may or may not decide to change their habits if the environment seems to require it; they may or may not adopt some new belief after learning of it. It is up to them. But they cannot unilaterally decide what is 'traditional' and what is not — unless (as can be the case, for example, with chiefly or shamanistic individuals in some societies) they have been identified by a particular group as the arbiter of that group's tradition.<sup>60</sup>

In groups where tradition is not dictated by one person, changes in tradition will inevitably be disruptive and contested, if the belief or practice being changed is widely agreed to be a significant one.<sup>61</sup> Different individuals will inevitably interpret innovations

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<sup>60</sup>For an example of the latter process, see Keesing (1968: 278-279).

<sup>61</sup>Even the highest figures of traditional authority may encounter resistance when attempting to force a change in tradition. Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna, one of the most respected Fijian chiefs of the twentieth century, was unable to convince smaller villages 'to combine into more viable and attractive communities' (Macnaught 1982: 156). Macnaught observed that 'Ratu

or changes in the group's environment differently; for some, they will represent good cause to change a tradition, whereas for others they will not. Only sometimes will collective opinion about the need for change approach unanimity and a practice or belief change *en masse*.<sup>62</sup> In other cases, change (prompted by environment or innovation) will be a process of attrition. A tradition will remain, but individuals (singly or collectively) will decide whether it is in their personal interests to continue following it — just as one makes a decision, however quickly, before incorporating any new belief or behaviour into one's personal knowledge. If enough people adopt an alternative practice or belief, that may in time become the tradition, replacing the previous tradition in the process.

But, as I mentioned, that process will not go uncontested. When many individuals have embraced a tradition — an element of group knowledge — and made it part of their own knowledge, some are bound to feel personally threatened if that tradition is challenged or abandoned by others; the challengers are contradicting what the tradition's defenders 'know'. From an 'evolution of the mind' perspective, there will be people who wish to defend the old practice against the new for the entirely rational reason that it continues to work for them (something which only they are in a position to know) and they are not convinced that the alternative will be better. Even if the new practice wins out and becomes a tradition itself, some may continue to hanker after the 'old tradition'.<sup>63</sup>

It is also possible that if a relatively recent belief or practice adopted because it was thought to be 'better' turns out to be generally considered a failure — even if it is not a failure in the eyes of some — there will be pressure to return to the tradition which had existed before it, on the grounds that that was 'more suitable' (in other words, it had worked where its replacement did not). That pressure may be even greater, one might expect, if the failed new practice is seen as foreign (and therefore less likely to be attuned to local conditions to begin with) and the old tradition is seen as being indigenous or local. Such pressure may, however, be matched or even outweighed by pressures to explore new alternatives.

The word 'traditional' is often applied to people and physical objects, as well as beliefs and practices: recall here the example of the 'traditional CD' given in Chapter One. The explanation for this is straightforward so long as one keeps belief and practice in

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Sukuna had over-estimated the dynamics of traditional organization in trying to stretch it in new directions and control it bureaucratically' (*ibid.*: 156).

<sup>62</sup>I am reminded here of the ongoing debate about Australia's flag and moves to have it changed, which involves both the forces for change outlined above. Public opinion is divided on whether Australia needs to change its flag in order to cast off colonial symbols and forge a new identity; and no alternative design has been proposed which has received overwhelming support. Compare this with the Canadian experience, where the question was swiftly settled once a widely-preferred flag design was found.

<sup>63</sup>Once a new practice has acquired the label 'traditional', however, it is afforded a large measure of protection from subsequent questioning and attack. So labelled, the new practice acquires an exalted status not enjoyed by its competitors; it has an advantage against any suggested replacement, in that it is now the 'tried and true' alternative.

mind. A physical object, or type of object, is labelled 'traditional' if its *use* is a tradition. Similarly, a person can occupy a 'traditional' position — and thus become a 'customized person', to appropriate Boyer's term — if they have been appointed to perform a particular traditional practice or function (the manner of that appointment often being subject to its own traditions). In either case, matters of age or novelty are only important inasmuch as they affect the 'traditional' status of that associated practice. An object which is no longer used by a group of people is no longer 'traditional' to those people, in the sense of current practice, however ancient it is; if it is ever described as 'traditional', it is in the sense of 'old traditions' now superseded — it was traditional once, but is not now. And similarly, a relatively new object can acquire 'traditional' status, if it is used to perform a certain traditional function.

It is crucial to remember here that traditions are defined in relation to a particular group, and that some uses of the term may therefore seem odd to outsiders (especially if they also use that exact same belief, practice, or type of object, but define it differently in relation to *their* experience). Consider the context in which the term 'traditional CD' was used: in an article written by a music journalist for young music-loving readers, many of whom would have used CDs since they began listening to music. To someone outside that group — someone who may not own a CD-player, and may even be surprised to find that very few Australian music stores these days sell long-playing records at all — the use of the description 'traditional' will seem odd, or even wrong. But it is not necessarily wrong (though some might consider it premature) for its target audience.

### Political Consequences of Tradition

Clearly, the relationship between tradition and change is most definitely not a polarised one, and for very good reasons. But it should also be clear that change in tradition will often provoke conflict, for the reason that not all individuals who share in group knowledge will wish to see that knowledge rewritten (again for good reasons) — *supplemented*, perhaps, as is easily handled by the wider store of group knowledge, but not *rewritten*, as happens with the subset of group knowledge called tradition.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Again and again I find myself drawn to the parallels between tradition and language. Indeed, the relationship between the two may be more than one of analogy. A language is a form of tradition: a tradition concerning which words are understood (and accepted) by a particular community. Comments on linguistic change have great resonance in a discussion of tradition:

Of all forms of change, linguistic change is one of the hardest to accept. A country is propped up by its language. Disturbance of the system by the loss of a meaning (for example, the traditional sense of the word *gay*) or by the threatened disappearance of a useful distinction . . . brings more grief, it often seems, than the death of an elderly acquaintance. One is seen as inevitable, the other resistable. The sense of linguistic deprivation is unmistakable. (Burchfield 1992: 65.) (Footnote continues on next page.)

This has obvious and pressing political consequences. First, as conflict within society is invariably a political matter, change in tradition becomes a political matter (and thus fit for study by political scientists).<sup>65</sup> Second, questions of whether a significant tradition is 'invented' or 'constructed', 'authentic' or 'inauthentic', can be politically important — especially when people learn that such a tradition was *imposed* from outside. Important, because learning that a particular 'indigenous tradition' was in fact the invention of a colonial master can influence how some people view that tradition from then onwards, and *individuals'* views about a tradition can, taken collectively in the manner outlined above, lead to pressure to change that tradition. If the tradition in question is that a particular section of society should enjoy certain political privileges, the political implications are obvious.

Another problem may be seen in the process of *increasing* the role played by tradition in political systems at work in some Pacific societies. This process might at least partly be a result of a reaction by Pacific peoples against imposed political systems; similar reactions have occurred in the West, but there have tended to result in the invention of a new system (as the disliked system is, in the West, usually of the nation's own making). In ex-colonies, however, the easier solution may be seen by many to be to reject the imposed system in favour of an 'indigenous' system; rather than inventing a new and untried system, elements can simply be taken, ready-made, from traditional systems at hand. The urge to reject the imposed system may be so strong, however, that faults which exist in those traditional structures are overlooked as being relatively unimportant. And those very faults may be a result of changes in those traditional structures throughout the colonial period, changes made in part as a result of outside influence — precisely the kind of influence supposedly being rejected.

Also worth further examination in the political context is why some attempt to portray political traditions as 'ancient' at all, when in other aspects of social and cultural life the evolution of tradition may be considered perfectly acceptable. One explanation may be that to accept that a traditional political institution has evolved is to accept *change*,

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Like tradition, language is subject to change: standard-English-speakers no longer pronounce 'waistcoat' as 'wess-kit' (Bryson 1991: 90). This example also shows the effect the written word can have on language — the modern pronunciation of 'waistcoat', and that of many similar words, arose when 19th century reforms dramatically increased levels of literacy, and many people unfamiliar with established pronunciations began to pronounce words as they were spelt (Potter 1966: 76). (The parallel influence of written records upon traditions is noted in later chapters.)

<sup>65</sup>Conflict can also occur when choosing between existing traditions. Here the comments of Immanuel Wallerstein are relevant:

Tradition is always a contemporary social creation. Civilizations are the way we describe our particularities in terms of millennial heritages. We are not free to be totally arbitrary. There must be some surface plausibility to the continuities asserted. . . . But . . . there remains a vast gamut of pasts one can plausibly choose, a vast gamut of pasts that are in fact chosen. And of course conflicting interests argue for alternative pasts for the collectivity. (Wallerstein 1978: 4.)

the very antithesis of 'ancient' tradition. If a traditional institution is shown to have changed, it loses some of its 'tried and true' reputation, and demonstrates to everyone that traditional political institutions are not necessarily rooted in the distant past, and *need not be*. Traditional leaders whose forbears may have sanctioned radical change (as occurred in both Fiji and Tonga) would thus be undermined in their arguments that a similar degree of change today would violate tradition.<sup>66</sup>

That the *perceived* nature of tradition in relation to change can conflict with the *actual* nature of tradition seems to me to lie at the very heart of problems concerning 'tradition in politics'. Tradition is not the antithesis of change, and thus is not opposed to a process of politics which is about negotiating change; it is merely that its changes are not always overt and consciously directed. Tradition cannot be rendered changeless by remaining separate from politics or by dominating and stifling politics; and political change cannot be prevented by a retreat to tradition, but only — *maybe* — slowed. Policies founded on a false belief that change can be resisted indefinitely may provoke adverse reactions among those affected, thereby indirectly leading to just the sort of changes which were being resisted. The question Pacific peoples must ask themselves is whether that risk is significant and, if so, worth taking.

Traditions only remain traditions if they continue to enjoy widespread support, and at the point where they change, or pressure arises for them to change, they can become an important political concern.<sup>67</sup> That is exactly what we see in Fiji and Tonga, as this study will establish. And, as will ultimately become clear, changes in traditions are themselves affecting how Fijians and Tongans view the world. Before turning to the details of these changes and the pressures which have provoked them, I will now introduce the views of some Fijians and Tongans themselves by discussing *their* explanations of the concept of tradition.

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<sup>66</sup>In Fiji, for example, such a set of circumstances would have left traditionalists with little defence against the Fiji Labour Party's pre-coup proposals to make the distribution of rents from Fijian-owned lands more equitable (Robertson and Tamanisau 1988: 48).

<sup>67</sup>A practice considered traditional can become entrenched, such as in a written constitution, but through that entrenchment it ceases to be completely traditional — the fluid, living, evolving tradition outlined here. (This point is further discussed in the next chapter.)



## Chapter Three

### Definitions of Tradition: Some Local Opinions

*Part of your problem is this perception of just exactly what tradition is. [The people you talk to] will probably be talking about different aspects, all thinking that you're talking about this different aspect of [tradition]. . . . It's probably best to actually define it so we can then have some sort of agreed definition of the relationship of the subject matter to the process of change. (Madraiwiwi 1993.)*

*To deny the relevance of traditions in our lives is to repudiate our sources of knowledge, our cultures, our very selves. It is a prescription for getting lost at sea. (Hau'ofa 1993c: 130.)*

The previous chapter examined the debate surrounding the concept of tradition (and the concept itself) at length, and one could be forgiven for desiring some respite at this point. Rather than lose the momentum of that discussion, however, I wish to capitalise on it by relating various Fijians' and Tongans' thoughts on the subject.

My own ideas about tradition are the end-result of three essential stages — an initial phase of reading (the formulation of hypotheses), followed by extensive discussion with locals (the testing of those hypotheses), followed by further reading to catalyse and synthesise my ideas (the construction of a thesis out of those hypotheses and tests). The previous chapter dealt with the first and third stages but did not explicitly discuss the second, and it is that discussion which I commence here.

A more comprehensive analysis of these ideas' significance will accumulate and emerge as the dissertation progresses. Here, by discussing the themes of Chapter Two but through the words of Fijians and Tongans, I aim simply for these two lines of discussion to reinforce one another in the reader's mind like two waves in phase, so that their ripples will spread through what follows.

#### The Concept of Tradition

When I asked people what they and their fellow Tongans and Fijians understood by the term 'tradition',<sup>1</sup> I was not surprised to hear it occasionally described in terms similar

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<sup>1</sup>By asking such a question I was attempting to discern not only what the interviewee understood by 'tradition', but whether they distinguished between their own views and those of others. Sometimes an interviewee would make that distinction clear by stressing the diversity of views in the community: for example, 'It's not an easy question for one to answer, what is the thinking of the Tongans in regard to their tradition, because there are splits, here, there' (Fifita

to the 'everyday concept of tradition' I have previously outlined. But, as can be seen from the following, even these basic definitions contained unexpected subtleties.

It means your way of life. Your values, your inheritance from the past, your history. Those are the major components of tradition. (E. Fusitu'a 1993.)

It is . . . what has been handed down to us from the past by [our] ancestors; something which is still being observed. If you refer to customs, some of them are modified; you can still call it traditional. But you think mostly of the things that have been handed down to you. (Taufa 1993.)

When people talk about tradition, they are thinking about our way of life; more or less the culture, what they know and what they have been used to. What they have been instructed by their parents and through a lot of institutions, from school and church, and even the government system. It's what they think that they should do and follow. (Liava'a 1993.)

It's a broad term. I just understood it as what was there before we grew up, and that's the way we live; our customs, our culture. It's the unwritten way; the laws not written but which we abide by. They're not enforceable by punishment, and yet we still live by them. (Niu 1993.)

Traditions and customs are really [that] which governs our day-to-day life. For indigenous Fijians, it governs our whole feeling for the future; it governs and colours our perceptions about realities, our own existence. . . . I see them as part and parcel of our lifestyle. They are part and parcel of the very land on which we live, the very sea in which we [fish]. (Lasaro 1993.)

[It is] things handed down from the old people to the younger generations, and their interpretation has become authority. We try to hand it over, perhaps reinterpreting what it means, but . . . thinking about tradition as being what has been told to you in the past [now] being handed on to new generations. ('A. Havea 1993.)

'Modified', 'reinterpreting': implicit in these words is a recognition that tradition changes. One need not rely on implication, however, to establish that this recognition is widespread.<sup>2</sup> I broached the question of change in tradition with many interviewees, and was surprised by the extent of agreement among them. In Fiji and Tonga, as one Tongan

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1993); and, 'Ask ten people [and perhaps] they [will] give ten different answers' (Fusitu'a 1993). Some, however, would happily answer as if they were answering for everybody, and that too I saw as significant.

<sup>2</sup>Christina Toren also recognises that Fijians' concept of tradition embraces change, although she contrasts it with our (Western) 'immutable' tradition:

The Fijian term for tradition and ritual as generic terms is 'acting in the manner of the land' (*cakacaka vakavanua*); it refers to a way of living and behaving that is culturally appropriate. By contrast, our normative understanding makes tradition inhere not in action but in objectified structures; it explicitly distinguishes immutable 'tradition' from processual 'history'. (Toren 1988: 696.)

I cannot agree with this depiction of Western notions of tradition; while it accords with the 'everyday' concept I noted in the last chapter, I believe that Westerners do recognise tradition's changeable nature, even if only subconsciously (although we still tend to obscure it with an emphasis on innovation which invites such false dichotomies as Weber's distinction between the traditional and the modern).

government minister said, 'there is really not that strong a view that tradition means no change or means resisting change' (Kavaliku 1993).<sup>3</sup>

I don't mock traditions; I like my traditions. The whole Fijian way of life . . . is good, provided that we encompass the changes that have to be made to equip people for the future. . . . [Fijians] know that things are changing. Perhaps [traditionalists] don't see it in that context, . . . but if you look around any tradition in the world, some form of change has happened, simply [for] convenience. . . . It will change whether we like it or not. (Momoivalu 1993.)

I have seen change within Fijian society in regard to our customs and traditions. . . . Even the Great Council of Chiefs used to emphasise that we should discard what we think is not good for us. We don't have to keep it. . . . Better [to] discard it, and only maintain what we think is good for us and for our children. (Tonawai 1993.)

Customs in olden days were a straightjacket; they tied you down. Now that is gone, but customs are still observed. (Wainiqolo 1993)

I don't see traditions and customs as stagnant entities any more. . . . [Since] Christianity came to this country about 160 years ago, we have seen tremendous changes. (Lasaro 1993.)

Many people are beginning to have no qualms whatsoever if traditions are thrown overboard. Only the other day I was at a *faikava*, and a minister of religion said, "I don't really care much about traditions; I'll brush it aside. Live by Christian principles." So there would be a number of people now, a number that was becoming appreciable, that would question the efficacy or the goodness of sticking with traditions. (Helu 1993a.)

Fijian culture, or life in general, changes all the time. What we embrace now as traditional was not probably two years ago, or ten years ago, but we have swapped. For example, Fijian ceremonies. There are artefacts which were not part of the ceremony [which] are now. . . . [Nobody says,] "This thing is not part of the Fijian tradition — it's Western." (Dakuvula 1993.)

Nor, it seems, is this attitude confined to urban areas (where Western influences might be considered to be greater). I asked the Director of the Institute of Fijian Language and Culture, Paul Geraghty, about the attitudes of village Fijians to change in tradition:

I don't think any of them are particularly concerned. . . . They've seen it happen in the past; they've seen it happen in their parents' time. . . . The social cohesion is still there; the basic structures are still functioning; so it's not anything to get alarmed about. (Geraghty 1993.)

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<sup>3</sup>One Fiji government minister has actually used the changeability of culture and tradition as a point with which to criticise democracy:

Democracy is a form of government that is culturally rootless. Its development as a theory embracing the governance of a modern state is a recent phenomenon. It is the antithesis of culture in the sense that its principles and practices are firm and unchangeable and relate simply to numbers of bodies, rather than cohesion of communities. (Bole 1992: 78.)

To my initial surprise, I did not speak to one person who said that tradition is or should be fixed and unchanging.<sup>4</sup> Of course, one cannot conclude from this that *no* Fijians or Tongans entertain such an idea, but it at least indicates that it is far from commonplace (and in political circles rare indeed). I was told that there were some such people around: the late Catholic Bishop of Tonga, Patelisio Finau, said,

There are people who are dreamers. Romantics. They want to think that things don't change. They . . . get up before people and talk like that; . . . they say, "Tonga is still Tonga. Tonga will always be Tonga." . . . There are people who are so biased about things Tongan, they don't want to change; they dream there's no change around. . . . They refuse to see the changes. . . . Many of them see changes, but it looks all right, because it's the King [initiating change], it's the nobility, so they have the right to change. (Finau 1993a.)<sup>5</sup>

I suspect, however, that even people such as that — especially given Finau's last point — would not consider *all* tradition to be totally inflexible; they may merely wish that certain traditions were (a point I will explore further later).<sup>6</sup> Their stance may also involve an unconscious recognition of the paradoxical nature of tradition: that at some

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<sup>4</sup>The Western perception of tradition as static may have arisen because rapid technological change in the West over the past century has made tradition seem *relatively* static by comparison. Robert Hughes has commented on America's obsession with change, and the falsely polarised view of tradition and change this has encouraged:

Ezra Pound's exhortation to "MAKE IT NEW" hangs over all American culture. . . . But it is misunderstood. Pound never meant it as a sign that the present erases the past. The phrase fascinated him because he believed it had been written on the bathtub of the Ch'ing Emperor and that it was an injunction to carry the work of the past, constantly refreshed, into the present: the "it" is tradition itself:

Tching . . .  
 . . . wrote MAKE IT NEW  
 on his bathtub  
 Day by day make it new  
 cut underbrush,  
 pile the logs  
 keep it growing. (Hughes 1994: 95.)

<sup>5</sup>Some such extreme claims were made in Fiji in the heated period immediately after the coup, as Robert Norton has noted (quoting a letter by A. Yata, *The Fiji Times*, 27 July 1987):

Some enthusiasts . . . went to extremes in advocating a return to "the old ways". One proposed bark cloth for clothing again, thatch houses, and traditional forms of work and exchange: "Even the *Taukei* Movement is under Western influence for they talk in English and want to be in parliament. There is no need for this. Everything can be done from the *bure* (thatch house) in the village". He begged Rabuka "to make a law to force Fijians back to the old traditions". (Norton 1990: 146.)

<sup>6</sup>Of course, one may also adopt such a position for more cynical reasons, which some feel might explain the stance of those with vested interests in the Tongan regime:

They're not saying that [democracy] is not practical, nor practicable; they are saying that things according to or based on traditions are still the best. . . . They don't say that traditions change all the time, because when they say this they seem to be implying that we've had the same traditions for centuries. They say, "They've carried us all these centuries, and we're here, and we are well and good, so why try and change?" (Helu 1993a.)

level we must believe in its unchangeability.<sup>7</sup> While few might whole-heartedly believe that tradition *is* unchangeable, more might (unconsciously) believe that it *should* be in order for its perceived value as knowledge 'tested and found useful' to be maintained. Geraghty had found that he was often expected to engage in minor rituals of 'saying the correct thing' which acknowledged the importance of tradition's supposed unchangeability:

[It's] not anything that I've encouraged, but I've been sort of attributed with the office of custodian of ancient culture, so when *I'm* around people often say, "Isn't it terrible how children these days don't know how to do —" some ancient custom which even the parents don't do. I'm supposed to say, "Yes, isn't that terrible, you really must do something about this." But it's all a bit of a charade. I don't believe it, and they don't believe it either. (Geraghty 1993.)

Even people with public reputations as conservatives acknowledged to me that tradition changes. One such was Fiji government minister Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, who was reportedly a prime mover behind the 1987 coup:<sup>8</sup>

We have to accept the simple fact that the whole world is moving. Changes are taking place everywhere. We cannot continue to live in the past. The changes have to take place: maybe not scrapping traditions, but there are changes taking place within our traditions, and that we have to accept. People are becoming more enlightened, I think; as a result of their education people are beginning to see things [in] a different way [than] their parents used to see things. People are beginning to ask questions [about] why they do what they are doing. I'm not saying that we are scrapping our traditions; no. I see there [are] some changes taking place in our traditions, and I think that cannot be stopped. People have to accept that. (Kubuabola 1993.)

Conservative Tongan church leader Laitia Fifita was also particularly notable in the way he stressed tradition's inherent changeability, saying, 'Change to us is something . . . unavoidable. Change is coming all the time, in all respects' (Fifita 1993). When I speculated that there are not many Tongans, if any, who would say that tradition has to stay the same for all time, his response was emphatic: traditions change, and the origins of those changes cannot be easily pinpointed, nor their durability predicted:

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<sup>7</sup>This paradox was recognised long ago by Fijian anthropologist Rusiate Nayacakalou in his landmark book (based upon his 1964 doctoral dissertation) *Leadership in Fiji*:

The framework of ideas associated with "building on traditional institutions", "adaptation", and change "within the framework of traditional culture" . . . is a powerful [one] in which the Fijians firmly believe. But it contains a basic contradiction in that one cannot change and preserve the same thing at the same time. Yet the very contradiction gives these ideas their appeal, for they provide an admirably ambiguous philosophy in terms of which the Fijians think they can resist change and yet embrace it, retain their culture and yet change their way of life, or, again, simply take the middle of the road and either confidently or with resignation avoid the painful choice between change and preservation. (Nayacakalou 1975: 135.)

<sup>8</sup>See *Islands Business*, May 1988, p. 18, and Usher (1992: 12).

Once you talk [about] tradition, can you also give a starting point, from what year to what year, and [say that] it all happened in that [period]? Can you refer the tradition to a particular time? The answer is no. Let's get away from that mess, because you cannot set tradition to a certain length of time. In fact there is a tendency to change in the population all the time. And even if you do it that way, there is no limit of the time for keeping to [a] certain part of our custom. (Fifita 1993.)

I asked if there were any aspects of Tongan tradition that cannot change for it to remain identifiably Tongan, to which his answer was simply, 'No.' While he noted that 'it's quite natural that you will like to hold on to the best part of your life,' he saw tradition as 'totally flexible':

Some people insist that [particular traditions] are not to be changed. But then it is up to us: when they finish with the society, whoever is taking their place starts off with something different. (Fifita 1993.)

Fifita's observations lead neatly from the question of *whether* Tongans (and Fijians) acknowledge that change in tradition occurs to that of *how* it occurs. This, as will be clear from the previous chapter, is perhaps the essential question about tradition, and not one to which I expected to receive neatly encapsulated, ready-made answers.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, some suggestions were forthcoming, and they have contributed directly and indirectly to my own answer to that question.

Some indicated the role that personal decisions play in tradition:

Tradition would be the values you accept. There are values which my ancestors had, traditions which they had, which I have accepted, and there are others I have not accepted. I have chosen the traditions which I like, and I have used them because they're applicable in this day and age, and they're workable. And if the traditions are not workable, what's the use of trying to make them work? (Fakafanua 1993.)

In many ways it means something that's within you, that you could build on, but not to resist things that you consider may be good for you, or may help you. (Kavaliku 1993.)

I think in the long run that people here will end up choosing right principles over their tradition. Right now the tradition is very strong, but I have noticed already in the last several years situations where when tradition conflicts [with] what [people] really believe in principle, they'd choose the [latter]. . . . Whenever tradition and what you believe go hand in hand, [fine], but if ever there's a time here in Tonga that it conflicts, people will pick what they believe. (K. Moala 1993.)<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>As one Tongan jokingly observed (when himself answering 'I don't really know'), 'If you can answer that one, I think you will earn your Ph.D. just by that answer!' (Kavaliku 1993).

<sup>10</sup>Newspaper editor Kalafi Moala was here discussing tradition in the political context:

Take the last election for example, where several nobles went out to their villages, and they campaigned so strongly, . . . and told people who to vote for, who not to vote for. Even the King's village, where he lives in his palace over at Fua'amotu: those exact same villagers basically voted the opposite of what they were asked and told by their chiefs to fill in; an overwhelming landslide victory for the Pro-Democracy [Movement] in those very

Others emphasised the functionality of tradition:

What will we call tradition in a few years? If it works, it will become the tradition. Most people will say, "This is what we have made ourselves." But where Fijians are prepared to make the changes we'll have to [wait and] see. (Dakuvula 1993.)

Probably the [question] would be, "What would be of benefit to me?" If the tradition [is] giving me benefit, I would still maintain it. If not, I would tend to disregard it. If the new things benefit me, I would tend to favour [them]; here I'm talking of maybe material goods and money and employment. . . . Because what are the main driving forces in life? It's pleasure, benefits or gain. . . . Now Tongans know that they have certain rights, and they would also be aware that those rights give them some benefits or advantages; if [they saw] any tendency to either take those away or lessen those, I think they would resist it. (Tapa 1993.)

We have some traditions which we think we should keep. And we have a lot of traditions which we think [are not] good [for] this age. Those kinds of tradition we should discard. That's what we are trying [to do], slowly; I have seen that some Fijians are doing that. Even myself: I used to say to my relatives, "Please, we don't want to [be] . . . spending our money [on] something [when we don't] get any [benefit] from it. Our forefathers . . . lived in a different time and age; we should see what's good for us today and for the future." (Tonawai 1993.)

This continuous testing of the value of particular traditions against the circumstances of life at any one time is a process of selection which clearly points to an evolutionary model of tradition. I heard tradition described as, in effect, a 'best fit':

Without being conscious of it, I suppose, people are aware of the fact that the tradition that . . . goes through the making of our daily lives, of our lifestyle, has something in it: a contribution to make to us. It's the best way of life for this spot on Earth, for this people, for this point of time. (Fusitu'a 1993.)

And Ratu Mara, when reflecting upon the concept of tradition at the end of our interview, used evolutionary language to describe its nature:

I would change the word "maintained" to traditions which have been developed. Again, whether that's the right word: to develop means from nothing we've got something. We've modified. Developed and modified. Evolved. (Mara 1993.)

One can see here a shift in language from the singular to the plural. Tradition is group knowledge; it is transmitted and reinforced via the group:

It's only when you live as a group and you understand what constitutes the identity of tradition and customs within your group that . . . those practices and customs [are reinforced]. It's when you become an individual, and you

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villages. Even the Prime Minister's village. Government people were so shocked that the people would [do that] after the nobles called a *fono* and talked to the people. So it's a very good indicator of the fact that the bottom line, when it comes to it, [is that] if tradition conflicts with what people really believe should be done, they'll follow their beliefs. (K. Moala 1993.)

live apart, [away from the village,] and don't have the day-to-day contact of your fellow kinsmen to reinforce those things, that before too long you find that you're an odd man out, or your son becomes totally isolated in terms of these things. It's group living — that's what Fijian life is all about: communal living, community. It's there [that] when something goes wrong, somebody points it out to you: "It's not the Fijian way; that's not traditional to do it that way." (Cokaunoto 1993.)

[Traditions are transmitted] by life. . . . Whenever you walk into someone else's house, and they tell you "come and sit on the seat" and they sit on the floor. When you go to a feast, they take you up to the front, and you sit there. When they speak to you, they speak to you in a different way than they would speak to other people. When you have big formal occasions, you learn. You see how people speak to you. (Fakafanua 1993.)

Thus, while traditions are always subject to change, that change is made with due regard to existing tradition, in the context of the group — a recognition, one may surmise, that a tradition is not merely part of own's own knowledge, but part of the group's knowledge:

The way we see change and the way we want to change must be in the context of our traditions and customs, because that gives us the fullness of life. . . . Customs and traditions and [our] entire heritage give meaning to our own existence. And what kind of life you want to lead, or what kind of society you want to create, as a Fijian, depends on these factors which are tied together by traditions and customs and [your] relationship with people, with other races, with the land. (Lasaro 1993.)

While the group shares its tradition, however, the group is nevertheless composed of individuals — diverse individuals who will disagree over which particular traditions should change. Thus, while *tradition* is widely valued (as one would expect if one considers it a rational means of acquiring useful knowledge), opinions on specific *traditions* vary:

I have not yet met a Tongan who does not want tradition *and* change. But the [foreign] media present us as if we can only be one thing or the other. . . . Our make-up is both, from the youngest child to the oldest Tongan. The only difference [is in] what are most of the traditions that we want to keep, and the changes that we want to make. That's where you look for extra information. But as to whether you have Tongans who are pro-tradition and anti-change, and Tongans who are anti-tradition and pro-change, false. All Tongans want both. ('E. Fusitu'a 1993.)

There's certain reservations that I have regarding retaining some of the Fijian traditions. I don't think I'm an exception. A number of us would like to do away with certain traditions, and then [there are] those who would like to see the reduction in importance of one [or] another. (Vakatale 1993.)

This, I believe, is the primary source of the difficulties some Fijians and Tongans have with the idea of 'changing tradition'. They would surely not argue that nothing has changed during their lives; and thus when pressed would have to conclude that tradition changes. Their concern, rather, would be with maintaining certain traditions they see as central to the whole tradition. Certain groups of people who are believed to be better at



maintaining those core traditions are in the same way identified as being more 'traditional':

We try to keep what is good for the Fijian and the Fijian society. But not everything. Back in the village, some people don't want to change, because they're very strong in holding with our culture; they're our customs and traditions. Those kind of people it's very hard to change overnight, but [as] time goes then they will see the change in their life. (Tonawai 1993.)

The subtleties of the term 'tradition' can easily lead to semantic difficulties. When 'Eseta Fusitu'a, prominent Tongan government spokeswoman, says, 'Tradition is not just past in Tonga, it's very much present as well; so because it is both past and present, you will find its existence in past politics, and you will find its existence in present politics' (E. Fusitu'a 1993), she is initially referring to how people conceive of tradition (as being of both past and present simultaneously). But she is also referring to present political traditions (traditions as particular beliefs and practices) which are part of the whole Tongan tradition (tradition as a collection of all traditions). In other words, she is discussing the way in which the concept of tradition affects the traditions which form the tradition-as-sum-of-traditions. It is hardly surprising that these subtle distinctions are not spelled out by everybody at every step of the way; even if we were all fully aware of them, to do so would be mentally exhausting. But they must be recognised in any deeper discussion of tradition, and I will continue to attempt to distinguish between them here.

One might say that if change in tradition is driven by individual decisions about whether to personally observe a particular tradition (as I have said it is) then that process would undermine group attempts to maintain particular traditions. I would agree, as long as that process is unconscious and private. But when the process of change is publicly recognised — when it becomes conscious and overt — public dissent is likely to follow. One would then expect such comments as 'change, yes, but not *this* change' — exactly what I heard from many:

There's room for change. But not the kind of change [the pro-democracy people] want. We need to effect changes slowly as we get the people ready. (Afeaki 1993.)<sup>11</sup>

The majority of the older generation, people in their fifties through seventies, . . . still want to hold to the way of life that they know. They don't really want to do away with it. It's basically good thinking, because that's the only thing they know. (Liava'a 1993.)

Why are we being forced to take on this [Western] style of life? The evidence is before us now; we don't really like [the life] other industrialised countries

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<sup>11</sup>See also Lasaqa (1984: 196): 'Because social change affects the Fijian's conception of his status and being, one cannot expect too rapid and drastic a change. The Fijian needs to be sure that what he changes to is both workable and acceptable to his self-esteem.'

lead. We don't want to go that way. Because the meaning of our life is seen in the traditional, the cultural, and the spiritual context in which we live. (Lasaro 1993.)

Of course it should be understood that no one can stop change. But it is a certain kind of change . . . political people are talking about. They don't mean the change of this morning to this afternoon . . . or natural change, but they think of political change. (Fifita 1993.)

This last point underlines the distinction between public and private change. Change driven by private individual decisions becomes 'natural change', unavoidable and therefore (if perhaps begrudgingly) accepted. But 'political changes', such as (but certainly not restricted to) proposals for change in government institutions, are clearly situated in the public arena, and therefore are seen as resistable. That view is not necessarily a mistaken one. If a system of government is somehow entrenched — for example, legally enshrined in a constitution — then indeed it is not as susceptible to the same gradual cumulative forces for change as one which is simply observed as a matter of convention (to use the legalistic term) or tradition (to use the term relevant here). One would expect problems, however, to occur whenever a traditional political system is formally entrenched. By being limited in its potential to continue adapting to changing circumstances, it is at risk of eventually losing its status as a relevant, *living* tradition.<sup>12</sup>

Proposals for 'political change' are not made without reason; they are not merely random ideas proposed to an indifferent public. They are made in response to a perceived need. That need, usually, is for public institutions to meet the concerns of the people they are meant to serve; and the people's concerns will change as their traditions change. 'Natural change' in tradition cannot be stopped (much of this study examines the forces at work today in changing the traditions of Fijians and Tongans). Therefore, pressure for political change becomes inevitable. Traditional political systems may well be capable of resisting change through legal or other means, but they do so at the risk of losing their status as living tradition: as not 'what was once traditional' but 'what is traditional today'. Living tradition is always subject and open to change. At any one point in time it may not need to change, but at some point it might.

Of course, individuals will disagree over whether or not a political system (or part of it) continues to be relevant and useful, just as they will disagree over the usefulness of traditions in the home and in their personal lives. In the latter case, however, they have the power to decide whether they will observe a particular tradition (and in doing so they indirectly help to bring about its change). In the case of public institutions, individuals (other than absolute rulers) have no such power. They cannot encourage change in the

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<sup>12</sup>It may still be identified as traditional for a long time, so long as it remains widely accepted as 'the' way of performing that particular function, but if that acceptance begins to erode, its status as 'tradition' becomes open to question and challenge — as examples in the following chapters will demonstrate.

group by themselves changing; they can only argue, or negotiate, for change. In other words, they must engage in politics.

In Fiji and Tonga we see arguments on both sides: that traditional political structures meet the needs of today's society (as Fusitu'a said, they are the 'best way' for Tongans here and now); and that they do not:

Traditional structures are simply incompatible with the new modern structures. . . . Time is being spent trying to achieve chiefly development, along lines which have severe structural implications. . . . [What I term] "Fijian political development tied into the communal system" can seriously constrict the scope of Fijian political development. The reliance on traditional (so-called) communal structures . . . is going to create . . . things that divide [Fijians]. (Baba 1993.)

At that point in our interview, Tupeni Baba (who was a prominent minister in the short-lived Bavadra government) approvingly read out a pertinent passage from Nayacakalou's *Leadership in Fiji*:

It seems to me that one of the greatest obstacles facing the Fijians today is the failure to recognise that there is a contradiction; they must now make the momentous choice between preserving and changing their "way of life". The belief that they can do both simultaneously is a monstrous nonsense with which they have been saddled for so many years now that its eradication may be very difficult to achieve. (Nayacakalou 1975: 135.)

These comments deserve close attention. Can one both preserve and change one's way of life simultaneously? Or, recalling here that some interviewees defined 'tradition' as their 'way of life', can one both preserve and change one's tradition simultaneously? If one is concerned with tradition *as a whole*, the answer is certainly no, and it is correct to call such a belief nonsense. But if one is concerned with *traditions*, or particular 'ways of life' — specific beliefs and practices — then the answer must be yes. One can change some traditions and preserve others.

Obviously, difficulty arises from the conflation of the terms 'tradition' and 'traditions'. Yet there is another point worth exploring. Nayacakalou and Baba are essentially saying what I just have: that problems can arise when political systems are overly resistant to changes in their structure which would make them more relevant to their society's present needs. Why should the traditions of political systems be so particularly subject to concerns of 'relevance'?

One answer, to restate what has already been said, is that these traditions are more 'public' than many other traditions. By 'public' I mean more than just 'of the group'. All traditions are 'group knowledge', determined and controlled by the group; but while many traditions are controlled by the group through their actions and decisions as *individuals*, these traditions are controlled by the group *as a group*. They are a matter of public debate. For that reason alone they will be more liable to demands that they be relevant to people's needs.

But consider also what political systems and institutions are. If politics is about negotiating change (as well as locating power), then a political system is the system through which change is negotiated (and power is assigned). That system operates by means of a number of formal and informal institutions: heads of state, governments, parliaments, media, and so on. Those institutions are subject to their own traditions: the traditional head of state of Tonga, for example, is the monarch.

Any change which becomes a matter of public concern — which may include changes in any number of traditions outside (as well as inside) these political institutions — is negotiated through the political system. Thus a political system must be able to respond to the pressures for change acting upon *many* traditions, not merely those acting directly upon the traditions of its own institutions. In effect, those extra pressures become pressures upon the system and its institutions: if the system cannot deal with these pressures, it *must* change, because it is (by definition) the system intended to deal with these pressures. Thus, the traditions of a political system will be subject to many more demands than those encountered by traditions in other areas. They will be 'tested' to a greater degree. They must be, relatively speaking, more relevant to the needs of society than other traditions.

'Public' traditions which entail the greatest need for relevance will, one would expect, be the traditions to which people will pay the most attention. One would also expect the highest-profile traditions to be those with which the whole tradition (of which they are a part) is most identified. Thus, one would expect the tradition of somewhere like Tonga or Fiji to be identified by its people with, mostly, its traditional political system. And this, as I will show in the second half of this chapter, is what one actually sees.

### Fijian and Tongan Traditions

So far in this chapter I have been discussing the *concept* of tradition. I will return to that later; but it is equally important to discuss *traditions* — the elements of 'tradition-as-sum-of-traditions'. In the context of local discussions of tradition, it is perhaps *more* important, because tradition as the sum of traditions, and not necessarily the concepts and the processes involved, is what many understand by the term. The founder of Tonga's 'Atenisi Institute, Futa Helu, agreed that tradition is 'a Western concept':

It was never the wont of Tongan people to think about tradition objectively, as something separate from their life. It's so much a part of their life it never occurred to them to isolate tradition in thought. But there are a few people, many of them educated people, who are beginning to do this, and there is general enlightenment also. So that when you ask your question, they would know what it means. But some time back, it would be a pretty new [concept]. By "tradition" now, Tongans understand "customs". Most of them would associate the term "tradition" with the standardised interpersonal relationships, or intergroup relationships, rather than, say, with performing

arts. If pressed, of course, they would say yes, our performing arts are part of our tradition; but when we mention the word "tradition", they would immediately think [of] interpersonal relationships. [The extended family,] and the relationships with your chiefs, and old people, and values of respect and loyalty, generosity, giving. These would be the immediate things. . . . So for Tongans now, and I think in a sense it was always like that, it is the human relationships which are more important. (Helu 1993a.)

What, then, are the traditions that make up tradition for Fijians and Tongans? As Helu said, human relationships, from the family upwards, are the main feature of Tongan descriptions:

[Tongans] consider . . . the traditional way of living [to be] in the extended family unit. From there you can draw in . . . cultural activities, funerals, weddings and things. That's all part of their interpretation; that's what Tongan tradition is all about. And they value it highly. (Fonua 1993.)

When I talk in terms of tradition, it's got to start in the home. The way we run our homes. The way children respect father and motherhood. The way that we always live in an extended family, there is a sort of a patriarch of the family. (Afeaki 1993.)

I will be discussing these basic family issues further in Chapter Seven. For now, it is important to note how they are regarded by Tongans as the first link in a chain which leads right up to the King:

The traditions we are talking about basically relate to the *kainga*, . . . the blood-kin in our system. The physical manifestations may change, like the kind of houses we live in, the clothes we wear, . . . [but those] do not in fact impact very largely on our expected behaviour within our *kainga*, that whole blood system. So when they talk about keeping our traditions, they mean keeping the coherency and the strength and stability of the *kainga*; the reciprocal relationships which are a very dominant feature of the Tongan traditional system; and the *'ofa 'aki* which is again a reciprocal term meaning mutual love, or mutual warmth.

So long as you keep your traditions and be visibly seen to participate in your *kainga*, you are all right. We often say *mata kainga*, meaning you recognise your obligations within your extended family system. That person is always accorded a higher status than a person who does not recognise his obligations or [is not] seen to participate in these kind of activities. So a great number [of] so-called highly educated Tongans will take great pride in performing their role within the *kainga* system. That's part of confirming their traditional obligations, or loyalty, commitment.

The whole political structure, . . . as well as the social system of Tonga, is seen to be a large extended family, and it's all linked together by blood and by obligations, . . . even if you are not related by blood as you [were] in the old days, [when] everybody who lived within a particular estate was related somehow or other to the chief by blood, . . . by marriage, and by obligations therefore. (Taufe'ulungaki 1993.)

The family is the starting point for a vast system of ranking:

Tonga is a highly stratified society, and you know where you fit in. . . . When it comes to meetings where the people are seated according to their ranks in society, according to the hierarchy . . . the chiefs will always

occupy the positions to the front, and then [it] comes right down to the ones in the lowest echelon of society. (Taufa 1993.)

In Tonga we have first our King, and then there are the nobles, and commoners, the people. And this has been with us since history began. Traditionally this ranking is of great importance to the lifestyle of modern Tongans and the way that they live and talk to each other. Even within the noble ranks themselves there are high-ranking nobles and [low-ranking]; it's graded in that fashion. And of course the people themselves also have their own rankings within the family and within the community, in village life, and so on. (Tupou 1993.)

In Fiji there is a similar focus on family and on ranking:

When we meet on traditional or cultural ground in Suva, . . . you see this spirit coming alive within us. We're still very much part of this extended family. Even though . . . the emphasis [today is] on economics, we still have our traditional role to play as far as extended family is concerned, as far as our responsibilities are concerned. (Tabu 1993.)

Our traditions and customs, culture as a whole, . . . stabilise our patterns of relationships with each other from day to day. . . . Political relationships, right from our individual relationship with each other, from [the] extended family system, from the clan or the tribal relationships, and from relationships between tribal kingdoms, are really governed by our traditional hierarchy, customs, traditions, *vanuas*. And this governs and stabilises our whole way of life. (Lasaro 1993.)<sup>13</sup>

The system of ranking encompasses many details, such as ceremony and traditions of respect:

When you look at the Fijian people, what you can call tradition is their ceremonies: chiefly ceremonies of welcome, of installation of chiefs; a way of speaking maybe; these are what come from the custom, and we still conserve them in the modern context. (Dakuvula 1993.)

There are traditional things that you do . . . just if you're a Fijian. You acknowledge the presence of others. You would acknowledge the elders — from the rural areas, from the grassroots. You wouldn't really stand above people; you would bend or go lower, unless you're a chief and you stand above everybody else. . . . When there's a *yaqona* ceremony, whether it's formal or informal, as a sign of respect you clap. It's really like you're saying "thank you". . . . There are little traditional things that you do, but it's not really learnt at school. But it becomes part of a person. . . . It inculcates respect for other people. I think that's why Fijians are a hospitable people: because it's really basically in their tradition to respect other people. (Vakatale 1993.)<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Note also, in a recent article by a Fiji government minister: 'I have freely interchanged the terms Fijian social and political system and the Fijian chiefly system to reinforce the indivisibility and the unitary nature of the two aspects of the systems.' (Bole 1992: 74.)

<sup>14</sup>See N. Thomas (1992a: 325): 'Fijians also differentiate themselves by emphasizing that their rituals are works of respect, that respect pervades their behaviour, and that customs of respect are absent from Fiji-Indian society, as well as from the society of white foreigners.' See also Ravuvu (1992: 63). Vakatale detailed some of the specific traditions she had in mind:

What, ultimately, is the purpose of a system of ranking but the allocation of authority and power? A system of ranking is a political system. In other words, the major defining characteristic of their whole tradition is, for Fijians and Tongans, their traditional political system. Many Tongans, for example, specifically focus on the monarchy when they discuss tradition:

Everything that is Tongan is tied to the system itself, and when I talk in terms of system, I'm talking about the monarchy, the nobility, the whole social set-up. That's what our tradition is all about. . . . Our tradition is centred in the monarch itself. You take away the monarch, then the whole tradition and the whole culture disintegrates. (Afeaki 1993.)

One member of the royal family even considered this focus on the monarchy to be unfortunate:

They see tradition [as] the King, the nobility, and what they have initially been told at home, through grandparents and old aunties. What they get at home is the basis of what tradition would mean to them. For instance, tradition to me, when I grew up, was not going behind my father's back, and not to touch anything of his or his majesty's now, because we all lived at the Palace.

Thinking that tradition is just for the aristocrats, it's just a class thing — I don't interpret it that way. . . . Unfortunately a lot of society, especially the

There are certain doors we come through. You just sit by the doorway, and then if you come through that door, that signifies your rank — you're somebody [high] up. It doesn't matter which house you go to. . . . And that establishes your relationship with the household, your relationship with the village.

It's the way you sit; for example, we would accept a Chinese not to sit properly, that's accepted, but a Fijian has to sit properly — we have to sit cross-legged. . . . There's the way that the women sit and the men sit: nowadays all the women are sitting like the men, cross-legged. I was brought up by my father, who was [filled with] tradition: I don't know how to sit cross-legged. I sit like a woman; . . . that's the way I've been taught from childhood. But other women just sit [cross-legged]. It suits me now, because I'm in a place where everybody sees me, so my example is to seem that I [am following tradition]. What they don't realise is that it's out of necessity: I don't know how to sit cross-legged!

So it's really the differences that make a Fijian Fijian. Picking something up — if I were to come past you [to pick something up], it's automatic for me to say "*tulou*". It's automatic for me if I were in the village. Here, I would just go and take something from the top of the cabinet there, and you're sitting down, and I would say "*tulou*". At home or in the village, that's easy enough but I wouldn't do it: I would go down and clap. It doesn't really matter who [it is], it just shows respect. We reciprocate in this way. (Vakatale 1993.)

But she also noted the downside of Fijian forms of politeness:

We are a very polite people, to the extent that you can be very dishonest in being polite. . . . You can say things just to be polite. And there's certain ways of saying no, and we say yes and it might mean no. . . . Like a chief, for example: when [people] come through, [you] listen, and then there's another faction that will come to you, and you will say, "Yes, yes," and the person will say, "Oh, the chief has supported us." The next one will come, [and will also hear], "Yes, yes, all right!" They [also] think that the chief has supported them. The chief has really just acknowledged that it's your right to talk to him — unless they come to him and say, "Resolve this," [in which case] he has the right to resolve it. But [those are] all the nuances in Fijian politeness. (Vakatale 1993.)

young ones now, think that that's it. I have had questions put to me: "What is the use of the Tongan tradition?" I say, "It's of use; it's you, it's me." It's unfortunate, but I guess they just see it as duties to the Palace and duties to the noble of the village. (Siu'ilikutapu 1993.)

A focus on traditional rulers can, however, have other implications. Those rulers can attempt to use other traditions to reinforce their own position: by promoting any traditions, the logic would go, they reinforce the whole tradition (of which they are the focus), therefore reinforcing their own position. Local critics argue that this indeed occurs:

Tradition now, and culture, are used by the powers that be as a stick to beat their adversaries with. . . . I'm sure it was always used like that, but now we are at a stage [where] the ruling classes all over the Pacific are digging in, because they feel that their position is being questioned. And so they are moving back to tradition and culture. . . . Ultimately it is to buttress their positions. (Helu 1993a.)

This link between apparently unrelated traditions and the rulers at the core of tradition can be seen in even something as basic to life as clothing. In Tonga, the example given to me a few times was the *ta'ovala*, a mat worn around the waist:

If [pro-democracy people] feel that Tongan traditions should change, why should one wear a *ta'ovala*? It becomes an automatic thing [for Tongans]: when they don't they feel out of place. . . . We wear this because of the monarchy and the nobility. If they [feel] that strongly, then they should do away with [them]. (P. Vea 1993.)

Wearing this *ta'ovala* is required by law, but it makes us feel that we are different from other countries. Maybe [fifty years ago] people were willing to wear this, but now it's getting to become a nuisance, wearing this! Of course you feel incomplete if you don't wear the *ta'ovala* to church. But going to work, it's a different matter. . . . It gives a sense of formality. (Ketui'ionetoa 1993.)<sup>15</sup>

Other examples of the use of traditions to support existing hierarchies will arise later in this study, and the next chapter will examine more closely the hierarchies of Fijian and Tongan society and their political implications. I will conclude this chapter on local definitions and concepts of tradition with a discussion of two issues so far unexamined. The first of these is the relationship between tradition and identity; the second is the matter of 'invented traditions'.

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<sup>15</sup>It is significant that the wearing of the *ta'ovala* in certain situations has had to be enforced by law. The legal requirement that every civil servant had to wear the *ta'ovala* was instituted in the early 1970s because people had started to wear European-style clothes:

Particularly at schools, it gave a bad example to the students to see their teachers wearing [Western clothes], with the new fashions coming, hairstyle, dress, and everything; I think some of the teachers were a little bit carried away. (Ketui'ionetoa 1993.)



## Tradition and Identity

Not all discussions of tradition concerned the processes involved in its transmission or the specific traditions which resulted from that process. Often I heard tradition linked to the concept of 'identity'. As 'Eseta Fusitu'a said, tradition is 'very much tied up with our identity' ('E. Fusitu'a 1993). Her husband, when I asked why Tongans want to keep their traditions, said similarly, 'For us, your identity, being a Tongan, is very important. . . . The fact is they like being Tongan and they want that identity to be retained' (Fusitu'a 1993). Others agreed:

I think the traditions and customs to us are very important. It plays a very important part in every aspect of life in Tonga. The Tongan church, family; . . . it gives us a sense of identity that's unique from any other country. It makes us proud to be a Tongan. (Ketui'ionetoa 1993)

Tradition is what a people is made up of. . . . How are they able to know their identity if they don't keep their everyday customs, behaviours? (Siu'ilikutapu 1993.)

[Tonga] is still a traditional country in that we want to retain . . . our own identity of course. I think you can include language here: we speak Tongan, because we grew up in Tonga, and it's our way, it's the means [by which] we understand each other. (Taufa 1993.)

Some, in talking about their tradition, drew connections with deep spiritual feelings within themselves:

To me, if our tradition and culture dies, our race dies, because [it is] something that distinguishes us. I have always treasured this, as if God is with me. One thing that I have enjoyed, and I've never lost touch with it, is a spiritual power that . . . is alive in me. This is a very forceful power. I got it when I was a child, when I used to go into the forest. I sat there and listened to the singing of the birds, and when I [went] to catch roosters, I felt as if I saw the spirit of God running with me. . . . I have inherited my forefathers' great gift; . . . that same spirit that was there. . . . When I see the commotions here, I still have that peace. With that God's peace . . . I can face whatever problem. . . . When challenges come, I know I can conquer [them]. (Tabu 1993.)

Others were more skeptical:

Fijians . . . have these illusions about themselves. . . . Some of our leaders *love* to go on about [there being] no such people like us who have these customs and traditions that mark [us] as a people apart from *everyone* else in the world.<sup>16</sup> It's such a lot of drivel when you consider that 18-19 percent of Fijians are in jail. There must be something wrong with our

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<sup>16</sup>An example occurs in a recent article by Fiji government minister Filipe Bole, who after outlining the basic hierarchy of Fijians and chiefs says:

By contrast, non-Fijians have no similar traditional social and political structures to use or adopt. . . . To my knowledge, there is also no concept of leadership akin to that of the Fijians that non-Fijians can rely on for political purposes. (Bole 1992: 74.)

traditions and our social control if 80-90 percent of the prison population are Fijians. I really take umbrage at these platitudes.

It particularly comes out [at] formal presentations with the whale's tooth. . . . The rhetoric is so flowery and so extravagant; it sits very poorly with the reality. The sentiments that gush forth when people get carried away when they're presenting something! . . . Fijians should start facing some realities about themselves; that there are some aspects that need to be reconsidered about themselves for their own good. (Anonymous 1993.)<sup>17</sup>

Part of why some Fijians feel that they must retain their identity through their tradition is what they consider to be their precarious position in a multiracial country and in the world:

One of the [reasons] . . . why Rabuka executed the coup [was] because he thinks that if we go away from our tradition and culture, all the Fijian people will be finished. And we see that too. [There are] only three hundred thousand people of Fijian race in this world. That's why we are worrying about our race [and want] to keep our culture and tradition, because we see this new Western lifestyle: it seems to us that [it] invades our traditions and culture. (Tonawai 1993.)

These concerns about threats to tradition and therefore identity are not unique to Fijians. Tongans recognise similar threats, and in attempting to ward them off seek to closely identify various worthy human characteristics with themselves:

We have a Traditions Committee.<sup>18</sup> . . . They say that there are five things that make the Tongans [distinct]. Every country has characteristics that make them different from any other country, but for the Tongan, the five characteristics are: respect; commitment; fulfilling your obligations; keeping your human relationships above yourself; and willingness to die for the country. . . . If those things were true then the Tongans must have a history of peace, perfect peace, and happiness! . . . But this is taught in the schools, in the churches, over the radio. . . . It makes the Tongans feel superior to other races. (Fukofuka 1993.)<sup>19</sup>

What should we make of this identification of tradition with identity? I would argue that, if tradition is seen as group knowledge, we should be neither surprised by such an identification nor dwell on it to too great an extent.

A person's identity is that which makes him or her unique. What is a person's identity other than the sum of what he or she is? A person's identity is composed of both

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<sup>17</sup>This interviewee, a Fijian civil servant, noted that these views were not shared by most, saying, 'If [I] were to openly express these views, well, I'm considered something of a maverick anyway, and they'd say, "It's him, what do you expect?"'

<sup>18</sup>I examine the Traditions Committee, which was set up by Queen Salote, in Chapter Five. Fukofuka further noted: 'It's not working as strongly as it was. . . . They were the ones who . . . clarified what really were the Tongan traditions and what we should keep. To me their main job was just to make sure that we remain subservient in every sense.' (Fukofuka 1993.)

<sup>19</sup>One could add that these five characteristics distinguish Tonga from very few other countries: many peoples, in their more patriotic or nationalistic moments, might claim that they value things like respect and willingness to die for their country more than anyone else.

physical characteristics — which I will leave aside here — and mental characteristics — in other words, his or her mind and knowledge. And part of every person's knowledge, I have argued, is in the form of tradition. Tradition is group knowledge, in which individuals share.

Every person's identity is determined by more than just membership of a group; I am more than just an Australian, a Tasmanian, or someone from the Huon Valley. But I am also all of those things, and if I wished to describe what it is that makes me, say, Australian, I would focus on those aspects of my identity which I share with other Australians. As Australia is a multiracial society composed mostly of relatively recent immigrants (or their descendents) from around the world, I would not refer to my Anglo-Celtic racial origins to distinguish myself from non-Australians (although a Tongan could use his or her own Tongan racial characteristics in this way in certain contexts; as I have said, I will not dwell on physical characteristics here). Instead, I would refer to those beliefs and practices I have in common with other Australians; that is, to my own share in our group knowledge (a large part of which is our tradition).

For individuals, a large part of one's identity is the tradition of the group of which one is a part (or rather, the traditions of the groups, for most people are members of more than one group). For the group itself (leaving aside any distinguishing physical racial characteristics), its shared mental characteristics (i.e., its group knowledge, of which traditions are a major part) *are* its identity. Little wonder that tradition is so closely linked to identity by many.<sup>20</sup>

Little wonder, also, that foreign influences — influences from outside the group — which threaten to influence and change traditions are perceived as threats to the group's and its members' identity. As I have argued, where individuals are concerned, any change in what is accepted by the group as tradition forces a change in what individual members of the group *know*, as they will have made tradition part of their own personal knowledge. Any change in tradition therefore affects their identity. And, as identity is concerned with that which *distinguishes* a person (or a group) from other persons (or groups), any change in a group's tradition which makes it more like the tradition or practices of another group represents a threat to the identity of the group and its members.

This, I think, is most of what needs to be said here about identity. A study of why people feel the need to have their own distinct identity would fill a dissertation by itself.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>On culture and identity, see Linnekin (1983); Linnekin and Poyer (1990b). On Fiji, see Norton (1993: 745-749). For a discussion from an art and literature perspective, see Hereniko (1994). For views on the 'Melanesian Way', see Narokobi (1983a; 1983b).

<sup>21</sup>Useful studies include those of Mackenzie (1978) and Smith (1991). Smith argues that national identity exerts 'a more potent and durable influence than other collective cultural identities' (Smith 1991: 175-176), and that 'there is nothing to prevent individuals . . . from feeling they are Yoruba, Nigerian, and African in concentric circles of loyalty and belonging' (*ibid.*: 175). (On nationalism, see also Anderson (1983); S. Lawson (1992).) Mackenzie's

I will, however, say this: I think people overestimate the threat to their identity posed by foreign influences on their traditions. Australians, for example, worry about their wholesale adoption of American words and habits.<sup>22</sup> Tongans and Fijians sometimes worry about the same. And yet would anyone (especially anyone who had visited all of these countries and seen their differences for themselves) argue that Australia is not distinct from America, and that Tonga and Fiji are not distinct from the West? To focus exclusively on imitation is to ignore the innovation and selectivity which usually accompany it. Australians may adopt some American words, but not all; and we speak them with Australian accents and use them in our own ways. The same goes for traditions. There are probably few things that would be considered less 'traditionally Fijian or Tongan' than automobiles, and yet Fiji citizens and Tongans use them in their own distinctive fashion, a fashion which could one day — who knows? — be considered traditional.

This is not to say that cultural imitation should never be of concern; of course it sometimes should, in certain circumstances. But that is hardly an original insight. These days it has become fashionable among many people (mostly Westerners) to worry about the incursion of Western culture (by which most mean American culture) around the globe. I have worried about it myself. But I can also recognise that the essential difference between the effect America is having on the world today and the effect Britain had a hundred years ago (or Rome had two thousand years ago) is that the former is occurring during my lifetime. Change occurring now might force me to change; change which occurred in the distant past, while it might have affected the status quo of the society into which I was born, cannot force me to change now. The former threatens what I am; the latter helped make me what I am.

Why should Australians worry more about American influence than about the Norman invasion of England in 1066? There are many external influences upon our society today, economic, environmental, and otherwise, as well as many internal

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'whodunnit'-like search for the meaning of the term 'political identity' is clearly pertinent here in its exploration of language, myths, ritual, symbol, and other allies of tradition:

Language . . . must in life be extended downwards to dialects, accents, and idiosyncracies of speech; sideways to include ways in which we communicate intelligibly alongside words and between words; upwards to include the grandiose complexities and practical simplicities of ideology, myth, ritual and symbol. This is 'how to talk' and we share with one another in 'talk'. This is 'shared identity'; sharing in a most peculiar abstract something-or-other, but nevertheless 'sharing', in that the thing makes no sense except as something common to human beings, in dyads, triads, groups and multitudes. (Mackenzie 1978: 164-165.)

See also Friedman (1992), who discusses issues of identity in the light of postmodernism and the 'politics of tradition in the Pacific' debate (in the process constructing categories such as 'postmodernism' and 'traditionalism' which appear somewhat too mutually exclusive for my liking — see Chapter Eight).

<sup>22</sup>For example, while I have been writing this chapter (in mid-March 1995) the pages of *The Australian* have been filled with letters bemoaning what correspondents see as a flood of American words displacing their Australian equivalents.

influences — all of which are at least as important as, say, whether our kids wear their baseball caps backwards. Thus, while acknowledging that foreign influences which change traditions can threaten people's sense of identity, I do not wish to dwell upon that threat, as to do so may overstate it.<sup>23</sup> And it is with this in mind that I turn to the final matter I will consider in this chapter: that of 'invented traditions'.

### **'Invented Traditions'**

In Chapter Two I examined at some length the literature of the 'invention of tradition'; while I concluded that this phrase is accurate enough as a description of the way *all* tradition originates, I argued that the use of the term 'invented tradition' sets up something of a straw dog<sup>24</sup> by implying that there are other 'authentic' traditions which were not invented. I also, however, proposed that the matter of traditions imposed from outside (for example, by colonial rulers) — which is what most seem to mean by 'invented traditions' — could be seen as important. Some of the above may appear to qualify that perception, as indeed I hope it does. I will expand on that now, by way of discussing local responses to the concept of 'invented traditions'.

Academics, so the popular stereotype goes, live in an ivory tower at a remove from the 'real world'. As with many stereotypes, there is some truth in that; but only some. Academic debates can and do extend into popular consciousness. So it is, I found, with the debate about 'invented traditions': some of my interviewees were familiar with the concept, and it was shaping their own perceptions of their tradition.<sup>25</sup> Not surprisingly, these few were those who had been in contact with the academic world; mostly, too, they were people in Fiji (recall here that Fiji's Council of Chiefs is a favourite example of an 'invented tradition' in the Pacific literature):

When you start talking about political structures, Fijian chiefly hierarchy, you can call it traditional, but it's not really tradition. If you look at the history of it, that structure of hierarchy which we still maintain, what we call the Fijian confederacies — Tovata confederacy, and so on — are constructs of the colonial period. (Dakuvula 1993.)<sup>26</sup>

I've only come to realise myself very recently . . . just how much the British are responsible for setting up the Fijian system. It wasn't the Fijians at all; it

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<sup>23</sup>A further concept which touches upon matters of identity — that of indigenosity — is discussed in Chapter Six.

<sup>24</sup>The term 'straw dog' is one I recently saw used as a nonsexist alternative to 'straw man' (and which I consider preferable to the other proposed alternative of 'straw person').

<sup>25</sup>Rarely would I specifically discuss 'the invention of tradition' with interviewees; rather, their awareness of those debates would become apparent when I would ask more general questions about tradition and change.

<sup>26</sup>See also Dakuvula (1992: 71); Durutalo (1993b: 3).

was the British [who created] the tradition. . . . [Fijians] believe that the present system's always been [there]. They've been taught to believe by the big ones, "We've always been here, this has been the way it's done, and don't ask questions!" But if you go backwards a hundred years, it's [untrue]. (Keith-Reid 1993.)

It was all invention. Peter France's book *The Charter of the Land*. If you find a copy of *The Charter of the Land* in Fiji without being bugged, you'll be very lucky. The library copy is lost. . . . Basically, a lot of Fijians are unaware. . . . These [political] systems you're preserving very often [are] really a colonial creation. But not many people know that. . . . If they knew, they'd be very worried about it. (Baba 1993.)

But would they? Would they be *very* worried about it? I once thought so, but I am no longer so sure. While it would probably make them regard their present traditions in new ways, would they necessarily regard them with concern? While it may provide a rhetorical weapon against those who oppose change on the grounds that existing traditions are the only possible 'authentic' ones (and I will give examples in later chapters that suggest it does), the fact that new traditions were imposed in the past might not in itself be of any greater concern than if they had been freely adopted; as I have demonstrated here, most Fijians and Tongans are quite comfortable with the idea that tradition changes.

The question scarcely arises in Tonga, which strictly speaking suffered no colonial impositions, even though, of course, its history has been influenced by Europeans over the last century and a half. Tongans are well-educated, and are aware that changes have taken place in their country in that time. Yet they are still, as previously shown, proud of their Tongan identity. This may well be because they feel that *they* have shaped those changes in their tradition. But if that is true of Tongans, it must be almost as true of Fijians: after all, 'colonially imposed' traditions have not stood still in the interim, and Fiji has now been independent for a generation.

Perhaps the clearest demonstration that Fijians and Tongans can embrace foreign ways and happily make them their own is given by their whole-hearted adoption of Christianity. There is no clearer example of a foreign influence: Fijians and Tongans know that Christianity came from the West. Yet they practice Christianity with a fervour which far exceeds that of today's secular Westerners. They have made a Christian tradition of their own. Why should examples of foreign-imposed political institutions be of greater concern than the example of a foreign-imposed religion (or even one freely adopted)? Religion (or the lack of one) surely influences people's lives to a similarly significant extent.

Another problem with the view that Fijians and Tongans would be worried about past impositions of tradition is this: in the process of becoming aware of such 'invented traditions' as the Council of Chiefs — i.e., in the process of learning more about their history — they would surely also become aware of other changes, imposed or not, for which they would feel grateful:

They say Fijians are very caring, very communal-minded, they would look to look after extended family; but reading some old publications, we had a very realistic society. If you were sick and didn't recover after two weeks or so, they killed you, because you became a burden. (Tabakaucoro 1993.)

Senator Adi Finau Tabakaucoro showed no sign of regret over the passing of that particular tradition; neither, it would be safe to say, would most modern Fijians. The same would go for many other traditions which disappeared as a result of colonial rule. Why should the replacement of various political institutions by others be singled out of all these changes as a matter for special regret? Perhaps the best argument that they should not (and would not) be came from Paul Geraghty, when I asked him if Fijians were aware that the British had invented the Council of Chiefs, and whether it mattered to them:

I think some are aware, some are not; [but] very few care. [It's] not terribly important, because it has become a tradition. Whether you like it or not, people talk in terms of provinces and *tikina*, which were never part of life before the colonial government. They have become tradition.<sup>27</sup>

The Great Council of Chiefs was a British invention, but nowadays the British have nothing whatsoever to do with it. It's run by Fijians, and Fijians make all the decisions about how it goes; if 120 years of something running continuously doesn't make it a tradition then what does? Probably a lot of Fijians know that it's a colonial innovation, and that it wasn't around before the 1870s, but they don't even care, because it's not important. Tradition is not measured in terms of the actual number of years that something's been in operation, it's measured in terms of acceptance; and if the feeling is that most of the chiefs, who are the important people in Fiji, now accept this as their own institution by which Fijians are to be governed, then so be it — that's acceptable, [and it] doesn't matter how it came about. I mean, all the institutions prior to that were originated by Tongans.

It is important in the sense that it can show you how traditions can arise, but I think the problem there is more in the minds of Europeans than it is in the minds of Fijians. They are astonished that something that was devised by Europeans should now become accepted as [being] traditional Fijian; but it doesn't bother [Fijians], so why should they be worried about it? (Geraghty 1993.)<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>He added, 'It's like what happened in Ireland. In Ireland, the counties were set up by the English. They have no meaning whatsoever. But nowadays Irish men would die for their counties, almost — on the playing fields.' (Geraghty 1993.)

<sup>28</sup>Some Fijians said essentially the same:

At the grassroots level . . . they see the Council of Chiefs as a Fijian gathering of our traditional leaders. If you talked to the average Fijian, they probably wouldn't know how it originated. Some people probably think — because I've read it in a newspaper myself; even the Taukei nationalists would think — [that] the Council of Chiefs was there even before the British came.

[But] if I argued, "The Council of Chiefs is not really a Fijian body; it was formed by others. Our century has brought them together; we never had anything like that, so why listen to them? They are not a traditional body," that won't wash with Fijians. It doesn't matter. What matters is now. The Council of Chiefs is at the apex of Fijian nationalism, the Fijian nation. (Dakuvula 1993.)

(Footnote continues on next page.)

There may be one reason why we should single out 'invented-tradition' political institutions as a matter of concern. As I argued earlier in this chapter, the traditions of a political system ideally must stay more relevant to the needs of a society than other traditions, because it is through the political system that change is negotiated. One might therefore argue that Sir Arthur Gordon, for example, was imposing upon Fijians institutions (such as the Council of Chiefs) which were less relevant to their needs than their own institutions.

But whether that is true is highly debatable, and that debate would not necessarily be clearly won by Gordon's critics. Given the prevailing circumstances of the time — i.e., that Fiji was in the process of being colonised by a foreign power and was being subjected to many other influences from that foreign power — one could argue that Gordon acted properly. When a society is being colonised by a foreign power, it needs political institutions which can deal with foreign influences. In these circumstances a pre-colonial political system (unused to those influences) runs the risk of becoming irrelevant to its society's needs. Gordon could be said to have been doing Fijians a service by creating for them new political institutions better suited than their own to dealing with their new colonial rulers.

Again, whether *that* is true is debatable, and I do not wish to debate it further here; as far as Fiji is concerned, it is a question for historians to consider. The question of concern to today's Fijians and Tongans, rather, should be whether their traditional political institutions (whether 'authentic', 'invented', or simply *traditional*) are relevant to their societies *now*. And that, therefore, should be the important question for political scientists too.

The people with whom I spoke conceived of tradition in various ways, often sophisticated, and the signs were that their fellow Fijians and Tongans do the same. Clearly, there was an awareness that tradition has changed, and must change in order to stay relevant to their lives. Laitia Fifita, at least, felt that this process of change should be more conscious and formal: 'I think culture should be brought up from time to time, discussed by elderly people, especially church people; it needs a renovation all the time' (Fifita 1993).

In the next chapter I will discuss the existing political systems of Fiji and Tonga and the role tradition plays in them; and in the chapters after that, some of the forces which are creating the challenges those systems (and those traditions) must meet. Jone

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Not many [Fijians] are aware that it's a colonial creation, except for Fijian scholars like me; down at the grassroots they really think it's an indigenous Fijian institution. But then it's like the *lotu*, Christianity, which has become Fijianised if you like. Yes, it was brought in by Gordon, but as a result of its evolution over a hundred years it's got a life of its own. It's so embedded in the Fijian psyche . . . that it's pretty hard to get rid of it. (Durutalo 1993a.)



Dakuvula, while recognising the challenges facing Fijians and implying that a collective approach would best meet them, hinted at the powerful unconscious and undirected forces at work in changing Fijian tradition and Fijian society:

I would define tradition as what people decide to create for themselves in order to preserve their solidarity, in order to make their life meaningful; in order to preserve the social structure, political structure. . . . A big challenge I see the Fijian people facing now [is] to be able to maintain solidarity and stability in the foreseeable future by being innovative. We want to preserve a chiefly [arrangement] . . . so [that] the symbolic importance of it as a unifying force is preserved. If we don't do that then we might as well just coast along and become a more individual type of society. More like the West. (Dakuvula 1993.)

Through innovation, tradition can meet the challenges facing Fijians and Tongans; through change it can remain relevant. And Fijians and Tongans feel, not surprisingly, that they gain strength by having traditions which remain relevant to them. As one member of a noble family in Tonga described it to me, the cycles of society are like the cycles of life: you crawl when you are a child, then you walk, and then you crawl again in old age; Tonga, he said, needs its traditions, because 'if you keep your traditions, your customs, then you can walk, not crawl; you feel young' (Havea 1993).

Or, as Princess Siu'ilikutapu put it: 'Let's all remember our past. Then we would be more subtle about living.' (Siu'ilikutapu 1993.)



## Chapter Four

### Tradition in the Political Process

*Fijian society and politics go [back] nearly 3,000 years; once they'd developed to a state in which they had a leader, and a form directed by this leader, they [were] practising politics. So when you ask what the role is of Fijian tradition in national politics, I think it's just the extension of their indigenous political life into modern political systems, except that [leaders] have their constituents in the area of their traditional leadership. (Mara 1993.)*

All writers work in the context of what has been written in their fields; the first writer on a subject writes in a different way than the thirtieth. In an established field a particular tradition of writing develops, a tradition to which many (often unconsciously) conform.

Academic writing on Pacific politics has developed a tradition which might appear curious when viewed from the mainstream of political science. Some writers rely on what might be called 'the momentum of history' to carry their arguments: studies of contemporary Pacific politics are often preceded by lengthy historical accounts stretching back to pre-contact times.<sup>1</sup>

The reason is not difficult to fathom: academics studying the Pacific are often writing for a non-Pacific audience who know little of this history. But how much does one need to know? One might reasonably assume that few Australians, for example, would know the details of Australia's federation, but despite this only some studies of Australian politics recount those details. An overriding assumption exists that by discussing the present-day legacies of history one can incidentally inform readers about those elements of history they need to know in order to understand contemporary events.

Historians might question this assumption, and I would certainly not dispute that history can offer valuable insights into the roots of contemporary problems. But it can rarely offer a complete explanation, because people's knowledge and awareness of their history evolves in a similar way to their traditions. Rather than offering us a clear window on the past, popular representations of history refract our views and understandings of the past like crystal.<sup>2</sup> In some sense, we see only the history that we

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<sup>1</sup>Discussions of Fiji's Council of Chiefs, for example, are often prefixed by an account of its creation at the time of cession. For an example of my own adherence to this tradition, see Ewins (1992b: 13-15, 29-30).

<sup>2</sup>Historians enjoy a deeper, though never complete, understanding of the past, but their influence over contemporary debate (like that of most academics) is usually limited, as was demonstrated in Fijians' discussions in the last chapter of the minimal impact of the

want to see. Many Tongans, for example, see the King as simply the latest in a long line of rulers going back centuries, although the monarchy in its present form was established barely more than a century ago by his great-grandfather, George Tupou I. It is clearly in the government's interests to reinforce this perception of continuity however it can. As one pro-democracy parliamentarian said, Tongans 'worship Tupou I and the constitution, but they're never taught that what he did was really a revolution' (Fukofuka 1993). Thus the significance or broader meaning of past events can also be distorted (or, to use a more neutral term, changed) by the way in which history is transmitted.

All historians confront these problems (historiographers study them), but the need for students of contemporary events to do the same is open to question. Why ask, either directly or indirectly, whether current events accurately reflect the values and practices of the distant past when those events are products of the values and practices of today (which may or may not be similar)?<sup>3</sup> Too great a focus on history in contemporary studies may even lead us to assume that past values and practices apply in these countries today, an assumption which can lead us to misinterpret contemporary events or to be caught unawares when change occurs (witness the surprise caused among international observers by the dramatic events in Eastern Europe of 1989). I do not mean by this that all history is misleading, but rather that if every study is dutifully prefixed by an extensive discussion of historical background then one can end up believing that, for example, 'chiefs and commoners have always been this way, and so always will be'. Although history can tell us much about the roots of contemporary politics, it cannot explain everything; it should be equally valid to focus upon contemporary events if they are what one wishes to explain, which is what many political scientists studying other countries and topics do.

Therefore, I am breaking with this tradition. This study contains no potted histories of Fiji or Tonga; historical details are discussed here only when they are directly relevant, or provide some particularly useful contrast with contemporary change.<sup>4</sup> This chapter, instead, examines the status quo: the political systems of Fiji and Tonga in the early

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'invention of tradition' debate on the wider community. Even the history taught in schools offers only a partial picture of the past, a picture sometimes skewed by unspoken educational agendas; and even that picture can be further distorted by students' own experiences (such as missing lessons because of illness).

<sup>3</sup>To ask whether contemporary events accurately reflect past values is different from asking whether they reflect past values in any way. The latter is a perfectly valid question, and is obviously important for anyone who wishes to study the long-term changes in a particular tradition or culture.

<sup>4</sup>That said, those in search of historical accounts would be well-served by Campbell (1989) and Howe et al. (1994) for general histories of the Pacific; by Campbell (1992c), Latukefu (1974), and Rutherford (1977) for historical accounts of Tonga; by France (1969), Routledge (1985), Sayes (1984), Scarr (1984), and N. Thomas (1986) for accounts of pre-colonial and early colonial Fiji; and by Lal (1992a), S. Lawson (1991a), Macnaught (1982), and Sutherland (1992) for accounts of twentieth-century Fiji. Also noteworthy for his vivid and witty accounts of Fiji and Tonga is Kenneth Bain (1967; 1989; 1993). On some of the difficulties facing Pacific historians, see Kolo (1990).

1990s, their traditional elements, the problems surrounding them, and the political challenges they face, to lead into subsequent chapters on the wider social forces behind those challenges.

### Fiji's Political System

Fiji's current political system is not traditional — not yet, at least. To say otherwise would be to ignore the upheaval of the past decade, including Rabuka's 14 May 1987 coup, the suspension of the 1970 constitution which had been in operation since Fiji's independence from Britain, the declaration of a republic after a second intervention by Rabuka and the army late in 1987, and the proclamation of a completely rewritten constitution in July 1990. I arrived in Fiji to conduct my fieldwork only a year after the first elections had been held under that constitution in May 1992. Fiji's political system was still very new — as it arguably still is in 1995.

It will be some years before the system itself is familiar enough to be considered traditional. Fiji's political system does contain prominent traditional *elements*, however; and it is these elements with which this study is concerned.<sup>5</sup>

Fiji is a country of some three-quarters of a million people of diverse racial origins.<sup>6</sup> No racial group forms a clear majority of the population; the two largest are the descendents of the pre-European-contact inhabitants of Fiji (Fijians, who comprise 49.7 percent of the population) and the descendents of indentured labourers brought to Fiji from India by the British colonial government from 1879 (Fiji Indians, 45.3 percent).<sup>7</sup> Other groups include Europeans (mostly of British colonial ancestry), part-Europeans (the local term for people of mixed Anglo-Fijian ancestry), Chinese (many of whom have married into the Fijian population), and Pacific islanders (of non-Fijian ancestry). Fiji

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<sup>5</sup>The desire to see those elements protected, I have previously argued, was the main motivating force behind the supporters and perpetrators of the coup (Ewins 1992b).

<sup>6</sup>Precise figures are unavailable, the last comprehensive census having been conducted in 1986 (before the coup prompted significant emigration).

<sup>7</sup>Figures are 1992 estimates from the Fiji Bureau of Statistics (Lal 1994: 35). The question of what names various Fiji citizens should be known by continues to vex Fiji, which has seen various attempts over the years to solve the problem (the issue has been raised again in 1995 by Rabuka, who has proposed that all Fiji citizens should be known as 'Fijians'). As a foreigner I feel it is inappropriate for me to enter this debate, whether directly or by leading by example (such as by using an unusual term throughout this dissertation). While the label 'Indo-Fijian' for the descendents of Indian indentured labourers is popular in certain circles in Fiji, it is not the term generally used by the public. While I do feel that the term 'Indo-Fijian' has connotations of racial admixture which are inappropriate (besides which, I have never seen white Fiji citizens labelled 'Anglo-Fijians'), if that were the accepted term I would use it; but it is not. In this matter I take as my guide the still strong Fiji tradition (i.e., not only Fijian tradition) of referring to Fijians, Indians, Chinese, Europeans, and part-Europeans.

also encompasses the outlying island of Rotuma, the Polynesian inhabitants of which form a distinct (but small) sub-population.

Race remains an unavoidable facet of Fiji life. The policies of colonial governments kept Fijians and Indians separate — geographically and in other respects — and separation, as the experience of many countries has shown, breeds mistrust, fear, dislike, and sometimes even hatred between different racial and cultural groups. Fiji has experienced all of these symptoms to some extent, and the seventeen years following independence were not long enough to eradicate them.

The political importance of race was reinforced by the 1970 constitution, which determined both the structure of parliament and the electoral system along racial lines.<sup>8</sup> Pre-independence proposals for all seats to be elected on the basis of a common roll were rejected, giving Fiji politics little room to evolve in a non-racial direction. Thus, when a government perceived by many Fijians as 'Indian-dominated' was elected in 1987,<sup>9</sup> it found itself in an unforgiving political environment. Rabuka gave race as his pretext for the coup, and it was certainly an important aspect of the events of 1987 and the years immediately following.

The 1990 constitution attempted to remove Indians from the political picture, at least where playing a major role in government was concerned.<sup>10</sup> Any attempt to provide approximately equitable apportionment of seats among races (i.e., according to the relative population of each) was abandoned, with Fijians being allotted a clear majority of seats (37 out of 70) in the reconstituted House of Representatives (the house of the prime minister — who now could only be a Fijian — and the government). Of the remaining seats, 27 went to Indians, 1 to Rotumans, and 5 to those who fitted none of the other categories. 'The Indian community are really the victims of this constitution,' said one politician; 'There's nobody else as aggrieved as us' (Chaudhry 1993).

The complicated voting arrangements of the previous electoral system, which had allowed each race some say in the voting for particular candidates of other races, were replaced by strictly communal voting. Fijians, for example, can now vote only for Fijians. The presence in the House of some seats elected on a national basis has also been eliminated; Fijian seats are unevenly allotted among Fiji's 14 provinces (the

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<sup>8</sup>The House of Representatives (the seat of government in the bicameral parliament) consisted of 22 Fijian seats, 22 Indian seats, and 8 others. The electoral system was complicated, with seats allocated by race, some common-roll voting and some voting according to race. For a brief description of the system and some of its effects, see Ewins (1992b: 18-20, 67 (note 23)).

<sup>9</sup>Bavadra's government consisted of 19 Indians, 7 Fijians, and 2 representing other races (or 'General Electors'). His cabinet, however, consisted of 7 Indians, 7 (initially 6) Fijians, and 1 General Elector; cabinet had 'never been so balanced'. (Robertson and Tamanisau 1988: 61.)

<sup>10</sup>Information here regarding the composition of parliament is drawn directly from the constitution (Government of the Republic of Fiji 1990: ch. 4).

provincial system being a colonial legacy which is now part of Fijian tradition), with five reserved for urban areas.<sup>11</sup>

The role of Fijian traditional authority in the system becomes more obvious in the upper house, as was discussed by the President of the Senate:

The Senate was really based around the House of Lords. In the draft constitution the proposal was that it be a House of Chiefs, but as the discussions went into the representation not only of Fijians but of other races . . . it was changed [to] carry the name of the Senate of Fiji through, which takes in every member and every race. (Cokaunoto 1993.)

The name may remain neutral, but the role of the chiefs remains central. The Council of Chiefs,<sup>12</sup> the chiefs' main deliberative body, nominates 24 of the 34 senators (who may or may not be Council of Chiefs members); and the president of Fiji — who is himself nominated by the Council of Chiefs, thus guaranteeing that he will be a high chief — nominates another nine 'from other communities' (the last being chosen by the Council of Rotuma).<sup>13</sup> Together, these unelected senators hold great power, should they choose to exercise it, and not only over ordinary legislation sent to them by the House:<sup>14</sup>

It's a watchdog, but it also has great responsibilities. No review of the Constitution is possible without a [two-thirds] Senate majority, including no less than 18 of the 24 [Council of Chiefs-nominated] members, so it's fairly watertight. It's like a floodgate: when the tide is going against it, when it sees it's to the betterment of all [and] it doesn't reduce Fijians' influence or authority in [their] own land, then there'll be an easing of the floodgates so it's able to accommodate the rising tide or the ebbing tide. (Cokaunoto 1993.)

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<sup>11</sup>Significant imbalances occur in the apportionment of seats among urban and rural areas; this is discussed in Chapter Seven. Note also that this system does not apply to seats for other races, for which Fiji is divided into 27, 5, and 1 single-member constituencies.

<sup>12</sup>Throughout this dissertation I refer to the Council by this name, although it is also known as the 'Great Council of Chiefs'. Either name, according to Fijian-language expert Paul Geraghty (personal communication), is an accepted translation of the Fijian name for the Council, *Bose Levu Vakaturaga*.

<sup>13</sup>The result is a significant difference in style between the two houses:

Members of the House of Representatives have been elected by the people, so they do feel that they have a mandate, and also that they have to listen to what their constituents are saying; they have to take it up in parliament. Up there in the Senate they have been appointed by the Great Council of Chiefs [and] by the President; there's a big difference in approach. (Kubuabola 1993.)

And, for reasons which will become clearer later, it poses difficulties for Prime Minister Rabuka:

The Senate doesn't really owe Rabuka anything, because they were not appointed by him, they were appointed by the so-called Council of Chiefs. And Rabuka still hasn't got a hold on the Council of Chiefs. . . . Firstly, because of the presence of Ratu Mara, who tends to control the Council of Chiefs. . . . It's really a weak flank for Rabuka, the Council of Chiefs and the Senate. (Durutalo 1993a.)

<sup>14</sup>The Senate may also initiate legislation, whereas the pre-1987 Senate could not (Cokaunoto 1993).

The Senate thus wields far more power than the British House of Lords, and on behalf of a specific subsection of Fiji society. Fiji's appears to be a distorted Westminster system indeed, and certainly no model of representative democracy.<sup>15</sup>

The final sign in the early 1990s of the influence of traditional rulers over the political system as a whole was the creation by the Council of Chiefs of the *Soqosoqo Vakavulewa ni Taukei* (SVT).<sup>16</sup> The SVT was intended to be a successor to the Alliance, the multiracial but predominantly Fijian party which had governed Fiji under Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara from 1970 to 1987, and was supposed to unite Fijians:<sup>17</sup>

The Great Council of Chiefs thought that if we got all of the Fijians together . . . then the result would be good for the Fijian people. If they try to dis-integrate from the whole Fijian body, and try to form their own political parties, from there there will be trouble, because the people will go on their own way, join that party and join this party, and . . . there will be no unity in the Fijian people. (Tonawai 1993.)

A seemingly foolproof system was in place. A written constitution promised an eventual end to the post-coup unelected 'interim' military governments which had attracted so much international and internal criticism. That constitution, although conceding some seats to Indians, promised domination of parliament and hence government by Fijians and their chiefs; and the SVT provided the vehicle for that domination. Fijian tradition would be protected:<sup>18</sup>

The chiefly power that was waning was reinforced again, reorganised and restructured, which was what the whole military coup was all about. The Council of Chiefs now is a revamped Council of Chiefs; the chiefs have got

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<sup>15</sup>Both Rabuka and Ratu Mara have expressed their dissatisfaction with the 1990 constitution. In 1990 Rabuka said, 'I'm not happy with it. But if the chiefs are happy I'll go along with it.' (*Pacific Islands Monthly*, August 1990, p. 13.) Mara recently said of the 1970 constitution, 'I still believe that it is the best constitution, not only in Fiji but in the world.' (*The Review*, April 1995, p. 18.)

<sup>16</sup>The Council of Chiefs approved the formation of the SVT in June 1990 (Lal 1992b: 387). *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei* literally means 'The Association for Policy-Making by Fijians' (Durutalo and Hau'ofa 1993: 69), but is usually translated as 'Fijian Political Party'.

<sup>17</sup>The SVT announces its unifying purpose in its constitution's first words: 'The Fijian people have formed this Party . . .' (*Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei* n.d.: 1.)

<sup>18</sup>Despite the constitution's detailed protections of people's various rights in its second chapter — though with exceptions, such as section 13(2)(d)'s allowance of restrictions of freedom of expression 'for the purpose of protecting the reputation, the dignity and esteem of institutions and values of the Fijian people, in particular the Bose Levu Vakaturaga and the traditional Fijian system' — those rights can effectively be overturned at any time by parliament should it consider Fijian interests to be under threat (see also Johnson (1990)):

Notwithstanding anything contained in Chapter II of this Constitution Parliament shall, with the object of promoting and safeguarding the economic, social, educational, cultural, traditional and other interests of the Fijian people, enact laws for those objects and shall direct the Government to adopt any programme or activity for the attainment of the said objects and the Government shall duly comply with such directions. (Government of the Republic of Fiji 1990: ch. 3, sec. 21(1).)



more power by this constitution than they ever had hopes for. In a sense the coup was a counter-revolution [against] what they defined as a breakdown of Fijian culture and custom, meaning the chiefs' power. (Durutalo 1993a.)

Indeed, the casual observer might think that these traditionalist goals were achieved. The hero of the coup (as many Fijians saw him), Sitiveni Rabuka, succeeded Mara as prime minister after the May 1992 election,<sup>19</sup> a position he has retained after a second election in early 1994. The first president of Fiji, Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau (also Fiji's last governor-general until 1987, and one of its highest chiefs) was succeeded upon his death in late 1993 by Mara. And chiefs seem to be everywhere — as a Fijian friend said, 'All of a sudden there's just been so many Ratus.'

But matters have not gone as smoothly as first impressions might suggest. Even a year after the 1992 election, it was clear that Fijian tradition was changing, and that chiefs were facing challenges to their authority — not from the eternal scapegoats, the Indians, but from Fijians.

### The Council of Chiefs

In mid-1993 Rabuka faced some major and thorny political problems. One was the pressure from opposition quarters to review the 1990 constitution and redress its inequities. Another was his own proposal for a government of national unity (GNU) of all races, which stemmed from a recognition that continuing to govern with a cabinet which excluded almost half the population (Indians) might create unnecessary political difficulties (not least by denying government a valuable pool of talent from which to draw). These two proposals became linked in the eyes of the public, and became the first major test of the new government.

Rabuka's solution said much about the ambiguous political environment in which he was operating. He abdicated his government's right to make a decision on these matters in favour of the Council of Chiefs. The proposals were taken, in late May, to the Council's first meeting since the 1992 election; and its members avoided the uncomfortable option of pronouncing 'yea' or 'nay' by instructing that the proposals be 'taken back to the people', by which they meant provincial Fijians.

In some respects Rabuka's move was entirely practical: there was no point in pushing a proposal through the House only for it to be rejected by a Council-dominated Senate or his own Council-backed party.<sup>20</sup> And many in Fiji recognised the practical reasons behind his behaviour, even if they were sometimes critical of them:

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<sup>19</sup>Ratu Mara had been serving as prime minister until that time, having been reinstated by Rabuka after the coup. He retired at the May 1992 election.

<sup>20</sup>The constitution, in fact, appears to require such action, as seen in its chapter on 'Fijian and Rotuman interests':

He's basically trying to make sure that he's on the right side of the chiefs. . . . The rank and file of Fijians I'm sure [will] accept whatever Rabuka does. (Nata 1993.)

It's a political strategy for him. Instead of taking it to the SVT political party caucus, he takes it to the chiefs, because he knows that what all the chiefs decide will preempt any useful discussion within the party caucus. (Tabakaucoro 1993.)

Opinion [within the SVT] on the so-called government of national unity is pretty much divided. . . . The Council of Chiefs is a sort of consensus builder for the ruling party, [which it sponsors]. [Its] resolution on this question of national unity would be quite influential in determining what the party policy is going to be, and also defining for other Fijians whether to support the move or not. . . . The endorsement or the non-endorsement of the Council of Chiefs meeting now will be quite crucial for the survival of the concept. . . . [Rabuka] can't lose. . . . If it goes ahead then it's a great victory for him politically, because he's [brought] the chiefs around to his point of view. But if [it] doesn't . . . he can say, "Well, what else can I do? I'm a loyal Fijian, and I raised it in the Council of Chiefs; I thought this idea was good, but in their greater wisdom they thought it was not. . . . Don't blame me; I tried." (Durutalo 1993a.)

They're using this particular instrument for their own ends. [They] give them due deference and [a] sense of importance, but at the same time they know that Fijian people generally respect their chiefs, so they are just playing politics with the institution. (Chaudhry 1993.)

But many tempered their recognition of these practicalities with questions about their implications for both the Council and parliament:

It seems that the government is unwilling to move without seeking the blessings of the Great Council of Chiefs on all important issues affecting the country. This means that parliament takes the back stage. The constitution does provide for the supremacy of parliament, but in fact that isn't happening in important matters like the review of the constitution. (Chaudhry 1993.)

It really makes more important decisions than either house of parliament. Whatever the Council of Chiefs says, that is to be carried out; that's an important resolution. . . . Everybody's well aware, but then [nobody points] out, "How come this bunch of guys who were never elected by

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In the exercise of its functions under this section, the Cabinet shall act in consultation with the Bose Levu Vakaturaga, or the Council of Rotuma, as the circumstances may require. (Government of the Republic of Fiji 1990: ch. 3, sec. 21(3).)

The Council of Chiefs' most prominent member even implied that the government had been too tardy in consulting with it:

The Council of Chiefs could be a very useful instrument for any government if it's used properly and respected. You've got to go to them with your policy, after you've developed it or [when you] are in the process of developing it, try to get them on your side, and once you get them on side you have no problem. But if you started the way they've done, and go on for one year [and] come out with some very basic and controversial issues . . . without consulting the Great Council of Chiefs, [then] when you consult them after a year they'll make pleasant noises, but whether they're behind you is another point. (Mara 1993.)

anybody now determine our fate?"<sup>21</sup> We have this joke, our own parliament, sitting there, which we spent a lot of time fighting and campaigning for, but they're useless, in the sense that the Council of Chiefs can override any of their decisions. (Durutalo 1993a.)

[On] matters regarding land and the constitution the Senate members [nominated by] the Council of Chiefs have to all agree before any change is made. So there's really no need for the government to keep referring [issues] to the Council of Chiefs. . . . Probably the reason is insecurity on the part of Rabuka, being a commoner, and having to deal with the chiefs at different levels. (J. Moala 1993.)

He is [attempting] to make the Council of Chiefs into some [kind of surrogate] parliament. That is contradictory to [its] whole charter. . . . [It] has a historical mandate to deal with land customs and customary rights. But now the whole projects of the nation [are] being discussed in the Council of Chiefs. (Baba 1993.)

[Its present meeting is] not open; it's closed to the press, which is rather annoying. There's supposed to be a briefing, but there hasn't been. . . . They used to be open in the old days, . . . but now they're acting like it's their own private club. (Keith-Reid 1993.)

The *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* is in a position where if it's not careful how it's managed [it] will discredit itself, and the discredit will come not from anybody else but from the Fijians. Now that may not necessarily be a bad thing; that may be a positive development. But the fear that I have is that one or two stupid idiots who are [actually] senior ministers might want to manipulate it for their own personal ends. If they do that then the whole Fijian race will suffer. (Anonymous 1993.)<sup>22</sup>

What eventually happens if the government of the day doesn't see eye-to-eye with the chiefs: which particular views will prevail? (Chaudhry 1993.)

The situation had been quite different in the past:

Before 1987 the constitution didn't recognise the Great Council of Chiefs. So in all their meetings they made recommendations, resolutions, all these things, which were quite useless; [they were] just filed away and no one bothered [with them]. Their role then, at that time, was mostly to advise the governor-general on matters concerning the Fijians, and it was up to the governor-general to decide whether [it was] good advice or not. (J. Moala 1993.)<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>In the weeks after my interview with Durutalo, people such as Labour Party leader Mahendra Chaudhry and *Islands Business Pacific* publisher Robert Keith-Reid did begin to ask such questions publicly.

<sup>22</sup>A Fijian civil servant.

<sup>23</sup>One minister interpreted the 1990 constitution as an attempt to regain power for the Council which it had lost at independence:

At the Deed of Cession, the Council of Chiefs was the operating authority. During the colonial period, under British rule, [it] was still the authority on [matters] Fijian. [On] anything that was akin to Fijian culture [and] custom, [the colonial government of the day] would listen to the Council of Chiefs. And when [the] Council of Chiefs made a decision, that came into effect. (Footnote continues on next page.)

Pre-coup, the Council of Chiefs still had to meet and endorse these things, but it wasn't so politicised. The Council of Chiefs was basically a rubber stamp of Ratu Mara; . . . whatever [he] brought up they okayed. . . . Now everything's different. It's, "Hey, you people can't just make the decisions from the top; we've got to discuss it. [The reasons have] got to be explained to us." (Dakuvula 1993.)<sup>24</sup>

Rabuka had been 'very successful [and clever] in getting the Council of Chiefs to see things his way' said one Council member, who added, 'I feel the Council of Chiefs is not exercising . . . what I perceive to be its rightful role, because it should have said, "This is not an issue that we have to deal with." We should have looked at the constitution.' (Anonymous 1993.)

What do Fijians perceive to be the rightful role of the Council? I heard a wide range of views:

The Great Council of Chiefs has a very great role in our society, because we see the Council as the supreme group of people who have [a] say [on] whatever we do, our culture and traditions. The Great Council of Chiefs is a place where we can voice our complaints, from the village level [to the] provincial, and then to the Great Council of Chiefs. . . . Anything which concerns the Fijian people, they are the ones who can bring [that] back to the government, and the government sees that the Great Council of Chiefs can look after the Fijian people. (Tonawai 1993.)

The Great Council of Chiefs is really the highest consultative body which Fijian politics has, and that encompasses both tradition and customs. (Cokaunoto 1993.)

In all matters pertaining to Fijians it should really be paramount — [mainly] in terms of land. Any major developments, financial investments and those things, should be referred to the Council of Chiefs. At the moment the Council of Chiefs gives its blessing to any major policy that our government proposes, like the Government of National Unity. At the moment, rightly so, because the party I belong to, the SVT, is a Council-of-Chiefs-sponsored party.

I think that the Council of Chiefs should be above politics. It should be like it was in the past: that it gives its blessings to all Fijian political parties. . . . Because then it retains its supremacy, rather than coming down to the level of politics. . . . It appears [from] the last [meeting] . . . that the Council of Chiefs is playing less and less role in the SVT. . . . I think the Council of

After independence it was a different story; . . . [the] Council of Chiefs was just a sounding board. Whatever they decided, they [had] to present to government again. If the legislature was against it, it was finished. So the original power of the Council of Chief was diminished after independence. The Fijians saw that as synonymous to losing out over the years since independence. That's why when they made this constitution they [made the Council of Chiefs] their base. (Kalou 1993.)

<sup>24</sup>This new questioning attitude among Fijians was probably also responsible for the Council's deferral of major decisions:

[They are] going to take it back to the provinces and consult with the people. That sort of practice was not very common in the old days, even pre-coup. There wasn't a great deal of debate. . . . I reckon this is a very positive development. (Dakuvula 1993.)

Chiefs didn't really see [itself as] playing a major role. It wanted to be the initiator. (Vakatale 1993.)

It's good to have the Great Council of Chiefs, but they should not interfere with politics. They should be above politics. . . . [Then] if you have problems in provincial politics, [you] can always go back to the Great Council of Chiefs to listen to their advice. If the Great Council of Chiefs plays party politics, . . . if we have problems there, we can't go anywhere else. So we fight among ourselves. (Matatolu 1993.)

[It was] the only authority that maintained law and order after the coup — if it wasn't for the Council of Chiefs I don't know what would have happened. Because the Council of Chiefs existed and because it was called, the people realised the army could not do anything really drastic unless the Council of Chiefs [approved], because they have their own influence on the army officers. . . . You can't make progress unless you have law and order. If you believe the Council of Chiefs can play a role in maintaining law and order, and you encourage that, then you're free to bring out ideas and develop policies, because there is law and order, and they will discuss it sensibly and give you their views. (Mara 1993.)

The main role of the Council of Chiefs now and in the past has been to prop up the administration. . . . In the colonial days it was an organisation which the governor used to justify whatever actions he was doing or to prop up [his] authority in the country. The membership has always been questionable; . . . today when the government selects a Council of Chiefs, obviously [it] will have to select people who will support it. A good example is [that] the paramount chief of Nadroga is not a member of the Great Council of Chiefs. For what reason no one knows. Just because she doesn't think on the same lines as the government. (Anonymous 1993.)<sup>25</sup>

They want to tie the chiefly system into a modern system, and it won't work. . . . Before they had the Great Council of Chiefs hanging around and [not interfering]; that's the way it should be. That way people . . . will be happy with the chiefs, and will happily go about doing commerce, and [will] happily be Fijian. . . . What we've done now is invented our traditional system, that's all. They've come to assume that Fijianess is defined by the ascendancy of the chief. When they talk about the paramountcy of Fijian interests, it's not [that] really; what they're looking at is the paramountcy of the chiefs, not Fijians. They're not the same.

Rabuka chose the traditional chiefs for his support. . . . He needed a power base. . . . I think it was supposed to be a marriage of convenience. . . . He's going [into] an alliance with the chiefs, and bringing up the chiefs as almost the arbiter for everything for Fijians. But they are trying to turn the clock back. He's a very modern guy, Rabuka, and I think he opened up a Pandora's Box that he never intended. I think some of his vacillating at the moment is to do with that. He's a bit awkward with the idea of having a democratic government and at the same time having chiefs having so much power unelected, particularly as there are a lot of chiefs who don't deliver. (Anonymous A 1993.)

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<sup>25</sup>A Fijian journalist.

## The Chiefly System

By now, certain questions become unavoidable: who *are* the chiefs, and what is their standing? Two notable interviewees — government minister Ratu Inoke Kubuabola and SVT Secretary General Dr. Filimoni Wainiqolo — detailed the chiefs' formal hierarchical relationship with the Fijian people:

One has to understand the Fijian set-up to appreciate the importance that Fijians place on the Great Council of Chiefs. . . . The family unit is called a *tokatoka*. The next level up is a *mataqali*. . . . And that clan, *mataqali*, is made up of a number of families. . . . *Mataqali* make up *yavusa*. And then we have a village. In some cases we have some members of the *mataqali* in one village, [and] some could be in the next village.

Families have different traditional functions. A family could be a chiefly family, or [one] whose role is a warrior role, or a fisherman role or whatever. . . . In each *mataqali* there is a head — chief of the *mataqali*. And this *mataqali* is the legal owner of the land.

Then in the village you have a chief, or head of the village, [who comes] from these different *mataqalis*. Two, three, or even four *mataqalis* [could] make up the village. . . . From there, we have *tikinas*, or districts. For example, . . . the 158 villages in [my] province of Cakaudrove fall into fifteen *tikinas*. One *tikina* might have only three villages; the largest *tikina* in our province . . . [has] 28 villages.<sup>26</sup>

Then you have the provincial council. There's a *tikina* council, [and] there's also a village council down below. [The] village council elects who sits on the *tikina* council, and then from the *tikina* council they elect members into the provincial council, and from the provincial council they elect who should sit on the Great Council of Chiefs.

Sometimes people are misinformed . . . that the Great Council of Chiefs [is] only made of people who do not represent anybody. But no, the representation is coming right from below, from the family unit [through] to the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga*. So that's why it is very important. (Kubuabola 1993.)

The chiefs and the people are inseparable. One cannot exist without the other. The chiefs provide leadership, and the people carry out the decisions made, whether in the village, the *tikina*, or the *yavusa*.<sup>27</sup> The people implement the decisions to the best of their abilities in response to the chiefs' directives. And vice versa: when the people want anything, they approach the chiefs. This system has survived for centuries; it is difficult to move away from it in the space of twenty years (since independence). . . . [We are] born into

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<sup>26</sup>*Tikina* were formally abolished in 1967 (with their responsibilities subsumed by provinces), but underwent a revival in the 1980s (Macnaught 1974; Macnaught 1982: 157-158).

<sup>27</sup>One can see how confusion about the different hierarchical terms can arise in the minds of onlookers when the terms are freely intermingled in this way. *Tikina* is a geographical and administrative term, a kind of district, and should be considered in the same context as the village and the province. *Yavusa*, on the other hand, is the term for a kind of social group, and should be considered in the context of the hierarchy of social groups *itokatoka-mataqali-yavusa-vanua*. There is no direct correlation between the levels of the respective hierarchies, although some loose correlation can be observed.

hierarchy. [We] may rise out of it, but [only according to] the Fijian traditional system.

When talking of chiefs, we are talking of 215 *vanua* "superchiefs", overlords; 1390 *yavusa*, each headed by a chief; 5280 *mataqali*, each headed by a chief; and 9979 *tokatoka*. They all play very different roles. Three "overlords" play major roles: Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, and Adi Lady Lala Mara [wife of Ratu Mara]. To make matters more complex, these three are interrelated. In the Western division, Ba and Ra, the *mataqali* is the most important unit: though very small chiefs, they become important [because] they become very wealthy from lease money. Money tends to lead them by the nose. Small chiefs are becoming bigger chiefs by their wealth, which complicates the issue. If you reach my age you will see we are breaking down, we are slowly changing. In the Nadi area, the influence of the *mataqali* and *tokatoka* is very strong — they exert more [influence] than rank demands.

The most important role of the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* is to bring together the views of the 215 major chiefs to such an extent that a consensus is reached. When the people through Fiji know the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* has accepted an idea [they know] the idea is good. [This is its] greatest role. The *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* has remained the most important authority in this land. The highest, because it is where *all* leading chiefs meet and make decisions. (Wainiqolo 1993.)

Already these comments reveal that change is taking place in who wields authority, and how and why they do. The comments of others reinforce this:

When commentators, even politicians themselves, write about the Great Council of Chiefs or about "the chiefs", it's always in the context of the great influence and power that they have in Fijian society and in the wider society, particularly since '87. When you actually look at it, it's not true, because . . . the Fijian [traditionalist] classes [are] not really only those of chiefly rank. A lot . . . have acquired influence by way of education, important government positions; not merely by ascription. Fijians also become part of our system by achievement. And so the system is not really only "the Fijian chiefs" as a group, it's more a grouping of people including "the chiefs", or perhaps the more influential chiefs, and those that identify with them.

When you actually look at politics in this country since independence, it's been [Ganilau and Mara] who have largely dominated the political scene, and so that's been seen as an extension of chiefly influence. That is true to an extent, but when you actually look beyond the apex of the pyramid, it's actually far broader than that. They seem to be the most visible aspects of chiefly influence, but it's not only a question of chiefly influence because since independence most of the cabinet has been of chiefly rank anyway, and most of those of chiefly rank are more in the position where they exercise moral rather than any real authority. (Madraiwiwi 1993.)<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>The chiefs' hold on top parliamentary positions, reinforced through the SVT, today causes some disquiet among ambitious commoner Fijians:

[With] the system as it is now, there's no chance for commoners like us to get into parliament. . . . There's two [or three] seats in each province; . . . one of them will go to the chief, then the next one will go to the smaller chief. So that leaves hardly [any] room for [commoners]. (Nata 1993.)

I think it's the *end* of the Council of Chiefs, the end of the chiefly system. They may inscribe these institutions in the constitution, [which says people are] not to criticise these so-called traditional institutions — that reflects the fragility of these institutions. They're worried about criticism of institutions that are [themselves] dying, that are unable to take those kinds of criticisms. (Baba 1993.)

The chiefly system is breaking down, in the sense that right now there's a lot of contestation for the titles. Around Fiji there's a lot of chiefs who are operating as chiefs or being called chiefs or holding the title that are not formally installed. There's an absence of a more nationalised [installation] procedure which can uphold tradition, to legitimate certain successions, to enforce traditional succession principles in the installation of chiefs.<sup>29</sup> . . . I would reckon that a majority of those guys are not [there because of] tradition. Some of them have said that they've just taken the title because their father got too old or something.

[If] we want to preserve the chiefly system, then we are going to have to put in place some goals . . . which set the procedure for installation of chiefs, so that if the people contest it then they will be able to contest it, and so on. Otherwise you're going to have a chaotic situation and divided communities because you can't find a socially-accepted procedure for installation of chiefs,<sup>30</sup> . . . [and] this Council of Chiefs is going to come apart, because it's breaking down at the bottom. (Dakuvula 1993.)

Some of the greatest problems for the chiefs have, in fact, been partially created by their presence in parliamentary politics:

The biggest problem in Fiji politics is the drawing in of tradition and status. . . . Opposition members of parliament [find that] the members on the other side, if they are chiefs, sometimes don't know where to draw the line in politics. . . . If you say something, . . . you have to say it diplomatically, and you've got to use the right language at the right time, and sometimes it doesn't go [down] well. . . . Sitting on the other side maybe as a minister, as a member of parliament, is a Fijian chief. That doesn't go [down] well with him, because he's receiving it not as a politician, but . . . as a Fijian chief [first of all] and a politician later. (Matatolu 1993.)

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<sup>29</sup>Dakuvula continued,

[Take] for example the paramount chief in Fiji, the Vunivalu of Bau: since Ratu George died ten years ago there has not been a Vunivalu. There's always people who want to take the title, some in government, and because they can't come to a consensus about who should be installed, it's left vacant; nobody's holding the title. But that is not unusual. It's recurring [in] a lot of parts of Fiji. [In] my village, a pleasant guy who goes around [claiming] to be the paramount chief in my *vanua* is not installed, and he's not recognised by the people there, but he is recognised nationally as the Vunivalu of Natewa because he's gone around saying that he is that. So this is one aspect of the so-called traditional practice that is coming apart. (Dakuvula 1993.)

<sup>30</sup>He added,

That is breaking down because people can't agree; but there are a lot of other things involved. In the past the chief was just the head of the *vanua*, and all the customs were certain. Now if you hold a title it also means you're going to get ten percent of land rent. (Dakuvula 1993.)

This factor is examined in more detail in Chapter Six.



When you criticise a chief . . . as a politician, you could be offending his own people. . . . They see [him] from a different angle, not as a politician but as their own traditional chief. This is a very sensitive area that Fijians even today are still trying to grapple with. (Delaibatiki 1993.)

That is why [some people] think that it's not right for the chiefs to go into politics, or to take or hold any political position.<sup>31</sup> . . . The chiefs think that it's right for them to discuss and fight for the rights of the Fijian people, because that's their traditional role, which is to stay there and do something for the betterment of their own people. . . . They are not forced to go in there. When things like that happen in parliament, or in political campaigns, [when] the people are saying something against them, we can't do anything about it; . . . they have to accept it. (Tonawai 1993.)<sup>32</sup>

The demands of political life have, in fact, led to demands for performance, regardless of title — a theme echoed throughout my interviews and developed throughout this study. The most significant observations about this change in the chiefly system were made by chiefs themselves, including the highest chief of all:

I have seen quite dramatic change. The urban people have been democratised. They will only respect chiefs if they deserve it. . . . Educational qualifications, . . . less drinking, leadership in business development, getting the means to improve your standard of living, using your land and getting economic crops, getting children educated; they'll respect you for that. (Mara 1993.)<sup>33</sup>

The way that things have been developing, ultimately the power of the chiefs will disappear, [or] will be eroded substantially. . . . The basis for leadership or moving ahead [is] changing. Whereas before it was a matter of birth — you were born into [a chiefly family] — now more and more of the Western values are coming in, like performance, success, education. They're beginning to replace and have more weight than . . . the traditional value of being born into a certain sphere of society. . . . It's beginning also to be institutionalised, and formalised in . . . the Council of Chiefs — it may be

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<sup>31</sup>See also Toren (1990: 145): 'Villagers thought it inappropriate for a man who had chiefly responsibilities to give much time to duties outside the traditional sphere and, more specifically, to politics.'

<sup>32</sup>At least one chief seemed to agree:

Many have said [that if] chiefs wish to enter politics, then they've got to shed their chiefly title and be able to be thick-skinned about what is said about them. . . . I think that a chief who understands his role and what he's committed to traditionally can shed that traditional role. . . . It's up to the individual. . . . They will soon sort themselves out as to who is best to weather the storm in politics. (Cokaunoto 1993.)

<sup>33</sup>At another point in the interview, Mara questioned some aspects of this democratisation:

One unfortunate part of the colonial system was the usage of disguised democratic principles. When they found that the traditional leaders were not really [viable] enough they [would] say, "Let's have [an] election for village chief," [and] so quietly and eventually the true traditional leaders were pushed aside. Although they're members of the village council, the *tikina* council, [an] election usually brings in the most useless person, the person who will not drive [people] to do the work of cleaning the villages, repairing the houses. (Mara 1993.)

[unwitting]. It's been reconstituted, and in this reconstitution, three members are nominated from their provinces, and [they] no longer have to be chiefs.<sup>34</sup>

They're formalising things that should be allowed to evolve in their own way. Now they're making it rigid. . . . Immediately after the coup they called a series of meetings of chiefs. Before, chiefs [were] very static. . . . By identifying all village heads as chiefs, they were formalising something that really was never such. From then on those people became chiefs, and I don't think it was the case in the past. They didn't have that kind of recognition.

It's had a sort of equalising effect. That is really part of the democratisation process, and I'm not to judge whether it's good or bad. . . . Ultimately it has become a question of commoners versus chiefs, where it will be the most successful Fijian who will assume the role of the chief. [Some] people will protest that this will never happen: I think it's happening already.<sup>35</sup>

The process through which Fijians became enlightened or educated has [made us a] fairly democratic people today. We believe in equality [and] freedom, and I don't think it's going to be questioned. . . . The whole acculturation process was too Western and too democratic for people now to question the gradual erosion of the status of chiefs. (Tabakaucoro 1993.)

How Fijian people view their chiefs [is changing]. Now chiefs have to earn the respect of the common people. . . . Just by their daily living; how they behave themselves. Also education-wise: chiefs have to be educated now. . . . In the [past], chiefs [were] respected by birthright. But now there's change there, I think. . . . Maybe that's a change of tradition. Just because you are chief, it doesn't mean that people respect you. That time has gone. You have to work hard and earn the respect of the people. (Kubuabola 1993.)<sup>36</sup>

## From Mara to Rabuka

Fijians' changing views of the chiefly system, and their effects, are illustrated by the different prime ministerial styles of Mara and Rabuka. Mara epitomised the chiefly

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<sup>34</sup>The Council of Chiefs which met in May 1993 consisted of 55 members: three for each of the 14 provinces, the President and three members selected by him, the Minister for Fijian Affairs and three members selected by him, the two Vice-Presidents, two members from Rotuma, and the Prime Minister (Rabuka also has life membership of the Council in his own right, bringing the official count to 56). Council meetings also included another 42 invited members, such as ministers and senators (*Daily Post*, 18 May 1995, p. 5; 26 May 1995, p. 25.)

<sup>35</sup>Tabakaucoro later noted a possible future development which would have profound implications for the present chiefly system:

Once I remember [Rabuka] talking about creating "merit" chiefs. . . . Because now we no longer have honours — knighthoods and that. They're thinking that we should have one of our own, and maybe we should begin by investing chiefly titles to people who merit it. (Tabakaucoro 1993.)

(Rabuka had in 1991 publicly forecast the end of the dominance of Fijian chiefs and the 'replacement of traditional aristocracy with meritocracy', drawing a distinction between 'meritorious' chiefs and 'traditional' chiefs (Lal 1992b: 389; 1993: 283).)

<sup>36</sup>See also Ravuvu (1988: 189; 1991: 74-75).

system and its values, and his high chiefly rank along with his status as Fiji's first and longest-serving prime minister welded the Fijian community into a unified political force for many years. Even when those welds had begun to break in the mid-1980s, many found his defeat impossible to accept.

Under Mara up until the '80s the Fijians were more or less welded together under one party. Mara was in place and [Ganilau] was in place and one or two other big chiefs were in place, and they all tended to follow the leader rather blindly, apart from a few mavericks like Butadroka, [leader of the Fijian Nationalist United Front]. . . . There was always a certain amount of talking behind backs, but no one really would ever do anything; they just followed the leader. Mara said this and it was done. (Keith-Reid 1993.)

But the events of 1987 dispelled the illusions of unity among Fijians; previously-submerged criticisms of even the highest chiefs came to the surface, and minority Fijian views became increasingly popular:

Butadroka [is] getting a lot of support, particularly in [the Naitasiri area] where he comes from. There is an increasing lack of reverence for Mara. . . . Butadroka . . . has been able to make a name through [his attacks on] Mara. . . . That reduced the standing of Mara compared to the pre-coup period. (Durutalo 1993a.)

Increased criticism has not meant that Mara's status has been drastically reduced — his elevation to the presidency after Ganilau's death in late 1993 amply demonstrates that it has not been — but it is certainly a sign that Fijians are prepared to demand much more of chiefs generally. And this has contributed to a sense of uncertainty about where the chiefly leaders will come from when Mara goes:

I do not know what will happen when [Mara and Ganilau] are finished, because [they were well] trained under the colonial administration [by] Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna, one of our high chiefs who we regarded as very high within the Fijian community. . . . Nothing like that [has] happened, to train some chief to succeed them. . . . These two have been going through two different worlds, old and modern politics; they have had a very good experience in going through all the difficulties and hard times in the olden days, [up] until now.

[It's] the Great Council of Chiefs' . . . prerogative to select someone [from] within the chiefly system to take the post of the prime minister or president. But at the moment, we don't have any chief — we have some, but not very [many] — planted to take up the post of the leadership. (Tonawai 1993.)

Some remained hopeful that any vacuum would be filled:

It's very difficult to [point to any] like Ratu Mara [with] all their skills and their training. I suppose people were also in a similar situation when Ratu Lala Sukuna was aging. The same thing the country was asking: "What if Ratu Sukuna goes?" And we had chiefs like Ratu Mara and Ratu Penaia and Ratu Edward [Cakobau], and the late Ratu George Cakobau. There are some young chiefs around. Maybe given the challenge they will rise up to it. (Kubuabola 1993.)

Others believed that Mara himself had carefully maintained that vacuum:

Mara was the person responsible for having that void of successors. . . . If Mara had really wanted to have somebody to succeed him he would have groomed them. Mara was the master of dividing: making sure that nobody stands out, that he would continue to be the figure that stands out. . . . We seem to be running out of chiefs that think, [but] even if he couldn't find a chief . . . there was a good crop of intelligent non-chiefs he could have [groomed]. Because [he was] so powerful, and [stood] out in terms of national respect, all he had to do was . . . let it get around that he [had] groomed this particular person, and that would have been accepted. (Anonymous 1993.)<sup>37</sup>

But Mara denied this, pointing to the restraints of parliamentary democracy:

[It] was accused [of me] that I didn't bring in [a successor]. Ratu Sukuna supposedly brought me up, . . . because I was almost a qualified doctor and he pulled me out of medical school and sent me to Oxford to read history. . . . But Ratu Sukuna was not a member of parliament as such. . . . A parliament of chiefs, that he can rule; but [in a] democracy, through a secret ballot, how can I select someone and expect parliament will [respect my choice]? I actually, during the interim government, appointed Jo Kamikamica as my deputy and stated that this man could do the job even better than I can do it — and look at what happened. (Mara 1993.)

After the 1992 election Kamikamica, a well-educated commoner, could not gain the support of the House over his rival within the SVT, Rabuka.<sup>38</sup> These events demonstrated, first, that any belief that the 1990 constitution denied Indians any political influence was unfounded: Rabuka became prime minister with the support not only of Butadroka's FNUF but of Indian members of the Fiji Labour Party, who would not support Kamikamica (who had instigated the interim government's harsh labour laws); his party governed in coalition with the General Voters Party. And second, Rabuka's rise served to underline the shift from chiefly to commoner rule.

One of the reasons for Rabuka's success in becoming prime minister was that he was not perceived as the candidate of the establishment, and that he was of non-chiefly rank, . . . It sets a precedent, because now non-chiefly Fijians can aspire to and lead Fijian society. . . . You don't hear it as often now, but a few [older] Fijians . . . would say that the position of prime minister can only be properly exercised by someone of chiefly rank.<sup>39</sup> . . . So

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<sup>37</sup>A Fijian journalist.

<sup>38</sup>For an account of the machinations behind this outcome, see *Islands Business Pacific*, June 1992, pp. 16-18, and *Pacific Islands Monthly*, June 1992, pp. 7-10.

<sup>39</sup>Some Fijians continued to regard Rabuka as an upstart — perhaps not least because he had contributed to the questioning of chiefly rule:

There was a period when he was attacking the chiefs pretty bitterly and saying how they should keep out of politics and make way for the new breed of smart young Fijians like him. So he causes a bit of antagonism there. . . . When you talk to certain members of the government, in their cups they say, "He's a bloody upstart; we're going to get him. Who is he?" That's a pretty strong feeling that comes out from the bar, a lot of cabinet

Rabuka's becoming prime minister . . . has in a sense widened a lot of Fijians' horizons as to the leadership role they can play in Fiji society. (Madraiwiwi 1993)<sup>40</sup>

An old friend of Rabuka's (and his press secretary at the time) spoke of some of his qualities and contradictions:

He doesn't see his inconsistencies. He says, "I am consistent; this is what I believe." He believes he's a traditionalist, but he doesn't see [that] he's undermining the power of the chiefs. . . . He's opened up all these things which contradict [that] intent; some [are] democratising; [with] any change you have positives and negatives.

If you really got him into a deep discussion about that he would probably admit, "Yes, that is the effect of what I've put forward." He would say that he's a traditionalist because he still respects the chiefs, and he still observes all the customs and knowledge of relations, ceremony and all that; when he goes to Government House he sits on the floor. . . . But he also is aware that he is a grass-roots person, that he's popular, and that people [treat] him like a chief.<sup>41</sup>

He's a modern-day Fijian chief. They give him the full ceremony that they give to anybody who is a chief. He comes back from a tour out of Fiji, there's a welcoming ceremony provided by the Fijian people in Nadi for him, . . . and people here come and give him a welcome ceremony like a chief. He's already accorded this authority. But . . . he's a different type of chief. Compared to Ratu Mara, he is more approachable.<sup>42</sup> People think they can

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ministers. No question he's got this support with the mass of common Fijians, but the hierarchy want to get rid of him if they can. (Keith-Reid 1993.)

These words were to prove prophetic. In late 1993 factional discontent within the SVT turned into open conflict, as Kamikamica joined other rebel SVT members in voting against the Rabuka government's 1993 budget. The budget's defeat resulted in early elections in February 1994, which Kamikamica contested as leader of a new party, the Fijian Association. Although his party won five seats, Kamikamica was not returned to parliament (leadership of the parliamentary party went to Ratu Finau Mara, son of the newly-installed President). (*Islands Business Pacific*, February 1994, pp. 41-43; March 1994, p. 5.) The Fijian public overwhelmingly endorsed Rabuka (the SVT winning an extra seat), strengthening his position to such an extent that he has been able to weather a series of political scandals in the year since. Kamikamica remains party leader of the Fijian Association outside parliament, and has said that his party 'would like to groom, and help in the process of developing younger leaders', adding that 'we have some very talented young chiefs' (quoted in Waqa (1994: 25)).

<sup>40</sup>As another Fijian said,

I am thankful to God that that's happened, because the ascendancy of a commoner to become the prime minister, for whatever reason, . . . shows that a commoner can get up there. (Mataitoga 1993.)

<sup>41</sup>He added,

He was getting that reception immediately after the coup; when he went out around the rural areas they were giving him the full ceremony for a chief. People understood that he was not a chief, but they gave him full ceremony, because he did something which to them was remarkable. (Dakuvula 1993.)

<sup>42</sup>This caused Dakuvula some problems in his own work:

go and talk to him, bring him their problems, which is [how] I think a chief traditionally should be. . . . We always had this [in] the Fijian chiefly tradition: either [as] a chief you were above the people, or you were a chief of the people. There must have been two traditions. One [is] where a chief is like a god, a representative of God, and you don't approach them; they're out there . . . and they're isolated. That's probably what Ratu Mara is. [Rabuka] represents the other tradition; he [and] Bavadra are more democratic chiefs.<sup>43</sup> Those two competing concepts of different chiefs are still there. (Dakuvula 1993.)

Rabuka's rise is changing how Fijians think about leadership: either the way someone comes to be regarded as a chief may change, or the chiefs' hold on political leadership will diminish (as it is doing already). Either way, Fijian tradition will change. In that sense, Rabuka is not inconsistent in believing that one can respect tradition yet promote change; only if 'tradition' is taken to mean old traditions, a particular set of traditions, do contradictions arise.

### Provincialism and Party Politics

Besides helping to promote change in traditions of leadership, the events of 1987 and the 1990 constitution have created other complications for Fiji politics. Some of those complications arise from 'provincialism' or 'confederate politics':

Fiji as Fiji came into being only with the coming of the British, and when Rabuka kicked the Queen out and proclaimed the republic and broke that link with the crown, I think he did very grave damage. And it's noticeable that — the word tribalism isn't quite the right word but that expresses what I mean — the influence of the various provinces has increased tremendously. (Usher 1993.)

Fiji's three confederacies (Tovata, Burebasaga, and Kubuna) and the fourteen provinces which constitute them are, strictly speaking, colonial creations, although they reflect the long-standing cultural variation within the island group (which, as Usher

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I can hardly do my work because so many people . . . want to see the Prime Minister. I have to . . . channel them somewhere else. They never did that with Ratu Mara. Nobody dared go up to him, except those who knew Ratu Mara, or the chiefs, or people from his area, or people who knew how to approach him. Our office is full all the time [of] people sitting outside waiting to come in and talk. People want to see the PM. . . . Because if people want to see him then he will say yes. He goes around touring the area, and they say "I'd like to come and see you about this," [and] he'll say yes. (Dakuvula 1993.)

<sup>43</sup>The irony of Rabuka's success as the 'Fijian commoner PM' is, of course, that he overthrew a Fijian prime minister who was perceived by many Fijians to be illegitimate because he was a commoner. (Dr. Bavadra was actually a minor chief, but came nowhere near Mara in traditional status.) But Bavadra's downfall came, as one person observed, 'because he belonged to a different party; he represented a different tradition' (Madraiwiwi 1993). And, of course, the coup itself changed the ground rules of Fiji and Fijian politics.

indicated, only became unified under the British) and its basic historical divisions.<sup>44</sup> In a parallel to the revival of divisions within the Balkans after the collapse of communism, the provinces re-emerged after the coup as a potent political force:

It's a nice clean competitive role that the provinces [have] at the moment, [in fund-raising et cetera,] but once it gets to politics I think it's going to be very bad. To some extent it's beginning to surface. . . . Rabuka continues to feel he's in the shadow of Ratu Mara, so [he] has been trying to promote his provinces, these three provinces of Cakaudrove, Bua, Macuata. And Lau gets shoved aside. So Rabuka has to go to the other provinces to get support. And eventually you [get ugly complications], like [when] Tailevu probably back-stabbed him. . . . The provinces are now actually backing political horses. (J. Moala 1993.)

The problem emerged once the coup effectively neutralised Indians, the 'common foe' Fijians had been united against; and it was reinforced by the 1990 constitution, which determines Fijian seats on a provincial basis and weights some provinces over others (and all provinces over urban areas). The result at the 1992 elections was a shock for the 'Fijian Political Party', the SVT:

In the last general election 52 percent of the Fijians in the Western provinces voted against SVT candidates. In fact in two of the provinces, Nadroga and Ra, SVT lost. . . . In the province of Ba also, they merely just managed to win. (Chaudhry 1993.)<sup>45</sup>

The SVT is doomed to fail. Right now they are riding on Rabuka's personal popularity among Fijians. They did not win all the seats last year, which they should have . . . if they had them right. There was a bit of arrogance [about] how they were selecting candidates, and they [thought] that Fijians were together — Fijians will never be monolithic again, never. They [thought] that because it had been decreed by the chiefs that we have [a] political party to look after Fijian interests, that everybody should bind together. [Whoever] thought that obviously didn't have his ear to the ground

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<sup>44</sup>The confederacies' 'invented' character became a rhetorical weapon after the coup when Fijians from Western Vitilevu attempted to create a fourth confederacy out of parts of Kubuna and Burebasaga:

When people were trying to form the Yasayasa Vaka Ra confederacy, the so-called traditional supporters were saying, "You can't form the Yasayasa Vaka Ra confederacy because that's not traditional, that's a new formation." So the Yasayasa Vaka Ra guys advanced the argument, "Well, yours was a colonial creation; . . . ours is also a modern creation but a hundred years after that; they are all modern creations anyway, it's not traditional." (Durutalo 1993a.)

The issue died down, Durutalo added, when the key players were 'bought off' with 'lucrative posts', but the issue remained in people's minds and 'will emerge again at another time'.

<sup>45</sup>The SVT won 66.6 percent of all Fijian votes cast in 1992 (30 seats), and the Fijian Nationalist Party and *Soqosoqo ni Taukei ni Vanua* (who together formed the Fijian Nationalist United Front) won 17.4 percent and 5 seats, their best electoral results being in rural Vitilevu. The remaining two seats went to independents: nationalist-minded Kolonio Qiqiwaqa; and former Bavadra government minister Ratu Jo Nacola (who became a minister in the Rabuka government). (Details drawn from Lal (1993); see also Scarr (1993b).)

[to hear the] political grumblings. The fact that Butadroka won that seat, Ratu Osea [Gavidi] won his seat in Nadroga, says a lot of things. (Nata 1993.)<sup>46</sup>

In the face of these divisions, Rabuka, who is from the same long-dominant confederacy as Ganilau and Mara, has actually benefitted from his commoner status:

People say, "Well, he's from Tovata but he's a commoner." The straw that would have broken the camel's back [would have been] if you had a Tovata chief [as] both prime minister and president. The whole thing would have been absolutely dead, because I don't think the people would have tolerated it. That's where Rabuka has been very smart lately; he's been trying to say, "I'm from the Tovata, but really I'm not a chief, I'm just like everybody else." (Durutalo 1993a.)<sup>47</sup>

To keep the fourteen provinces on-side, Rabuka feels he must accommodate them all within the cabinet:

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<sup>46</sup>Nata found the result in one seat particularly noteworthy:

[There was a] seat in Serua won by Nationalists. That's very impressive, because that [was] a blue-ribbon seat for the old Alliance Party. I see no reason why the SVT shouldn't [have] taken that seat. But they'd picked this man who was eighty years old! . . . It's a demonstration [that] people are not as stupid as they think they are. They elected [one] SVT candidate, a person they [thought] capable, and the other candidate that got in was a Nationalist Party candidate. The person who was dropped was a chief, and he was about eighty years old. . . . They were realising, "What can this guy do in Parliament? He's just about got one foot in the grave." . . . Everybody's saying the chiefs are out of touch; maybe that's the proof of that, I don't know. But I think it is testimony of the awareness of grass-roots people. (Nata 1993.)

<sup>47</sup>Regional rivalries have, however, contributed to criticism of Mara:

There's very great respect for [Ratu Mara], but there's also considerable criticism and opposition to him. In the Western part of Vitilevu they say that he is the "Eastern establishment" [which] has taken over, and they're quite critical of him, [although] they wouldn't show that very overtly. . . . Ratu Penaia as president has been accepted almost universally, he's totally respected, and I think if Ratu Mara were appointed president he also would be respected as president. That's not the same as personal loyalty. (Usher 1993.)

Such criticism fuelled a move in 1993, backed by Butadroka's FNUF, to form an alternative voice to the Council of Chiefs, the Viti Levu Council of Chiefs:

They're worried that if Penaia [Ganilau] steps down, which seems to be likely any time now, then . . . another Tovata man, Ratu Mara, would come [to] the presidency, so that will create a lock on the Tovata leadership; [Fiji would] still have a Tovata prime minister, and still have a Tovata president. . . . They have very strong objections to that. . . . What they want is rotation of the presidency among the traditional *vanua*. (Durutalo 1993a.)

[The Council of Chiefs is] finished. The paramountcy is gone. Because it's a political party. Before we hardly addressed them. . . . Now we are starting up one in Vitilevu; we didn't do that before because it was a mutual voice. Even Rabuka after the coup [had] to react to this voice, because it was non-political. And the people from the other side, the Indians, respected it because it was non-political. But now it's turned political, [and] dominating it is Ratu Mara. He's the cause, sorry to say. (Butadroka 1993.)

Little has been heard of these moves, however, since the FNUF lost its seats at the 1994 election. (That election loss can be at least partially explained by key FNUF members' involvement in the Tony Stephens affair, a financial scandal which led to a 1993 inquiry, and by the party's support of Rabuka's SVT in parliament, which would make it somewhat redundant in the eyes of voters.)



He makes awful rods for his own back. . . . If he's going to have at least one minister from each province he starts off with fourteen, and instead of looking for quality, he's saying, "I must find one from each province." (Usher 1993.)

The issue has become so divisive that provincial tensions are tending to obscure commoner-chief tensions:

There is no attempt to move towards a common . . . tradition . . . which would get away from the regional. . . . Chiefs and commoners [are] looking at the cross-class alliances based on the *vanua*, and not so much [at the] commoner-chief traditional hierarchical relationship. (Durutalo 1993a.)

Provincial rivalries will persist, if only because (as outlined in previous chapters) people tend to identify most closely with those closest to them. As one Fijian said, 'Confederate politics in this country is going to be in for a little longer than a lot of people believe, because it has an inexplicable attraction to Fijian people' (Mataitoga 1993). But in the long-term this holds little reassurance for the chiefs:

Fijians will never be united, ever. I think the SVT, because of this, . . . will eventually fall. What we have now is a commoner leading it. Although it's convenient for the time [being] because of what Rabuka did in '87 — he's popular — after [he's gone] there'll be no more commoner leading the party. And once that happens, commoners will [reject it]. . . . Once people realise that that party was created by the chiefs to perpetuate their hold on power, they will go away. (Nata 1993.)

The forces for change explored here and in the rest of this study conflict with existing traditions, as even those who respect the chiefs recognise:

Don't get me wrong: the Fijians, no matter where they are or what they do, . . . still respect their chiefs. . . . We need the chiefs. But sometimes they do things . . . [that] really deter forward movement. It's really hard to talk about it, you know, because deep in my heart I believe in the chiefs. I say we need these chiefs, but again I know that in order to move forward I have to unshackle myself. (J. Moala 1993.)

And the result will doubtless be much as the late Simone Durutalo predicted:

The Indians will become spectators to what will clearly be an internal bickering within the Fijian set-up, increasingly much more acrimonious. That's the way I would see it developing in the next few years. (Durutalo 1993a.)<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Durutalo was an influential Fijian figure within the Labour Party, which had lost much of its Fijian support in the years since the coup. (As Leader of the Opposition Jai Ram Reddy of the National Federation Party observed, 'Some [Fijians] are still around in the Labour Party; others have drifted back to the traditional base' (Reddy 1993).) I asked Durutalo about this and about where the party could go from here:

Two things [have] made a problem for the Labour Party. One is that the constitution itself is not conducive to a Labour Party; . . . for a party to be able to maximise its influence it will have to be a racially-based party, and then form alliances, like the SVT and the GVP;

## Tonga's Political System

Tongans once ruled over parts of Fiji, but today Tonga escapes much of the regional and international attention paid to its larger neighbour. It is not a stop-over on any major international flight-path, so attracts few tourists. It has limited resources and little strategic significance, and was never formally colonised (although it was subject to some British influence as a protectorate from 1900 to 1970). With few residents of non-Tongan background, it avoids racial conflicts like Fiji's; the population of its main island groups<sup>49</sup> numbers under 100,000. Like many other small corners of the world, Tonga remains mainly of interest to Tongans alone.

When Tonga does attract international attention today it is usually for its unique political system. Tonga's head of state is a monarch — currently King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, who was enthroned in 1967. The King occupies the apex of a hierarchy which is akin to Fiji's chiefly system (he is actually related to Ratu Mara); Tonga's royal family and 33 nobles<sup>50</sup> are essentially chiefs.

The King wields considerable power under Tonga's written constitution (enacted in 1875 and amended occasionally since):

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they fought the election as racially-based parties, and then formed the coalition after the election.

Second [is] that this notion of Fijian paramountcy, and going back to the *vanua* and the chiefs, has thrown the Labour Party into disarray, ideologically. . . . They haven't actually formulated a stance to address the new political [situation] post-1990, or post-1987. There's been a reaction to contingencies as they came along. It might be time now for them to sit down and think [about] what they're going to do from now on.

If the Labour Party really now wants to keep its own ideology, and substantially its own structure and philosophy, and still try and work within the process, they'll have to . . . concentrate [on] the rural areas, and that's a bigger task, because they're very dispersed, and it will take a longer period of time because of education and so on. The rural areas are really isolated. That's [where] the power structure is much stronger: you have the *talatala* all over, and the chiefs, who are usually SVT, and so on.

They are concentrating very much on local government elections . . . as a [way] of building-up morale and visibility, because they're still based on a common roll; they're multiracial elections. [The SVT and NFP, which had just formed an alliance in Labasa to fight local elections, are] quite aware that the Labour Party, given the nature of local government elections and the rolls, is the party to [beat]. (Durutalo 1993a.)

The 1994 elections were not kind to the Labour Party, however, which won only seven seats to the NFP's twenty (*Islands Business Pacific*, March 1994, p. 5). See Lal (1994: 31, 33-34).

<sup>49</sup> From south to north these are: Tongatapu and 'Eua; the Ha'apai group; the Vava'u group; and two northern outliers, Niuatoputapu and Niuafu'ou.

<sup>50</sup> The exact number of nobles varies; there are 33 titles, but not all are filled at any one time. In 1990, for example, there were only 27 noble title-holders at the time of that year's election. (Campbell 1992a: note 1.)

The King is the Sovereign of all the Chiefs and all the people. The person of the King is sacred. He governs the country but his ministers are responsible. (USP n.d.-a: 372 (sec. 41).)<sup>51</sup>

The King appoints his government, which consists of a ten-minister cabinet and two governors (of Ha'apai and Vava'u), all of whom sit in the single-house parliament (the Legislative Assembly). Together they form the Privy Council, whose brief is 'to assist [the King] in the discharge of his important functions' (USP n.d.-a: 373 (sec. 50)). Parliament also contains nine representatives elected by the nobles,<sup>52</sup> and nine elected by the people (elections being held every three years).<sup>53</sup> Well less than one percent of the population, then, choose over two-thirds of the parliament; and Tongan commoners have no say in the selection of their government.

Obviously, Tonga is not a democracy, nor a constitutional monarchy in the British sense. During their first century under the 1875 constitution, this caused Tongans little apparent concern; rule by traditional leaders was accepted.<sup>54</sup> But the 1980s saw the beginning of significant challenges to the regime, led by a former government employee, 'Akilisi Pohiva.<sup>55</sup> Pohiva questioned the government's activities in a regular programme on Radio Tonga broadcast from 1981 to 1984 (Campbell 1992a: 86);<sup>56</sup> his allegations of government corruption saw him taken off the air and dismissed from the public service (although he later won a landmark court-case compensating him for unfair dismissal).<sup>57</sup> His response was to found the *Kele'a* (which translates as 'conch', the large shells used

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<sup>51</sup>As Guy Powles (1992: 3) has observed, 'The Constitution intends the King to have real political and legal powers unaffected by the sort of unwritten constitutional conventions which normally limit the powers of the Crown.'

<sup>52</sup>The elections for the nobles' representatives are basically consensual affairs: 'It's not excited like the other kind. . . . We don't campaign, just discuss it. . . . You go to everybody, and talk together with them.' (Fielakepa 1993.)

<sup>53</sup>For both nobles' and people's representatives, seats are distributed among five constituencies: 3 for Tongatapu, 2 each for Ha'apai and Vava'u, and 1 each for 'Eua and the Niuaus. Members are known by the order in which they were elected: 'Akilisi Pohiva, for example, with the most votes in Tongatapu in the 1993 election, is the current No. 1 People's Representative for Tongatapu, while Uili Fukofuka is No. 2.

<sup>54</sup>As late as the early 1980s one Tongan commentator, Emiliana Afeaki, was able to observe:

If "politics is defined as a "struggle for power", there is comparatively little of it in Tonga. Most people appear to be unaware of, or not interested in, what goes on in the government. (Afeaki 1983: 57.)

<sup>55</sup>Several academic articles have appeared in recent years which specifically discuss the political developments catalysed by the activities of 'Akilisi Pohiva. They include Campbell (1992a; 1994); Hills (1991a; 1991b; 1993); James (1994b); Latukefu (1993); S. Lawson (1994).

<sup>56</sup>Other comperes of this early-1980s radio programme included Uili Fukofuka and Uhila Liava'a (Helu 1992: 146).

<sup>57</sup>On this court-case, see Koloamatangi (1991).

as trumpets), an occasional newsletter intended as an alternative news-source to the government-run *Tonga Chronicle* and Radio Tonga.<sup>58</sup>

In these forums, Pohiva raised searching questions about the lack of government accountability to the people in the Tongan system. A series of scandals provided him with ready ammunition, the best known being the sale by government of Tongan passports to overseas nationals as a revenue-raising measure.<sup>59</sup>

Pohiva's campaign eventually became a campaign for democratic government. He won a seat in parliament in 1987, and over the next two elections was joined by like-minded people's representatives as popular support for their campaign grew. In August 1992 the campaign became formally known as the Pro-Democracy Movement (PDM) (James 1994a: 192). Six of the nine people's representatives elected in 1993 fell squarely in the PDM camp; and in 1994 they formed Tonga's first political party, the People's Party.<sup>60</sup>

These developments met with considerable criticism from certain nobles and government members, and virtual silence from the King.<sup>61</sup> In 1993 (as is still the case) government was paying no heed to the PDM's demands that all thirty members of parliament be elected by the people.

Tonga's is a traditional political system under stress. As later chapters will demonstrate, Tongans are changing their traditions through their personal decisions about how to live and behave, and they want their political system to reflect these changes. But the system depends on the will of a few — the King, and enough ministers or nobles to side with the people's representatives to form a majority in parliament — for democratic changes to be made, and these people are the ones who would stand to lose the most from such changes.

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<sup>58</sup>One sympathetic onlooker said of *Kele'a* that the information it dispensed 'fell like a seed on hungry soil', adding that 'it is one of the most popular, if not the most popular, news publication in Tonga today' (Helu 1992: 146, 147).

<sup>59</sup>These sales were made mostly to Hong Kong nationals in the 1980s. The passports initially gave no right of residence in Tonga, but as a result were not being recognised by other countries. The government changed the constitution to rectify the problem in order to stave off complaints from passport owners, and this in turn drew criticism from many Tongans. See Gittings (1991); Robie (1991b).

<sup>60</sup>The People's Party (initially called the People's Democratic Party) was formed on 22 August 1994. Its five founding members were 'Akilisi Pohiva, Uili Fukofuka and 'Uhila Liava'a (people's representatives for Tongatapu), and Teisina Fuko and 'Ulii Uata (people's representatives for Ha'apai). Fukofuka serves as party president and Uata as party chairman. By early 1995 it appeared that splits were developing between Pohiva and the other members of the party, with his continuing membership in doubt. (*Matangi Tonga*, August-September 1994, p. 36, and January-March 1995, pp. 5-6.)

<sup>61</sup>See, however, later footnotes concerning a 1995 television interview with the King.

## The King

The challenges to the Tongan regime seem, at first glance, to be contradicted by the devotion Tongans show for their king. Some of his high standing is undoubtedly a result of his personal qualities and considerable achievements.<sup>62</sup> But it also comes from who he is and what he represents. The monarch acts as a linchpin for Tongan tradition:

Tongan tradition is tied up with the monarchy, and therefore it has almost everything to do with politics. Whatever we do as a Tongan, in the end . . . upholds the tradition, and that tradition is that the King is head of the nation and the mainstay of customs and everything that should follow in the country. The land belongs to him, the people are his people, and therefore what the people do is supposed to uphold the tradition, which in actual fact means upholding the traditional political structure. (Fukofuka 1993.)

[It] is the expectation of every commoner that he has some relationship — maybe not a blood relationship, but some traditional relationship — that goes right back to the King. . . . [This sentiment] still exists very strongly. But apart from the royal family itself, this relationship of the commoner to the King is through the extended family and through what they call the elder head of that; . . . So there was no direct relationship between the commoner and the King; it was through the extended family and through the chiefs — we call them nobles now. (Tapa 1993.)

As a result of his central role in tradition, the King personally gains some part of the affections people feel for all of their traditions, and this increases the love and respect he is given. Even those who are critical of the government recognise that these public feelings are strong:

We all still love our king, and I don't think there is any move to do away with royalty and the King — no, definitely not. But I think that the structuring needs to be looked upon. ('A. Havea 1993.)

It is true to say that a majority of the people still look up to the King; they still love him. . . . I think the real disillusionment comes under that layer of the royal family. The nobles and the ministers — the people are crying for a change in that layer. (Liava'a 1993.)

It's very important that Tonga maintains its monarchy, for social and national identity. Part of the psyche or the soul of a Tongan is very much linked to the monarch. But that still does not take away from the fact [that] the monarch should give up his political powers. (K. Moala 1993.)

When we talk about leadership now with the people, most people still want the King. They still need their king to be there. At the same time, the people want to participate in running the government. (Pohiva 1993.)

Given the love and respect Tongans avowed for the King (and demonstrated in his silver jubilee celebrations), I wondered how well people distinguished, when thinking about the role of the monarch, between the *person* of the King and the *position* he holds:

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<sup>62</sup>These are briefly recounted in Taulahi (1979).

In the Tongan situation you cannot really separate the two. And therefore when you talk about respect for the King you're also, as far as the Tongan is concerned, [talking about] respect for the post, and vice versa. (Kavaliku 1993.)

They don't differentiate between the King and the system of government, just as they don't differentiate between Bishop Finau and the Catholic Church. They don't make that kind of distinction at all. That's why I think the strategy of [the PDM] is quite clever. You damage the reputation of the personality, and the system goes with it. And that has been the strategy all these years, in the last six or seven years. If you are successful in smearing the person, that's it. ('E. Fusitu'a 1993.)<sup>63</sup>

The King and 'the king' are inextricably linked in the eyes of many Tongans. To speak only of their 'love and respect' for the King is therefore somewhat misleading, as these are feelings usually directed towards a particular person. For Tongans, these feelings are also combined with a strong element of awe which derives from his position of power:

I understand that power means that A has power over B if A influences B [to do] things that B would not normally do otherwise. The King has that power over any Tongan subject. Any Tongan subject would melt in his presence and would do his bidding. That kind of relationship has changed over the last ten years; [but] ultimately the Tongan's identity is tied up with the King.<sup>64</sup>

Because of that . . . you grow up thinking of the King almost like God in a sense. And this feeling is so deep in us that our life won't be complete if there's no king in Tonga. That's why in our efforts to bring in democracy, the Tongan cannot imagine a government without a king. (Fukofuka 1993.)<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Eseta Fusitu'a, one of the PDM's strongest critics, felt that this strategy was beginning to backfire on the Movement:

The people are now waking up and realising that these personalities are far from perfect themselves. It was an absolute shock to the country when Pohiva was convicted of defaming Fusitu'a. From then on the papers have been vicious in attacking him. You see in the letters to the editor, people are saying to Pohiva, "You have no credibility any more. Don't talk democracy to us any more, now we know what it means. . . . We voted for you, and you were fooling us all the time. . . . God knows what would happen if you became Prime Minister." They're becoming trapped in their own strategy. ('E. Fusitu'a 1993.)

<sup>64</sup>Fukofuka illustrated this relationship as follows:

If you go to a Tongan home, no matter how poor it is, you would find in a carton somewhere [their] best tablecloth and best cutlery, best mats, put aside for the day that the King or the noble might just stop by. . . . You will find that in every home . . . because to them the ultimate achievement in the community is to be able to serve the King with the best you have. (Fukofuka 1993.)

<sup>65</sup>Fukofuka's point was illustrated by the words of one government minister:

If you did not have the monarch there, who would you have? You would have to use other procedures to find out who would be there. You have to have someone up there. . . . If you get rid of that [institution], what's going to happen? We are going to be unstable for many years until we find something else to fill that vacuum. (Fakafanua 1993.)

This contributes towards a perception among some that the King can do no wrong:

We went on a march . . . to the King [over the passports affair]. Many people . . . weren't interested in the right and wrong, they just [thought] the King must be right. It's almost [that] the King is infallible, he can't make a mistake. . . . Of course we like our leaders to be blameless, but I think [here it is] over-exaggerated. You can't criticise, he cannot be wrong, he must be right. In parliament the Prime Minister said the King was nominated by God, therefore he can't be wrong. (Finau 1993a.)<sup>66</sup>

These feelings come as much from unwritten tradition as they do from the legal position of the King enshrined in the constitution:

Part of the reason why the King seems so all-powerful to Westerners and especially the overseas press . . . is because of tradition, not because of the law. Because [for] a lot of things, under the law the King doesn't have authority, but because of tradition people will still accept it. (Kavaliku 1993.)

And this great power has given monarchs great control over the introduction of change:

All the changes in Tonga [throughout history] have always been initiated by the monarch. And always against public opinion.<sup>67</sup>

I think the greatest change is when His Majesty came back from his studies. He was the one who brought about these changes, creating the educational system we have now, and opening up, because [Tonga] was a closed society. (Fakafanua 1993.)

The King's supporters often stressed the positive role he has played in developing Tonga and caring for his people, and the sacrifices that have gone with that:

The royal family has been very sacrificial in what they do . . . and what they give up. Not only their own freedom, but also a lot of material wealth. . . .

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<sup>66</sup>Bishop Finau added,

That attitude is prevalent. If you call it Christian, I don't know what kind of Christianity that is. But it's there. . . . Some of the chiefs [say,] "I'm chief, therefore God made me a chief, and then I can't be wrong." . . . And some people believe that. (Finau 1993a.)

He later observed, 'If it comes to a [choice between] King, chiefs, and Christ, I often think that maybe poor Christ would lose out!'

<sup>67</sup>The King himself echoed this in a recent television interview when he noted that the freedoms Tongans enjoy were granted by the monarchy, not parliament:

The thing you must understand about Tonga is that popular liberties didn't come about as the effort only because of the struggle of the Tongan people; they were granted to them by the monarchy, so that the monarchy is really the source of liberty, and the source of security and freedoms, and not parliament. Parliament is a creature of the monarchy, which is quite different from other countries. (Interview by Erina Reddan, *Foreign Correspondent*, ABC television, 21 March 1995.)

When people look at the royal family they just look at the outer trappings. They don't look at the realities behind. (Fakafanua 1993.)<sup>68</sup>

I've never come across something that His Majesty initiated only for his own benefit. All the projects that he has initiated [were] not for him but for his people. (Ketui'ionetoa 1993.)<sup>69</sup>

The King's openness to advice from his ministers was also stressed:

Just reading the Constitution gives a wrong impression of what actually happens [from] day-to-day, because . . . it appears that the King has everything . . . and that he runs the whole government by himself. But in fact, it's just like any other government. The papers submitted to Privy Council [are] done by the various ministries, and they do their own homework, research the particular case and then make their recommendations. . . . He approves the various recommendations based on the advice of the minister concerned. There have been occasions where he refused, but very very few. (Ketui'ionetoa 1993.)<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>I asked the King's private secretary by what means the royal family was supported. Only the King, the Queen, and the Crown Prince receive income from government; other members of the royal family do not.

It's a very meagre income, to keep them in their accustomed standard of living; so they have to embark on other business enterprises, so that there's some supplementary income. (Ketui'ionetoa 1993.)

(For example, the Crown Prince has a stake in Royal Beer, a Tongan brewery operated in partnership with a Scandinavian company.)

<sup>69</sup>The King's private secretary offered several examples of the King's selflessness:

His Majesty has his own . . . dairy farm, and we distribute that milk to the public. And there's another farm on Vava'u; some people farm coffee. . . . Most of these farming projects have been operating at a loss. It can only pay for the labour, but no profit. Some of those people have become very fat! But to His Majesty, that's part of his [way of] helping the people. In fact we have about four workers here [at the Palace], paid by His Majesty on a weekly basis, [who] have nothing to do. One is about 78 years old, the other two about 84. They used to work for His Majesty, and when they got very old we recommended that perhaps we retire them, but His Majesty said no, maybe in the next five to six years they might have passed away, [and] in the meantime he's keeping [them on]. That's one way of repaying these people. (Ketui'ionetoa 1993.)

<sup>70</sup>Ketui'ionetoa described one case in point:

Parliament passed a law which allowed people in Tonga to apply for land previously owned by people who [had] migrated overseas, leaving their land here uncultivated. . . . But His Majesty refused to sign that law. He believed that although those people had migrated overseas, they still remained Tongans, and they had their relatives here — it's like penalising those people that they've gone overseas. Most of our foreign exchange comes from people overseas sending remittances. They help quite a lot with their families, and because of their help, they should still have their own piece of land, because in our Tongan way of life, when they get old, normally they come back. And when they come back to Tonga their piece of land is still there. . . . I think one can rightly say that more than ninety percent of the people were very happy about the decision by the King. In fact they were not happy about the members of parliament passing that law. (Ketui'ionetoa 1993.)



The fact remains, however, that the King has the power of veto over every act passed by parliament, and has been willing to use it.<sup>71</sup> This leads to an unavoidable conclusion for those who wish to change the system:

There is no way we can bring about change . . . without the King being personally involved, or even agreeing with the whole idea to start with. (Liava'a 1993.)

But just how the King feels about proposals for change has been unclear:

The people on top have not said a word. I don't know whether purposely they want to be quiet and let the others thrash out the situation, but there have not been any comments or anything. When we hear His Majesty speak to the public and so forth, he talks about development — he doesn't care about political issues. To me he's wise in that. He wants people to find their own way of looking at life and structure and development. ('A. Havea 1993.)<sup>72</sup>

One minister said that 'the King also supports the changes':

It's just a difference in approach, because he would prefer to set up political parties before the system is changed. I think political parties would probably follow changes rather than political parties making the changes, at this stage, with the system that we have. But that's really what he's pushing: for political parties [to form] within the present system, followed by changes after the political parties are formed and voted in to government. (Kavaliku 1993.)

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<sup>71</sup>One critic felt that the responsibility for government wrong-doing should lie squarely with the King:

This is where I differ greatly [with] the Pro-Democracy people. They keep knocking the ministers: the ministers are his. They . . . only carry out what he says. . . . He's the one basically responsible. . . . He's a nice man, but he would be a better traditional leader than a political leader. (Anonymous 1993.)

These views, he thought, would be widely shared; 'But nobody would talk about it; nobody would tell you.'

<sup>72</sup>Others were more critical of the King's tendency to remain silent:

We had several cases where I thought there was a crisis. All the King needed to do to totally pacify the whole situation was get on the radio and just say, "Okay people, this is what happened." Like this passport case: that was a crisis we were facing. . . . All the King needed to do was get on radio and say, "People, this was a scheme that we had set up initially with the intention to raise funds for Tonga. Now, we made some mistakes, and we overlooked this situation and that; we're going to make some corrections on that; we ask you to bear with us." No. No word. They just passed [a constitutional amendment] right through, [and] he signed his name to it. No communication with the people. Fifteen hundred people marched to the Palace very peacefully at that demonstration. [What] I'm afraid of is that in the future there won't be 1500 people that will march peacefully to the Palace. There may be 20,000 people that will march unpeacefully to the Palace. (Anonymous 1993.)

Others were less optimistic; many felt that he was unlikely to introduce major changes this late in his reign.<sup>73</sup> Some held out hopes that his heir, the Crown Prince, would do so, and there were some signs that this might happen:

If he continues the way he has and follows what he has expressed privately and in public, I think he would probably support the movement for some changes. (Kavaliku 1993.)<sup>74</sup>

The Crown Prince (who is also Minister for Foreign Affairs) remains something of an unknown quantity; his cosmopolitan ways cause some Tongans concern. But much as some Fijians spoke of past public concern about finding successors to Ratu Sukuna, some Tongans spoke of initial doubts about the King (when he succeeded Queen Salote) that had been subsequently allayed, and gave this as cause for optimism about his heir.

Expressing her own faith in the Crown Prince ('I trust his judgement; he would be the best change, whatever that is'), Princess Siu'ilikutapu emphasised the key feature of an hereditary monarchy, the feature which doubtless makes it so compatible with a traditionalist worldview — its stability, which ultimately derives from its predictability:

It's a continuation [of] a form of stability. [For] an unstable nation, the only way is for a [change from] father to son — not an elected person who comes from a different background, changes everything, then the next term, three or four years' time, it changes again. Wouldn't that [destabilise] any stable nation? (Siu'ilikutapu 1993.)

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<sup>73</sup>A recent Australian television interview with the King seemed to offer support for this view. The King clearly believes that the present system is still supported by the majority of Tongans. When asked about the criticisms the PDM had made of government, he replied:

Well, that is only their point of view. The point of view of the Tongan people in general is quite different.

While he did, when asked if Western-style democracy would come to Tonga, say, 'I think it will happen in the future,' he added:

It depends on many factors, but we [do] not yet find that elected representatives have the experience or the integrity that you would expect.

He further noted that 'Tonga has all the safeguards of a typical democracy already: . . . freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom of assembly and all that', and was cautious (many Westerners would say over-cautious) where the equal representation aspect of democracy was concerned:

It's possible for voters to make very serious mistakes, such as electing the Nazi Party, for example, and giving absolute power to a dictator. And the people should be safeguarded from any mistakes they make in this direction. (Interview by Erina Reddan, *Foreign Correspondent*, ABC television, 21 March 1995.)

On the King's warnings about democratically-elected dictators, see also Campbell (1992a: 90).

<sup>74</sup>The Crown Prince has said:

Traditions are not built into concrete. Change is inevitable. I would like to see politico-constitutional change initiated within my father's lifetime. I would then preside over its performance. (Quoted in Bain 1993: 101.)

## The Nobles

The foreign media's portrayals of Tongan politics often tend to single out the nobles for criticism. The equal numbers of representatives for the nobles and the people seems feudal to many Westerners, who have come to think of democracy as a natural form of government. But Tongan defenders of their regime say that to focus on relative numbers of voters misrepresents the nobles' role in parliament:

They are elected by the nobility but they do not represent the nobility as such, as would be the normal assumption. They represent the whole country, including government, including the people. (Fusitu'a 1993.)<sup>75</sup>

If you look at it from Australian eyes . . . then there's no excuse for it whatsoever. It will always be viewed as a system which is tailored to keep the entrenched establishment in power. When you then [examine] the Tongan concepts [behind it], . . . you will find that the nobility in the house have never been considered as politicians. They are there as the traditional representatives of the people as compared to the political representatives. . . . The nobles in the house will never behave politically. . . . [A noble's] self image is that of . . . father figure, and his role in the house is not to debate. His role in the house is to have an arbitrating role, where he'll try and keep the peace. Because that's what he does in the villages. (E. Fusitu'a 1993.)<sup>76</sup>

Traditionally the parliament has been the house of nobles, and representatives of the people were brought in [later]. The nobles as a tradition were never active participants in the house. They were always looked upon as the real judges of the house. You [direct] your debate to them. They are more or less the casting vote. (Afeaki 1993.)

The foreign press . . . say the nobles don't know what they're doing: they're sitting there, they're quiet, they're not doing anything. They miss the point altogether. The noble, in his personal upbringing, is always taught to arbitrate. Always taught to make a decision according to the consensus of opinion in his village and in his family. . . . You'll never find the nobles arguing sharply anywhere; sometimes to their advantage, a lot of times to their disadvantage. They can't break away from this role that they have been groomed to play. (E. Fusitu'a 1993.)<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Another noble (and minister) endorsed this broader concept of representation:

Now we have the people's representatives . . . saying that the nobles don't represent the people. They don't represent the people? They look after the people! They're the ones who distribute the land, they're the ones who are there at funerals and when birthdays are held. (Fakafanua 1993.)

<sup>76</sup>The nobles in fact have a dual role as representatives:

They represent the King in the villages and the districts and [throughout] all the outer islands. And so it is the King that the people should see [i.e., imagine as being represented by nobles] in their villages, playing the role and standing in the gap there. (Siu'ilikutapu 1993.)

<sup>77</sup>Others echoed this:

Like their Fijian counterparts dealing with chiefs, the people's representatives run into difficulties in dealing with the nobles, difficulties which their critics say are of their own making:

They don't really know how to approach them. . . . In our Tongan language we speak a different language [for] the nobles, and a different language [for] the King, and a different language [for] the commoners. That's custom. They don't talk to the nobles in their own [language]. They talk in the everyday language, and they're sometimes very abusive, and the nobles feel not only belittled [but] abused, and obviously the natural reaction for them is to say no to whatever the representatives introduce. (Ketui'ionetoa 1993.)<sup>78</sup>

In the last two sessions you have had a few members who have actively insulted the nobles — that is the real background to the nobles not voting. . . . As a rule, I find the same thing that Pohiva puts to the House, if Joe Blow puts it to the House, they'll vote for it. They're not voting for or against the issue; [it's a case of saying,] "You have insulted me, so I won't vote for you." ('E. Fusitu'a 1993.)<sup>79</sup>

Nobles also have obvious reasons to vote with the government against the people's representatives. Both government and nobles share the same loyalties:

The King appoints [them]: once someone appoints [you], there is a certain loyalty. . . . Apart from being appointed by the King, institutionalised in the constitution, they have a blood relationship [with him] and [so are] still very loyal to His Majesty. (Tapa 1993.)

The ministers consist of some nobles and some commoners, but they're all appointed [by] the King. . . . Then you have the group of nobles, who are

Look at ceremonies: nobles never speak. They have talking chiefs, [the *matapule*], that speak on their behalf. . . . You go to the Palace: the King doesn't speak; it's the *matapule* still speaking. So that role, and that function in our culture, extends into parliament. They were never expected to speak. But that silence now of course [is] interpreted by the radicals as stupidity. It's crazy. They were silent because that was their role in the whole culture. And [when] you came to the vote, their vote always made the difference. (Afeaki 1993.)

<sup>78</sup>He continued:

The representatives of the people . . . have been very successful so far in making the nobles angry! There are certain ways of approaching any particular problem. You should approach it in a very gentle manner. But the way they approach it in parliament: this had never happened before, for a representative to stand up and shout in very abusive language to the nobles. . . . There are certain ways of convincing the nobles that what they have been demanding so far is for the benefit of the whole nation. And they should do this in a way which is acceptable as far as the custom and traditions [are concerned]. (Ketui'ionetoa 1993.)

<sup>79</sup>Eseta Fusitu'a added that some were beginning to criticise the people's representatives for their impoliteness:

There has been a lot of backlash from the people. About two sessions or six years ago, you will find letters to the editor congratulating the aggressive members of parliament for having done this or having said this. Now you'll find the people writing letters to the editor regretting that members of parliament have to resort to impolite language; and when it's broadcast over radio people are complaining that it's teaching bad habits to their children. ('E. Fusitu'a 1993.)

... also appointed by the King. . . . Before you start the game it's already biased. But what do you expect of the nobles? Of course they will always move to the side of the ministers, because they are trying to protect the same interests. . . . It's unfair to expect the nobles to behave otherwise in such a system. It's just normal behaviour. (Liava'a 1993.)

But, some stress, this alliance of interests only goes so far; ultimately the ministers are more beholden to the King than the nobles:

You do not become a noble because of the King. You become a noble because of the law of inheritance. . . . The noble is appointed by the King, that's the procedure, but does not owe his title to the King.<sup>80</sup>

As nobles they'd certainly feel a kindred spirit to a [minister] appointed by the King. To move on from there and say that therefore you will always vote for the ministers, no. Certainly not. ('E. Fusitu'a 1993.)

Others agreed, saying that 'it's wrong to say that nobles are always on the government's side' (Havea 1993). One told of a case where the nobles had opposed the government and the people's representatives voting together:

There was a motion in 1990, I think it was. . . . You are entitled to a piece of land, eight acres, and you pay rent of 80 cents a year, to pay for clerical work. . . . [Pohiva] moved that it should be \$200 a year. And the government [were thinking] "Yes, that would be good," because they get ten percent. Nobility wouldn't have it. . . . The odd thing about it [was] the payment would be to the benefit of nobles. . . . [But] the nobility thought that that's a stupid idea, because you are then milking the ordinary people. (Fusitu'a 1993.)

The situation has also been made less predictable by the advent of younger noble's representatives:

These younger nobles don't react to the abusive language [to] the same degree as the older nobles. (Ketui'ionetoa 1993.)

It will be a complicating factor. . . . For example, just before the closure of parliament at the end of last year, [two] motions . . . were made by the people's representatives, [and] were carried, both of them, because they were able to enlist the votes of nobles — not many, but a couple — and also ministers in parliament. (Helu 1993a.)

But there is some way to go before nobles' representatives (and ministers who are nobles) discount their background completely:

I don't expect the nobles to just move a hundred percent with the demands of the people, because of our stratified social class structure. That class structure is unfortunately well consolidated by our constitution. (Liava'a 1993.)

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<sup>80</sup>Neither can the King arbitrarily remove a noble's title: 'I think there are only two ways to lose it: to lose your sanity, or to have committed an indictable offence. Then you will lose your title.' ('E. Fusitu'a 1993.)

One basic thing that tradition affects [in] modern politics is attitude; for example, chiefly attitudes . . . towards commoners. . . . In parliament [during] recent debates . . . one of the ministers, who is of chiefly rank, [was reported to have] said that one of the people's representatives should be boiled and baked in [an] *umu*. . . . So [there is] that basic attitude of . . . the high ranks looking down on the lower ranks. (Finau 1993a.)<sup>81</sup>

An important question arises from the view of nobles as the traditional representatives of the people in parliament. Do the people still identify with the nobles sufficiently that they are satisfied that the nobles do represent their interests?

At the time when the system was set up, it was the chiefs who spoke and represented the people of their village. Of course, with the twentieth century, new interpretations, and the changes in the relationship between chiefs and the people, that sort of criteria that held true in the past in many ways does not hold true now, for some. (Kavaliku 1993.)

Has the position of the nobles in Tongan society changed?<sup>82</sup> Some felt it basically had not:

Their place in society is very important. They are a cohesive element. His own people would look to him as one who brings us all together, and his counsel is still sought. If the place doesn't have a chief, then [it] doesn't seem to be an integrated whole; there's something missing in it; . . . and you will find that someone would tend to . . . crave authority [and] in some ways claim that he has got this authority or got this power. . . . There is still this longing for someone legitimate to occupy that place in the society.<sup>83</sup> You take that [away, and] increasingly the society is breaking up. (Taufa 1993.)

Of course there are bad nobles and good nobles. The good ones will survive; . . . the people love them. The bad ones, the people still love them, and they'll wait [and say,] "Their son will be better!" (Fakafanua 1993.)

Others thought that the nobles' position had changed:

Except for the powers based upon [their] legal positions, Tongans don't pay much attention to chiefs. Especially after the late eighties onwards, when the

<sup>81</sup>These attitudes, Finau said, had deep origins:

Theologically in the old days, for Tonga, only the chiefs survived death. They lived on after death. Commoners just disappeared. That attitude, while it's in the past, has carried over [to the] present, and into political life, and other ways in social life. (Finau 1993a.)

<sup>82</sup>See a chapter by Kerry James in White and Lindstrom (forthcoming).

<sup>83</sup>Taufa noted that although the class of nobles is small, at only 33, there is a wider, less-well-defined group of people who are considered chiefly:

You go to a village and you'll find a chief of some sort, high or low in the ranking of the chiefs; still there is that person or that office in the society. The more radical people [say] do away with the monarchy, not realising the important place that they have in the life of the society. Life of the village, life of a district, the life of the people as a whole, life of the family; there's still this important place that people still look to as a cohesive element in their life. (Taufa 1993.)

new younger parliamentarians who represent the people began to stir up public consciousness and revamp interests in your rights and your powers. (Helu 1993a.)

In the past they were very powerful, because they controlled the land and the Tongans relied on them for their livelihood. This is no longer the case now. Most of the lands have gone into the hands of the people according to the law. . . . The other thing [is that] well-educated people don't have land but rely on their work. (Pohiva 1993.)<sup>84</sup>

Once you make your land tenure system in such a way that once you get a piece of land registered, it's yours, and the estate holder is forbidden by law to have anything — and more and more people have land — [then if the people give the noble] anything, they give these things in return because of traditions. (Hau'ofa 1993a.)

Their increasing independence from the nobles causes some Tongans to question or even resent the nobles' demands:

There's a Tongan saying: "You grumble, but you go along." You don't really see people in a physical sense [showing] that they resent what their nobles are doing. They go along [with it], but they grumble. (S. Vea 1993.)

Sometimes the chief would say, "I have some obligation or something to do; everybody staying in my village will have to contribute so much money." This has happened, and it has brought discredit not to the nobility but to certain nobles. I think the criticism has been not of the system but of individuals who may be abusing their authority or their traditional rank. (Tapa 1993.)

Before, [the chiefs] had to rely on the people. Now the people are changing: they don't want to just give you something without pay. So the chiefs have to work hard to [meet] their own needs, instead of relying on the people to give them what they want.<sup>85</sup> Time changed that without telling. (S. Tupou 1993.)

Nobles have indirectly and unintentionally contributed to this shift by living at a remove from their people (partly because the demands of modern government require them to do so):

Most of the nobles now reside in the capital. Before they used to stay with their own people. Now they have their representatives in the islands, but they reside in Nuku'alofa. But I guess there is the need now for them to stay in the capital. . . . That's where the action is. And they can deal with their own representatives in Cabinet. . . . If they stay with their people in the islands, they will be forgotten. (Ketui'ionetoa 1993.)

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<sup>84</sup>The land issue is further explored in Chapter Six.

<sup>85</sup>One noble noted the increasing demands being made of him over the past decades:

[They have] increased from ten, twenty years ago — over [the] long term. Like the [King's birthday] celebration. The sum involvement of your day in these celebrations. . . . You have to be there [for the people]. They won't recognise it, politically. (Fielakepa 1993.)

Unfortunately they tend to ignore the role that they should be playing in society. For example, according to our traditional and social class system, . . . every noble is supposed to be responsible for a group.<sup>86</sup> . . . But most of them live away. They used to live together with the people, in the villages especially, but now they all migrate to the city, Nuku'alofa. Even nobles in the outer islands. . . . To me that is the beginning of the erosion of their powers. (Liava'a 1993.)<sup>87</sup>

The nobles themselves should go to their village . . . and get closer to the people and dialogue with them. In the village structure . . . they have the *fono*, a weekly meeting or monthly meeting. There you can . . . roll up to the chief and talk to them. (Fifita 1993.)

The result is a situation remarkably similar to that facing chiefs in Fiji; nobles must now *earn* the respect of their people:

The view now is that they should prove themselves, to earn the respect that they want. . . . I think the nobles are hearing the message. And it's only recently that they're pushing their children into competition with the open market as it were — [to] assume status rather than rely on ascribed status — [via] university education, technical training, nursing, teaching. (Kavaliku 1993.)<sup>88</sup>

[They are] still pretty well respected. It's a matter for the noble also to gain that respect from people; it is a two-way thing. I think you will find that the nobles who respect the commoners . . . will get much more respect from the commoners. (P. Ve'a 1993.)<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>A minister explained the nature of the group under the noble: 'A noble has a group of people under him, called his *kainga*; [they] may be blood relations or they may have come into his village through marriage and so on.' (Tapa 1993.)

<sup>87</sup>As early as 1972, one anthropologist was observing that 'an absentee noble intrudes on the lives of his tenants . . . much less than I had suspected' (Marcus 1979: 137). He has also observed that 'except for the nobles resident in Tongatapu villages close to the capital, Vava'u is the only place outside Nuku'alofa where titleholders still reside either permanently or for long periods' (Marcus 1980: 83 (note 1)).

<sup>88</sup>He noted,

The interesting part is that even though they do work in these places, the relationship is — because they are children of chief — still recognised by those that work with them. Even though they may be below you. They don't make it very easy for him or her, but the relationship is recognised. (Kavaliku 1993.)

<sup>89</sup>Peni Ve'a noted some of the effective ways in which commoners could express their displeasure with nobles:

Nobles who play up, especially on the land issue, in what may appear to be an unfair way, distributing land or something like that, will not receive the same respect as those who do things in a fair way. Sometimes this is shown when people donate to traditional things; say, if the noble has an obligation to His Majesty. [If] he is well liked, he will most likely not spend any money at all on meeting those social obligations, because he's pretty well respected, and once his folks know about it they will contribute. (P. Ve'a 1993.)

Nobles' reliance on others for support may partially underlie their defence of the regime:

There's only one really wealthy aristocrat in Tonga. . . . The rest are not really. People like Fusitu'a — he has no independent means. His estate is the northernmost islands close



Other centres of authority have emerged, and these are undermining the position of traditional authority figures:

The social aspect has been loosened through the development of thinking for oneself, and the influence of being independent. [Tongans'] identity is now being weaned away from the King, so that there are now what I call centres of authority other than the traditional ones. . . . Church minister in the village; the uncle who has a business; or the brother who has a degree; or the politician; or the paper editor: these are centres of authority to which [some of] the King's and the nobles' powers have been devolved [over the last ten years]. (Fukofuka 1993.)<sup>90</sup>

The nobles, then, are facing significant social challenges, and it is these which underlie the political challenges they now meet. If nobles do not account for these social challenges, warn PDM members, they stand to lose out:

The role of the noble now should be reviewed by the nobles if they want to survive. They must try to redefine their role in the present structure in this period of transition and for the future. If they fail to do it, they will be out, because commoners who are good at education, good at business, will become the members of the middle-class in the future, and the nobles lose. . . . I think that they already feel it. They know that they are going to lose unless they push their children to study hard. If they are lazy, if they don't want to join the private sector and use the resources they have, . . . they'll miss out. (Pohiva 1993.)

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to Samoa, and he's the one who really is the most vocal of them in support of the system, because that system is their only means of revenue. (Hau'ofa 1993a.)

<sup>90</sup>People in positions of (non-traditional) authority, such as the President of the Wesleyan Church, have found that they are accorded traditional signs of respect:

You are accorded honorific terms. A chief would be addressed with honorific terms. For instance, the word for "go" that's used of the common people is *alu*. . . . But when you refer to a chief going, you use *me'a*. The language is used according to the strata of society. When [a commoner] achieves something in his own effort, . . . people sort of automatically raise his status and accord him with the honorific terms.

It's somewhat new for me. You don't feel used to it when people say to you "you *me'a*", you go. I try my best to stop them from doing it; I say "I'm a commoner"; but they wouldn't. They think of me as president of the church, and therefore use the terms of reference that are used of people high up in the society. Likewise, those who have been made ministers in the government would be addressed as a chief. [With] a businessman, strangely enough, it doesn't matter whether he's successful or not in his business work — he's still referred to as a commoner. (Taufa 1993.)

Even the people's representatives had experienced something similar:

Now they're giving us the traditional respect because we have helped them understand what's going on in parliament, how power is used and abused, and they're very grateful for that. (Fukofuka 1993.)

## The Government

Much of the stance of the government towards the PDM stems from ministers' relationship with the King and the nobles. Many ministers are nobles themselves, although commoners are now included in government:

You will find in cabinet that still many of the ministers are appointed based on traditional qualifications. . . . But it's changing. Today you find some of the ministers being named because of their qualifications and their standard of education. (Tu'itahi 1993.)

Whether nobles or not, ministers — who are usually appointed for life, subject to the King's wishes — would risk losing their positions if they moved from a system of appointed to elected ministers:

There are very few senior people on top, but they are very influential, very powerful; they are the ones who are still trying to hang on to the traditional structures, and they're reluctant to have all these innovations come into the country. . . . It is quite natural for any people who benefit from a system to be reluctant to accept change. It happens everywhere. (Pohiva 1993.)

Underneath royalty you see a lot of noise that comes from the people with power, people in the decision-making level: a reaction to people who are trying to bring in change. Maybe it involves fear, lest one's status should be brought down. . . . They close the door to dialogue, and that's why we have all our problems today. ('A. Havea 1993.)

They can't distinguish between [themselves and the position they hold]. They've been there so long, they own it: it's them. They say "you're talking about me". They can't see you're talking about the system, or talking about the job. (Finau 1993a.)

The government and its supporters often play down its common interests with the noble's representatives:

Our parliament is the only parliament in the whole world where government is a minority; where government is twelve members, and then the other representatives are eighteen. You must look at it in that sense. (Afeaki 1993.)

Some admit, however, that in most circumstances the government can rely on the support of a clear majority in parliament:

In practice we are a minority government. . . . If the other two [groups] vote together — see, in the past this rarely happened, because the nobles had a very strong sense of loyalty to the King. . . . According to the constitution the ministers sit as nobles. So of course most things coming from the King and the ministers, the nobles would support. So rarely we're defeated. . . . Even if the government was defeated on a motion or a bill, it didn't resign [as] is the Western practice. (Tapa 1993.)

Government therefore has considerable freedom to act as it wishes, although ministers emphasise their sense of pragmatism:

Government doesn't really say, "This is our policy." Government is very pragmatic: it says, "This is the best we can do with the resources we have, and we are doing it." Issues are looked at individually. (Fakafanua 1993.)

But because the government is responsible to the King rather than the people, it has often neglected to inform the public about its actions. It 'usually doesn't explain what it's doing', simply because it doesn't have to (Niu 1993). Accompanying this has been an over-zealous sense of confidentiality:

They thought that *all* things were confidential except for when the work starts. To build that Reserve Bank, \$6 million down the drain, but . . . nobody knew until they start commissioning and construction has started. People go, "What is that building?" But they cannot do that now; they have to put it to parliament, ask for the funds, and then explain what it's for. . . . Tongans will not tolerate the former practice of being left in the dark about the use of their money. You have to account [for it]. (Niu 1993.)

People prefer to be in the know than to feel that they're excluded from making a decision or [having] any input into the system. I think quite a lot of the problems that we have in government now [are] because people do not participate in the process of development, of decision-making within their own departments or within their little sector, and they have no idea what's going on. . . . In many cases government is unnecessarily secretive about things. (Taufe'ulungaki 1993.)

The public's demands for information and greater accountability stem from allegations of corruption and mismanagement made since the 1980s. These centred on certain ministers rather than the King, but tainted the whole system of government by association.<sup>91</sup> Such concerns prompted the initial entry into parliament of people's representatives bent on reform:

My basic concern in the house was simply to try and dismiss some ministers whom I thought were clearly acting unlawfully, unconstitutionally; misappropriating money, or grossly incompetent. We were very much concerned with that, but to no avail. (Niu 1993.)<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>One critic said,

There are ministers who are crooks. They're corrupt. Definitely. I do not think the King is corrupt. . . . He may make some wrong decisions, he may make some mistakes here and there, [but] aside from shortcomings, I believe the man is clean. You can look at his lifestyle: he's not rich. His son is definitely much richer than he is. (Anonymous 1993.)

But a minister asked whether any of Tonga's leaders could truly be corrupt, given their relatively modest lifestyles:

Have a look around and you'll see. See where some of the ministers live. Are they really ministers? The things the government's been accused of, and all the millions which are supposed to be hidden away. If you have a look at it and see how the royal family lives, does this really show how corrupt they are? (Fakafanua 1993.)

<sup>92</sup>But Niu, who split publicly from Pohiva and the PDM camp in the 1993 election, added:

I didn't want to change the system. . . . Parliament can dismiss a minister. Parliament can change the budget of the government; the government may want so many millions for

But supporters of the government think that this campaign has already gone too far:

There were mistakes made by government people, and people actually are dissatisfied [because] of those mistakes. They do not see any penalty imposed upon those that allegedly made the mistakes, and those people are still in government. I think they are looking for blood. It's very un-Christian. Everybody makes mistakes. The mistake is done, government had admitted to it, and they're still talking about the mistakes. (Afeaki 1993.)<sup>93</sup>

The government *is* accountable, its supporters protest, crediting the system for that accountability:

Government has never been as accountable. . . . They have been very accountable in the last six years; it was because of this system. But this movement — there's no end to what they want. (Afeaki 1993.)

Parliament can dismiss a minister if the minister is found not to be running things according to law. . . . Any member can impeach a minister in the house. If the house finds him guilty of the charges . . . then he is dismissed. (Fusitu'a 1993.)

In response to such claims, critics point out the constraints of the system, and its weighting in favour of government:

In every country there's always corruption and mistakes that leaders make. . . . The issue here is that there is no recourse, there's no way of correcting that. . . . We need a system that makes government accountable, and within that same system allows people to be able to solve problems. When things are there that need to be solved, something is done about it. The way we're going now, it's just not going to go anywhere. (K. Moala 1993.)

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doing something which we felt shouldn't be done; parliament can change it. But parliament didn't want to do that. The majority says, "No, it's the King's wish, let it be done," and that sort of thing. That's the sort of headaches we had. But in a way we did achieve a lot. We had many laws changed which were not good before. We also had the ministers more careful, concerned; they did act more carefully and promptly, and they were doing a much better job than they were before. (Niu 1993.)

<sup>93</sup>Afeaki, a people's representative who was supportive of the government (and consequently voted out in 1993), spoke of the most prominent mistake, the government's sale of Tongan passports to foreigners:

We have corrected that mistake. The citizenship passports are not being sold again. They overlook the fact that the very money that we got out of the passports is probably what's saving Tonga right now, and yet they still talk about the wrong, a wrong that has been made right, and was corrected in the only way that it could have been done which was a constitutional change. If we hadn't done that, and all those passports were nullified, can you imagine all the damage suits that would have been following? We would have been breaking out money for two generations to come before we could ever pay it off. (Afeaki 1993.)

'Eseta Fusitu'a noted:

They've tried so hard to say to the people the King is corrupt, and none of that has held true. They tried with the passport issue. That has reached the end of the line; they said that the money went to the King, who had an auditing of those accounts published, so they can't pull the wool over people's eyes any more on that. ('E. Fusitu'a 1993.)

If government asks me to pay tax, or forces me to pay, [it has] an obligation to be accountable to me, to the taxpayers. . . . This is where they get it wrong. We didn't pay tax in the past, and that's why our country continued to survive and live this way. . . . There was no need for services . . . like education, medical services and all these things. Now people demand that government must provide all these services, because they are forced to pay tax. (Pohiva 1993.)

Moderate voices in the government attempt to put the issues into perspective:

Even government recognises the need for change. The real issue now is which direction shall we go, and how fast the changes [should] come. (Kavaliku 1993.)

'Well, there is some truth in it,' said the government's loudest critic; but he also pointed out the implicit message in such statements:

I believe ministers believe in change, . . . but their argument is that some people must direct and control the rate of change, and it is not for the people to do it, it is for the existing government people who are now in the position of leadership to plan the change, to regulate how things work. (Pohiva 1993.)

The message from the people, on the other hand, is that they feel such decisions rightly belong to them.

## **The Pro-Democracy Movement**

Clear, unequivocal action by government or the King at some point in the past few years could well have silenced their critics and satisfied many who are disgruntled with their lack of accountability:

I suppose if the King did address those things, people would be satisfied. But because he hasn't . . . people want another system that will. (Finau 1993a.)

It may be, however, that the moment for such action to have this effect has passed. A loose coalition of critical voices has coalesced into a movement for structural change:

Basically what we want is accountability, and that all members of parliament have to be elected. The King can select his ministers from that. But it would mean that the ministers will have to go back to the people every three years. . . . And we do that not because we want to change the country just for change's sake, but because the country is now at a stage where they may not be able to articulate it [but people] really want to change. It all boils down to what [a Tongan] gets every day to feed his family. (Fukofuka 1993.)

The key proposal is a simple one: let the people elect all thirty members of parliament. But its implications for the Tongan system are profound.<sup>94</sup> Consequently, it has provoked deep debate:

We support the Pro-Democracy Movement . . . not in the sense of [being] anti-King or anti-government [but] in the belief that it's a better system of government. (Finau 1993a.)

The pro-democracy people are not threatening people. They want what is good. And we are not taking the examples of the outside world; we are trying to handle things in the way that Tonga should be handled. ('A. Havea 1993.)

They don't know what they're talking about. They don't even know what democracy is. They've got a comic-book version of democracy. (Fusitu'a 1993.)

Everybody has their own interpretation of what democracy is. And people must really understand that in themselves. Also they must understand what it means, that you have to [be] responsible for everything else that you do. If you become a democratic system, the people decide, and if they make the wrong decision, that's it for however many years before you put everything right. (Fonua 1993.)

The issue in Tonga to me is not whether it's democratic or not — it is already democratic in many ways, in lots of the rights and the freedoms given. The issue really is the process and the rate of democratisation in terms of representative government, and in terms of accountability and the sharing of powers. . . . I think it's the rate and the direction of change that's the main issue. . . . Tongan tradition, social structure and culture, is part and parcel of the political structure that was set up, and we have to look very carefully at how to unfold or release bits and pieces, and how it affects also our own social, cultural life. It's not an easy thing. Whereas in Australia and other places, . . . changes in the system do not fundamentally affect the social, cultural part of your life. (Kavaliku 1993.)<sup>95</sup>

I thought it was a very unfair [proposal] for the nobles, because in a sea of commoners [they would lose out]. . . . One of the beauties of this present system is that we can listen and hear the other groups' needs right there, and not be separated into separate houses, let's say a House of Chiefs and House of Commoners. (Tapa 1993.)

They're saying that the ministers should be elected by the people; [look at] what is happening in Fiji and all these party systems — they're becoming

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<sup>94</sup>One people's representative said:

It would not change our tradition in any way. . . . We are trying now [for] a system [where] the people will elect the ministers. That is not a change really; it's only an administration matter. (Uata 1993.)

But such statements understate the implications of the proposed changes, and provide an easy target for pro-government forces. These proposals *would* change tradition: but, as I have argued in previous chapters, there is nothing unnatural, unthinkable, or necessarily objectionable in that. The King himself owes his political position to nineteenth century changes in tradition.

<sup>95</sup>I must disagree on the last point.

much more unstable. That's very typical of a democratic system. I don't think we can afford to have regular social unrest. (P. Vea 1993.)<sup>96</sup>

Do we have enough people to run such a system? Or are we going to have it only in name, but . . . end up with just a one-party system, just like what we have now? (Fonua 1993.)<sup>97</sup>

Some critics object to the way democracy has been presented to the people:

If you ask the common Tongans, uneducated Tongans . . . working in the farms, they believe that democracy is the panacea for all their problems. . . . They don't even know what democracy is. They have no notion whatsoever, but democracy is being presented to them in a very flowery way. If we have democracy, no more problems! And if some people during the *faikava* ask, "What is democracy?" [they are told,] "Democracy is for the King to relinquish his powers, for no more corruption in government." . . . They're very good at explaining the better half of democracy, [but] not really interested in putting [it in] balance. (Ketui'ionetoa 1993.)

Others require certainty about the effects before changes are made:

They're wanting to change the system altogether. To what? What alternative could they guarantee would stabilise the nation for the next one thousand years? Is it foolproof? If it is, I'm all for it. . . . This system has been proven. . . . Can they guarantee that this is the *best* system that they want? . . . Are we ready at this stage to be able to vote on an issue and not a relative? . . . People are ready for change, but is that the right change? I'd like that thought of a little bit more. (Siu'ilikutapu 1993.)

[The people] should be instructed by people who really know what will happen if these changes [take place] and what the implications are. Because most of the people don't know. (Tu'itahi 1993.)

These are impossible conditions for anyone to meet; no one can predict the precise effects democracy would have on Tongan society, just as no one can predict what will happen if the present system remains. And representative democracy's pedigree is measured in hundreds of years, not thousands. But it is worth pointing out that the

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<sup>96</sup>Since Fiji is not truly democratic, it is rather misleading to say that Fiji's problems are 'very typical of a democratic system'.

<sup>97</sup>Another noted:

They want to change the ministers: when you look at the way the ministers are elected, I think they're very carefully scrutinised by the King — they're going to be the top in their area. Look at the Deputy Prime Minister; he's the first Ph.D. in Tonga. He's a very well-qualified person. . . . Look at the Minister of Health — he was the first doctor with a degree. So it's not only in terms of performance; your qualification also should [count]. (P. Vea 1993.)

One question which it is impossible to answer at present is that if all seats were open to election, how many of the people currently in government — and nobles, for that matter — would actually win seats? While present electoral support for the PDM may be interpreted as criticism of government in general, it might be directed at some ministers rather than others. It is quite possible that popular ministers and nobles would retain their seats. Indeed, if support for traditional authority is as strong as government supporters say, they should have little to fear from popular elections.

PDM's proposals fall significantly short of full representative democracy: no king of England, for example, has enjoyed a free hand in selecting his ministers from parliament for over three hundred years. These proposals represent a retreat from their original demands:

They have adjusted their stance recently. Before they were going after abolishing the kingship. (Tu'itahi 1993.)

They [argued that] the King should not have executive authority. He should be just a figurehead, like the Queen of England. But in Tongan tradition the king has never been just a figurehead. He has been the leader in everything, whether it's in war, . . . in the churches, and so on. (Tapa 1993.)

The first time that they started pussy-footing around the subject was at their Convention last year, and I think that was because the people rejected their views about the King. ('E. Fusitu'a 1993.)<sup>98</sup>

Under this new structure, His Majesty still has the power to appoint his ministers, not from outside but this time from the thirty members elected. So people and His Majesty both have a role to play in running the government. . . . That is a step towards full democracy; it still has some problems. Ministers have to be accountable to His Majesty; they have to be accountable [to the people] also. (Pohiva 1993.)<sup>99</sup>

It's all playing politics really, because if you go for more than that you will not get anything. (Hau'ofa 1993a.)<sup>100</sup>

Judging by the electoral support for PDM candidates, which is the only measurable indicator of public opinion, their proposals have struck a chord with the Tongan people: they now hold six of the nine people's seats, and have some support from a seventh representative. Critics question whether this support accurately reflects majority opinion:

In the 1990 election, for Tongatapu there were 39,000 votes. . . . The pro-democracy [candidates] won 27,000. In the 1993 election [they] won 21,000 of the votes, [out of a larger electorate] because you had more people who registered. And the votes that they lost: it was 12,000 in 1990, it was 18,000 in 1993. . . . That was quite a shock result. . . . [The PDM-supporting]

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<sup>98</sup>Pohiva had expressed his preference for the king-selects-ministers model at least as early as 1991 (Robie 1991a: 17).

<sup>99</sup>A minister pointed out that, as he understood it, these proposals are also intended to spare the King from having to dismiss ministers who misbehave (Tapa 1993).

<sup>100</sup>Critics see this as a blow to the PDM's credibility, and some suspect a hidden agenda:

That idea of having the King in his place — that's a lot of bull-dust. Only a fool would swallow that story. What they have in mind clearly stands out: they don't want any king. (Fusitu'a 1993.)

But what threat is a hidden agenda if it remains hidden? Democracy involves taking into account the wishes of the people; in acceding to the people's desire to retain the King, the PDM could be said to be behaving democratically. And if the public ever decides to support stronger restrictions of the King's powers, the issue will no longer be a 'hidden agenda'.



papers forecasted that they would get 80 percent of the votes. . . . In Tongatapu they got 54 percent of the votes. ('E. Fusitu'a 1993.)<sup>101</sup>

When you compare the figures of those people that went out there and voted against those that didn't vote but registered, against those who just didn't even bother to register at all: no landslide. But the ones who registered: there was a good number of them [who] voted for the Pro-Democracy Movement. (Havea 1993.)<sup>102</sup>

And they question the basis of the PDM's electoral support:

[A monthly church paper] called *'Ofa ki Tonga* did a survey two days after the election, asking about 2,000 people throughout Tongatapu what they voted for. . . . If I recall correctly, about 80 percent of the people said that they voted for clean government. . . . About 20 percent said that they voted for political change. So that gives you the fuller picture. ('E. Fusitu'a 1993.)<sup>103</sup>

My interpretation is this was an indirect way of saying to government, "Do something about your ministers or about your system of working [to] improve." (Tapa 1993.)<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>Voters in Tonga receive as many votes as there are seats in their electorate. Each vote is cast for a single candidate, and the one, two, or three candidates (depending on the electorate) who win the highest numbers of votes are elected. Thus, in Tongatapu in 1993, 44,178 valid votes were cast, even though only 28,743 voters (out of 48,487 registered) turned out for the whole of Tonga. The turn-out on Tongatapu was approximately 14,700; on Vava'u, approximately 6,300; on Ha'apai, approximately 4,400; on 'Eua, approximately 2,000; and on the Niuaus, approximately 1,100; from which one can also deduce that Tongatapu is significantly under-represented relative to the other electorates, and the Niuaus are significantly over-represented (a more balanced allocation of representatives, based on these figures, would be 15, 6, 4, 2, and 1, respectively — not 3, 2, 2, 1, and 1). In Tongatapu, the three PDM candidates (who were all returned) won 25,168 votes between them, compared with 19,010 for the other 12 candidates combined; i.e., 57 percent of total valid votes cast. (Figures calculated from data given in *Matangi Tonga*, March-April 1993, p. 21.)

<sup>102</sup>The problem with this argument is that one cannot assume that non-voters support the government. One could even argue that if they did, they might have been more motivated to turn out and vote against the PDM. Apathy cannot be interpreted as active support or positive disapproval in either direction.

<sup>103</sup>Sione Latukefu reported the findings of this random-sample survey (carried out 'a fortnight after the February elections') as follows:

An overwhelming majority (77%) wanted social justice, only 10% wanted political change, 5% for reasons of family loyalty, 2% for quality of the candidate and 6% for other reasons. (Latukefu 1993: 61.)

These figures (which total precisely 100 percent) show that the survey obviously did not allow the nomination of multiple reasons for voting, but instead allowed only one (hence only a tiny proportion appeared to be concerned about 'quality of the candidate'). This invalidates any conclusion that only a small proportion of those polled favoured political change: many others may have done, while at the same time regarding 'social justice' (or another factor) as the *most important* factor behind their votes.

<sup>104</sup>One might argue that if people's criticisms of government are not being sufficiently addressed (as a continuing vote for the PDM would indicate), this suggests that the current system cannot adequately respond to such demands. A desire for change in the system therefore becomes implicit in people's continuing calls for 'clean government'. The question then is what

But others respond:

The issue was clear-cut in the last election. The election previous to that one, it was not pro-democracy, it was reform. (Hau'ofa 1993a.)

[The candidates] stated very clearly before the election campaign that they are for democracy and change, and in the past three years this issue of change and democracy was debated such that people are fully aware of [that]. (Tu'itahi 1993.)

Change, however, is not a foregone conclusion. Supporters of the government have stood their ground:

Mr. Pohiva has been criticised and been taken to court for some things; he's lost a case to a noble. . . . I think [his] credibility slumped, because some wrote to papers openly, "We supported you because we thought you were honest." (Tapa 1993.)<sup>105</sup>

People want this government to . . . give them a bit more for doing a little less. . . . The system will be modified to accommodate whatever the future holds that would necessitate changing it. But it will not be because of this little movement. . . . The country is going to better itself, to modify itself when it's necessary, on its own, without this hindrance. (Fusitu'a 1993.)

Instead of trying to say to the people, "I've got an alternative system which I think is better," their tactic has been to say, "The King has done all these dreadful things, minister A has done all these dreadful things, therefore, this system is bad." That has been their tactic all these years, and the result is predictable: the people have become so confused — which is the weakness of the system, or the strength of the system; which is the weakness of the officer, and the strengths of the officer? ('E. Fusitu'a 1993.)<sup>106</sup>

And the PDM has its own problems to surmount:

It's more or less the same issues for the past six years. For some it's becoming a bore. . . . Supporters for 'Akilisi for the past six years realise that new issues are coming on the agenda, but the government on the other side are stalling. They don't give him a black-and-white absolute answer. (Anonymous 1993.)<sup>107</sup>

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kind of changes people want, and the answer would not necessarily be the precise changes proposed by the PDM.

<sup>105</sup>Although this minister added,

Of course he's won several cases, so . . . now and then he's right. I heard one woman voter who said, . . . "I like 'Akilisi Pohiva because he's the only one that gives us the information that we get." (Tapa 1993.)

<sup>106</sup>'Eseta Fusitu'a added,

They're not total rejecters of the traditional system. In the areas of politics they will make this clear-cut stand about being non-traditional, but then politics does not make up the totality of anybody's life. In the main they will remain silent about the other aspects of their lives where they depend very heavily and exploit very heavily, just as I do, the family system and the traditional system for [their] needs. ('E. Fusitu'a 1993.)

<sup>107</sup>A civil servant.

The Pro-Democracy Movement is a pussy-cat that looks like a tiger. It doesn't have any real force other than its beliefs. . . . It's been now years where everybody's saying corruption, corruption, corruption — nothing's been done about it. And sooner or later the general public will get immune to the message of corruption; they'll think it's normal. . . . When a passport story came out four or five years ago, it really shook [people] up; they'd be mad. Half of them now don't even care. "Ahh, there's another passport story." It's part of what they call the Polynesian paralysis; that is, "do nothing about it".

The problem here is that the Pro-Democracy Movement's main project was really getting people elected. After the election they kind of just stand there. I believe that politics is more than just getting into parliament. (K. Moala 1993.)

The only way to try and formally attain the mission of our group is to form a political party. . . . We have to draft our constitution, we have to work on our manifesto. . . . Because there is a big question mark from the other side about our own programme, or whatever hidden agenda that we have. If we think democratically, we have to come out with our own thing, we have to table it before government — it's up to them to scrutinise. . . . You've got to have some organisation and some leadership in the whole team. Until we have that, I think the whole exercise is going to be full of problems. (Liava'a 1993.)

We have too many fronts [to fight on]. We are concentrating on parliament now. We [are] still going out to the people. Previously with the main centres of population we didn't get the kind of turn-out we had hoped for, because the nobles had made known that they wouldn't want their own people to come to the pro-democracy meetings. In fact one noble [in Kolonga] chased the committee out of his town. So we then went to the villages which didn't have the noble, and those were successful. Now we're going in very small groups. (Fukofuka 1993.)

We've got to work together with the people, educate them, explain to them very clearly what democracy is, how democracy functions, how democracy works, what we hope to achieve in the future, the advantages of democracy, disadvantages, all these things. Once we are able to get all these things done, then we hope to put up a referendum. There's a possibility that we [will] put up a new constitution and publish it; . . . make people compare the two. (Pohiva 1993.)<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup>Part of the Movement's education campaign was to hold a convention in December 1992. Accounts of the convention demonstrated both the eagerness of many Tongans to learn about democracy, and the eagerness of some in government to stop them (see also Robie (1992a)):

Government [successfully discouraged] the High Commissioners from sending money to support the convention. . . . We expected to get money from the Asian Foundation but when the Minister for Police informed the High Commissioners, Ambassadors, that government was not going to support [it], they pulled out their financial assistance. . . . Government was invited [to attend], and accepted, and after two weeks [they] pulled out. . . . They also arrested one of the Tongans that we invited to come from [overseas] to participate; . . . [they] sent him back to America.

Two weeks before the convention they sent out a message on the radio [in Tongan]. . . . They announced the names of six people [who were] meeting in one of the islands, and went on to say that after that meeting, they will start sailing from that nearby island to [Tongatapu] on the very day the convention was supposed to start. And the purpose of their coming to this main island was to do what His Majesty wants. That was a strange

Tongans have some cause for optimism, if only because people on both sides express a desire to engage in dialogue:

The people think that the change should come from them. And the King, I'm sure, thinks the change should come from him. I believe there are changes [which] should come from the bottom, and there are changes [which] should come from the top. Because if you are the father and I am the son, [we] have different obligations . . . and we have to [engage in] dialogue . . . to make the change smooth, friendly, and successful. (Fifita 1993.)

A lot of our problems would be solved if we came face to face. . . . The anger goes. I would have liked a lot more dialogue. Instead of [discussion] over the media. (Siu'ilikutapu 1993.)

Where that dialogue would lead is unclear; but the need for dialogue will not disappear, whatever changes are made. 'And after all,' as one church leader said, 'democracy is a form of dialogue.' (A. Havea 1993.)

There are no foregone conclusions about change in the political systems of either Fiji or Tonga, particularly in the short term. Political pressures and challenges exist in both cases, but the existing regimes are well-entrenched according to law. But it is possible to conclude that the existing systems will not run as smoothly as their supporters might hope. The reasons run much deeper than disagreements over particular personalities or day-to-day issues. Fundamental social changes are taking place, and changing and challenging existing traditions, including traditions of authority. The remainder of this study explores these social forces.

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announcement, but the implication was clear. It was intended to discourage people from coming to participate, because some people would stir up trouble.

I think that those people who planned to break up the thing, when they came and looked at the [crowd], feared that if they tried to disrupt [it] people would turn against them. On the very first day they found out that we had the support of the majority, and it would be very dangerous for them if they [tried anything]. Because the leaders of the most powerful churches were attending. (Pohiva 1993.)

It was a great success. . . . More [people turned out] than I would have expected: . . . some [say] 500, some 600. The first day one of the journalists said there were a thousand people, in the sense that after a few speeches, people will go, others will come in. . . . The room takes at the most three hundred. . . . The first day . . . there were another three hundred outside. So we worked quickly. Got TV screens [out there]. (Fukofuka 1993.)

But critics of the PDM were unimpressed:

They had what they call a convention, I think it was, inviting people from overseas to come and change the constitution or some such. I didn't take much notice of it. Just a little bubble, and [it] burst — nobody takes [any] notice. (Fusitu'a 1993.)

## Chapter Five

### Education's Effects on Tradition and Politics

*Despite all the custom, . . . education is now highly valued amongst Fijians. . . . It's going to break into the Fijian hold, because the person who is educated will not necessarily be the [son of a chief]. (Durutalo 1993a.)*

When talking to interviewees in 1993, I quickly realised that one aspect had been if not neglected then at least insufficiently emphasised in the academic debate about the 'politics of tradition'. That aspect was education. Many in Fiji and subsequently in Tonga — too many to quote them all here — affirmed the central role education has played in changing tradition and politics. 'Basically,' as one said, 'there's been a pressure against traditionalism: pressure to get educated' (Momoivalu 1993). Primarily, people pointed to higher-educated individuals as being those more likely to question existing traditional roles; but one should not underestimate the influence of any level of education on people's perceptions. This chapter explores various aspects of education and how they have impinged upon matters of tradition and politics.

#### Higher Education

Higher-educated Fijians became a significant political force in the 1980s. Urban Fijians accounted for much of the swing away from the Alliance in the 1987 election which delivered victory to the Labour/NFP Coalition; the Fiji Indian population, who for many Fijians became the scapegoat, actually voted in marginally increased numbers for the Alliance in that year.<sup>1</sup> The link with higher education is not difficult to miss when one considers that the Fiji Labour Party was largely the creation of trade unions, the most prominent of those being the Fiji Public Service Association; and that because of the nature of funding for university students in Fiji, most of whom receive a place in exchange for a promise to work for the government for a period afterwards, many graduates end up in the civil service.

A similar situation exists in the Tongan civil service, with graduates repaying their debt to society by working for the government;<sup>2</sup> and many of those graduates have gone

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<sup>1</sup>Usher 1992: 212-213. Indian support for the Alliance increased from 15.09 percent at the 1982 election to 15.30 percent in 1987. Howard (1991) gives a particularly useful appendix on the 1987 election, detailing the outcome in each seat.

<sup>2</sup>One civil servant explained that government gives students four-year scholarships in exchange for three to five years' work for the government on their return: '[In] Tonga,

on to support the Pro-Democracy Movement ('Akilisi Pohiva was once a government employee, as were other prominent pro-democracy activists). Part of the reason, undoubtedly, is that civil servants are well-placed to know when a government is going wrong; and higher-educated civil servants are more likely to feel that they could do better than their masters, especially masters who have achieved prominence and power solely by virtue of their traditional importance.

But it would be wrong to think that a simple equation exists where 'higher education plus urban Fijian or Tongan equals left-wing or democratic campaigner'. The picture is rather more complicated than that. As one Tongan church leader pointed out, 'There are very well-educated people who don't want to have to change' (Fifita 1993). A prominent Fijian civil servant observed:

[The coup] would not have taken place if it wasn't for the educated Fijians, contrary to what people have said. I speak [as] someone who was adviser to the coup leader and to the prime minister at the time and for two years immediately after. It was obvious to me, while observing all these things at play, that it would not have held together had the thinking people [not been] actually behind it, and able to not only react at an emotional level but provide some proper historical/legal basis for why they [had] been crying out the way they [had].

[The coup] really was an eight-month process. For it to be sustained [it needed] some elements of intellectual attack to it. . . . Some of the people who were involved in the coup, who actually directed it, . . . were the best Fijian brains, and people who are respected: well-educated, [with Masters degrees], doctorates. . . . [It] could not [believably have been] generated in eight weeks; [it was] well thought-out, carefully itemised, [well-illustrated] in terms of examples; they came with problems they had been studying. (Mataitoga 1993.)<sup>3</sup>

The history of tertiary education among Fijians and Tongans began at the pinnacle of the traditional hierarchy. Naturally enough, the individuals first deemed worthy of higher education at prestigious overseas institutions were prominent figures such as Ratu Sukuna and Ratu Mara in Fiji, and Prince Tungi (now King Tupou IV) in Tonga, who were among their countries' first graduates.<sup>4</sup> Their success in Western terms only served to reinforce their traditional status in the eyes of their people and to single them out as natural leaders; even today, Fijians and Tongans will speak in glowing terms of the educational achievements of Ratu Mara and the King. When higher education was still a

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government is the major employing organisation in the country, the civil service. And the main source of scholarships. In a way it's quite hard to feel your way out without government assistance.' (Anonymous 1993.)

<sup>3</sup>Even Rabuka's personal interest in military coups had been fuelled by past tertiary study on the subject (Dean and Ritova 1988: 28-29).

<sup>4</sup>The King was the first Tongan to receive a university degree (Taulahi 1979: 10). For more on the development of education in Tonga, see Paongo (1990).

rarity associated with such people, it became a path to success for commoners as well;<sup>5</sup> Tonga's first Ph.D. graduate, Langi Kavaliku, was appointed a minister by the King in the late 1960s, a position he still holds. Some of the *mana* of the highest chiefs had rubbed off onto the university degrees which were now within reach of commoners.

As graduates themselves, these leaders were well aware of the personal benefits of higher education, and did much to promote it among their people. The post-colonial 1970s and 1980s saw something of a boom in university education in the two countries, coinciding with the establishment in Suva of the regional University of the South Pacific (USP). The corresponding rise in commoner dissatisfaction with traditional rule has given some in government cause to reassess. One Tongan noble said of pro-democracy agitators,

Mostly I have noticed they are a product of a little institute of learning in Fiji called USP. I cannot really prove this, but I have evidence . . . that it's a breeding ground for discontentment. A lot of young people come from there with chips on their shoulders. . . . I spoke to [Ratu Mara] and he said, "It is true; we built this university with great hopes, . . . and it's a great disappointment. Most of the [people] we turn out are square pegs trying to fit into round holes in our communities." (Fusitu'a 1993.)<sup>6</sup>

It seems ironic, then, that the present Fiji government is sending more Fijians to USP than before by increasing their quota of places at the expense of Fiji Indians. Tupeni Baba, Reader in Education at USP, pointed to some of the problems accompanying this trend:

All evidence about Fijians' performance, particularly those studying through Fijian Affairs,<sup>7</sup> is that they are not succeeding. . . . A lot of money has been spent, [but still] the failure rate is very high. . . . Studies [have] indicated that for the last twenty years, affirmative actions [for Fijians] have not been [successful]. The numbers are increasing, but the proportion of people passing is still very low.

There has been a very negative aspect of their funding. They know that they are sponsored people; . . . [when they] fail in high numbers [that may] create complexes in them. . . . It's simply because a lot just don't compare.

It goes back also into the Fijian school. . . . There's a big problem on both sides, teachers and [students]. School-based experience is necessary, and this is where the Fijians lag behind nowadays, very badly — [in] that school-

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<sup>5</sup>See Bolabola (1978: 155).

<sup>6</sup>He was unsure of the reason for this, but went on to surmise:

There may be quite a lot of contributing factors to it. Most of those who go to New Zealand and Australia have made it academically. And those who are mediocre go to USP. Secondly, those who can afford it on their own go to Australia or New Zealand; they never go to USP. USP is a last resort, as it were. (Fusitu'a 1993.)

<sup>7</sup>That is, sponsored by the Ministry of Fijian Affairs.

base. In areas like social science, history, language, they can hold their own; [those areas] coming under not the school-base [but] more a society-base.

There could have been far more imaginative use of funds; if they concentrated the equivalent at secondary education, the result would probably be significantly better. (Baba 1993.)<sup>8</sup>

So why has there been a push for increased higher education of Fijians? A similar question may be asked of Tonga (though some subtle differences may be observed, as noted later). The late Simione Durutalo, sociology lecturer at USP, provided an answer for Fiji:

There's a push now in Fijian education and business. . . . [Fijians] say, "The government should really push us in this direction, because . . . otherwise we'll be shot." The feeling is certainly not "traditional culture forever", even by the ordinary people. They know that forces are intruding at the everyday level . . . that they [will] have to give way [to] at some time.

In the village, . . . they see that Fijians who get educated can [move] up in the world, and become leaders and important. So it's seeping through their consciousness. And of course he becomes important in the village council and sometimes he carries more weight than the chief when discussing [matters], because he's educated.

I'm seen as a Labour Party [person], but if I go in my village even my brothers will defer to me, although they are much more senior and one of them is about to be a chief. . . . The people say, "We'd better listen to Durutalo; he might be [in an] opposition party but at least he knows about the modern world. He's educated, he's got an M.A., he's a university lecturer, he teaches." Sometimes [I] clash with my brother, but I always carry the day. . . . Sometimes he's right and I'm wrong, but the people's perception is that I am more educated, I know the modern world, and he doesn't, although he is more senior and in traditional terms I should be listening to him. In fact, the fact that I am arguing with him is a breach of protocol. But then people say, "He's an educated guy; he knows that sometimes Fijian custom is wrong. Maybe that's why he's breaching the protocol: for our own good, in order to tell his brother [that] this is wrong." So it's clearly penetrating at the rural level. (Durutalo 1993a.)<sup>9</sup>

Higher education is now seen as valuable in its own right among Fijians, as it is among Tongans, and this has some profound effects for traditional rulers. Durutalo gave, by way of example, an account of a recent debate in the Ba provincial council on some proposed government legislation. Despite the fact that the members had already endorsed it, when he explained to them the drawbacks of the legislation they demanded

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<sup>8</sup>See also Baba (1989).

<sup>9</sup>Another echoed these comments:

Commoners are now better educated than the chiefs. Most chiefs are lacking education. And for the commoners it is hard to accept a decision being made by someone who lives in the village all his life, has never made a commercial decision, . . . and all his education has been done through the Bible. Half the time [when] they talk to you they're talking through the Bible. And it is really difficult to accept something like that. (J. Moala 1993.)



that a vote be taken again, over the objections of the chair of the council, the high chief Tui Vuda. Durutalo continued:

If it was [one of] the other guys, even though he knew about it he wouldn't have spoken up, because of traditional protocol. I breached protocol [when] I spoke against it, but it was accepted because they said, "What do you expect? An educated guy, he's going to breach protocol, because that's what they've been taught in schools: breach protocol if you [can] say something which is better."

The second thing was that they listened to me rather than Tui Vuda. I was fairly new, and quite young; . . . I'm not a [high] chief like him. And I was able to carry the council, who . . . rescinded the [motion] and opposed the legislation.

Also I notice in the council that whenever [Tui Vuda] talks, he will be pro-SVT, . . . and he will deny others their right to speak. But he never says, "Tell Simi to shut up," because he knows . . . I can challenge him in the council. And he also knows that that won't be seen as a breach of tradition by the other old guys there; . . . it will be seen as, "What can you expect?" (Durutalo 1993a.)

Clearly, as Durutalo went on to point out, this is a situation which can lead to jealousies and chief-versus-commoner rivalries. But its more profound effect is to convince the village chiefs, who previously relied on their traditional status to carry their will, that they should be educating their children too:

Before they tended not to educate their sons; it was usually commoner Fijians [who did that]. But now they're beginning to realise that if they want to retain their position within the village set-up . . . they have to educate their son in school, because a commoner Fijian coming along will just . . . push this chief aside. (*Ibid.*)<sup>10</sup>

Similar changes can be seen in Tonga, as one minister explained:

Before you could probably be a minister without any education at all, just because of your noble birth, because you're born into the royal family. You're brought up to look after the people, so there's no need for you to have a degree. But because the government's now wide open, you can't be just trained in the traditional forms any more — it's good to have that, but you also need to have the formal education. (Fakafanua 1993.)

Uneducated nobles are finding life difficult in today's politics:

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<sup>10</sup>Jale Moala, however, thought that this was not happening quickly enough:

Some chiefs have been very well educated. . . . Most of them have not, and these are the hangers on, the ones who just say yes. If Ratu Mara stands up and says this, they say yes; they can't challenge [it], and they themselves do not have opinions, which is very dangerous. It gets to a stage where only a handful of people are really deciding for the chiefs. And they decide it for me and for urban Fijians down the road.

A few of their sons are quite well educated, but not enough. For a body like [the Council of Chiefs] they really need most of the people [to be educated]. What's happening now is that most of them rely on the commoners to give them advice on what's going on. (J. Moala 1993.)

It's like a joke all over the country that those guys are semi-literate. You see some of them in parliament — [nobles from the villages arguing against] people like Laki Niu, who's a lawyer, and Pohiva, and Uli Fukofuka who's very well-educated. (Hau'ofa 1993a.)

And again, their response is to educate their children, to the point where now 'you have younger ones who are smarter than the older ones are' (*ibid.*). One Fijian noted that this result is not guaranteed:

They've been sending their children to school so that the line of leadership continues to [prosper]. This is unfortunate, because it's a well-known fact that all chiefs' sons are not as bright as [others]. . . . They're just not up to it. . . . If you look at, generally, who's up there, it's the commoners. . . . Even in cabinet, how many chiefs are there? (Nata 1993.)<sup>11</sup>

In following this path, traditional rulers are inadvertently reinforcing the perception that Western-style education is of greater value than inherited status, and so are hastening changes in traditional political structures. People, commoners and chiefs, can now become important by virtue of their education:

In the past thirty or forty years [in Tonga] the emphasis has been on academic studies. Everybody wants to get a degree. Doesn't matter what, or whether it's [well] regarded: . . . once you get a degree . . . you're a big shot. (Fonua 1993.)

In Tonga, more than in Fiji (probably because this emphasis has been reinforced from government over a greater period in the former), the result has been a rapid proliferation of educated people almost to the point of oversupply. One of Tonga's first Ph.D. graduates commented on changing public perceptions of qualifications such as his:

Like everything else it's becoming common. When I received mine [about fifteen years ago] I was one of three. . . . Now you get more and more. They are accorded respect, but it's becoming too common. When I was operating, there was quite an aura [in being] a very well-educated guy. (Hau'ofa 1993a.)

Many in Tonga comment on its high numbers of graduates.<sup>12</sup> Some are now beginning to question their value. 'We have all these administrators,' said one, 'but no one can fix the damned road!' (Fonua 1993). The problem, he said, is a mismatch between education and the home environment:

We are educating ourselves for a system which there's no way we're going to have. . . . It's a hard thing, because those degrees are not earned easily. . . . But the system itself was not structured to fit that. The money

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<sup>11</sup>No more than a quarter of the Fiji cabinet were chiefs at that time.

<sup>12</sup>Longstanding Tongan prime minister Tu'ipelehake observed after his retirement in 1991 that 'in proportion to our population we have more university graduates than any other country in the South Pacific' (quoted in Fonua 1991: 15).

supply as well: . . . there's a certain amount of money that has to be paid all along the line. . . . You only can pay so much for a person, depending on what he's producing. (*Ibid.*)

Clearly this will create dissatisfaction with their lot among people who know how to express that dissatisfaction, giving rise to challenges to the existing system. 'Eseta Fusitu'a gave education as the major cause of challenges from the PDM, arguing further that Western-style education has changed people's ways of thinking and blinded some to traditional values:

Those [challenges] are direct results of Western education. That doesn't mean that Western education is bad. It only means that the concepts of Western education are narrower. In Western society your main criterion for leadership is a show of hands. . . . [When] you want somebody to be a representative to parliament, you have a show of hands. That is absolutely consistent with your society, where that [and] personal qualification are your two major criteria for . . . achieving a particular status.

When you look at the Tongan context, or the Fijian context, you will find that we have those two criteria, plus others you don't have. . . . You don't have any traditional leadership any more. Yours is not wrong and ours are not wrong. They're both perfectly correct and both legitimate in their two different societies.

The origin of the challenges to our existing system come mainly from those people who first of all have been exposed to Western education, and secondly — this is my opinion — do not see that our criteria are broader than yours, but want to impose on our broader situation your narrower criteria. . . . The other [reason we see challenges is that there] are those who may totally reject the traditional criteria. . . . That's a perfectly legitimate reason, [although I disagree with it]. ('E. Fusitu'a 1993.)<sup>13</sup>

'Akilisi Pohiva agrees that education has changed people's thinking, but he sees no way back for those who might regret those changes:

The present king opened up the well for Tonga. He went overseas; he came back with new ideas. He started our high school in Tonga. Perhaps he was thinking about the need for development in the country: economic development, but not political. To me, he never thought that pushing

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<sup>13</sup>The editor of the Fijian-language newspaper *Nai Lalakai* echoed the observations that education was changing people's ways of thinking:

I can say that the thinking of the Fijian people now is different say from forty or thirty years ago. . . . Fijians are more educated now, and . . . their thinking is different. A few educated Fijians seem to disagree with the present Fijian administration, and even the chiefly system. . . . I have received some letters in the past [saying] that we should do away with this chiefly system, and some say that we should do away with [our Fijian customs]. Some very well-educated people [in Fijian society] voice that kind of thinking.

It will depend [on] how they've been brought up, from their own village, or from their parents, and the type of thinking they have been [fed]. When they . . . go through university, they might change in their type of thinking. But some I think will not change, because they have their roots in their culture and their traditions; they cannot do away with that. . . . [No matter] how far you go in education, I think your tradition and culture will stay the same. I don't know why those people want to do away with this. (Tonawai 1993.)

education would eventually affect the political thinking and the consciousness and awareness of the people.

It's a good thing that our [successive monarchs] all pushed education. But the mistake of the present king is that he could not stop political change. Economic and social changes always go together with political change. He can't allow social changes, technological changes, economic changes, to go on, and stop political changes. That is not the rule of society. . . . It's too late for him to stop the people from going overseas for further study. (Pohiva 1993.)

It is indeed too late to stop people gaining access to further study, not least because at the top levels of government the need for educated leaders is obvious. Today's governments, in Fiji and Tonga no less than in the West, have to deal with complicated economic and social problems, and for that they need more than the skills of traditional village chiefs.<sup>14</sup> Many educated Fijians, for example, will therefore privately or publicly express discontent with the important say the Council of Chiefs has today on major matters of policy. As Isikeli Mataitoga described it,

If [the chiefs] cut them out completely, a lot of Fijians [will] go, "Who are those guys, apart from the fact that they were born lucky? . . . A lot of them never went past form four; [they were] lucky [if] they went even to secondary school. How can [they] be expected to understand the intricacies of investment portfolios, which is one of the agendas they were discussing? It's ridiculous to expect them to know; why should they? People [do] postgraduate study to understand market analysis." (Mataitoga 1993.)<sup>15</sup>

Mataitoga is a clear supporter of the post-coup regime: he was involved in drafting Fiji's 1990 constitution, which gave the Council of Chiefs its newly prominent role.<sup>16</sup> But he also believes that more room should be made for educated commoners in bodies such as the Council of Chiefs.<sup>17</sup> Again, there is no equation which says higher education always

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<sup>14</sup>This was a point well made by a chief who holds a senior civil service position:

You cannot run a modern state along traditional lines, where you wanted the chiefs always to be in control. I tell [people] it's coincidental that I happen to be of chiefly rank. I hold this position because I happen to have the requisite qualifications. If I didn't, it [wouldn't] much matter whether I were a chief, . . . just as [if I were] of a high rank and I didn't have a pilot's licence I couldn't fly a plane. I think that's the most graphic way of illustrating [it]. (Madraiwiwi 1993.)

<sup>15</sup>Another said,

The chiefs [have] to be wary, because as more commoners become more educated . . . they will begin to challenge [their] authority. The chiefs have to realise that they [will be] subjected to criticism, whereas in the past if you criticised the chief you [might] get clubbed on the head. Now people understand that you've got courts and you've got the constitution and that this is supposed to be a democracy; the chiefs should be put in the spotlight, and be examined in whatever they do. (J. Moala 1993.)

<sup>16</sup>See Mataitoga (1991).

<sup>17</sup>This was already occurring in other areas, he said:

leads to democratic agitation. That is one effect which can be readily observed among many Fijian and Tongan graduates. But others choose to use their newfound knowledge to support other viewpoints, including those of traditional regimes.

Simione Durutalo considered the educated supporters of Fijian traditionalism to be particularly dangerous:

I don't worry so much about the chiefs; I worry about these new educated commoners who are using the traditional [set-up] for their own [advantage]; that's a more cynical use of tradition. . . . [For] the old guys, that's what they were brought up with — they honestly believe in that; sometimes you feel sorry for them. And they are generally good-natured and good-intentioned in their [attachment to] tradition, although it might make them look stubborn. But it's these others who are well aware they're just using tradition to advance whatever interest they have: these to me are the more dangerous guys. (Durutalo 1993a.)<sup>18</sup>

The paradox is that educated Fijian commoners who use tradition to increase their influence themselves represent a significant change in tradition. They simply would not have enjoyed the same influence in the past. Even educated chiefs are of a different breed to their uneducated kin; they will inevitably view their own role in society in subtly different ways as a result of their education. That they now feel they must become educated rather than rely on the aura or *mana* which in the eyes of their people previously surrounded them is itself a significant change.

One effect which *can* be ascribed to education (especially higher education) is that over time it produces a more critical and analytical populace, and those traits inevitably lead to widespread questioning of traditional structures, the very hallmark of which, in Fiji and Tonga of old, was their unquestioning acceptance. Such questioning may not lead to revolutionary change, but it will lead, in the short-term, to pressures for change — and in the long-term to change itself.

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A lot of senior civil servants get involved in their provincial affairs, either [as] members of the council itself or as advisers. In [the] proper Westminster model [that's] unthinkable, because it is political involvement. . . . The bulk of the well-educated Fijians are civil servants. If they have got to be tied down by the rules of the Westminster model of government [and are not allowed] to go and advise in their *tikina* council, their provincial council, who is going to do it? (Mataitoga 1993.)

<sup>18</sup>He gave as an example a recent controversy over Fijian Holdings (further described in Chapter Six):

These Fijian commoners — most of them are educated — used what was clearly a company that was established for the provinces' [benefit] to advance their own individual interests, to buy shares . . . to enrich themselves. It's not surprising that most of them were great supporters of the coup in 1987. (Durutalo 1993a.)

## Education in Schools

If tradition and politics are being reshaped by Western-style education, are there, I wondered, any attempts to educate Fijians and Tongans in the other direction? Are traditional values being formally taught?

These clearly were not appropriate questions to ask of tertiary education in the two countries. Although many Western universities today are provoking debate by exploring or even promoting non-Western systems of thought (consider, for example, the controversy surrounding programmes of African studies in American universities),<sup>19</sup> institutions in Fiji and Tonga have not reached that stage (though some students studying overseas will, presumably, be exposed to such influences). This is unsurprising. For Fijians and Tongans, Westerners are the 'other'. Most pursue higher education in order to learn 'successful' Western ways;<sup>20</sup> any deviation from that path would be against many students' and their parents' wishes.<sup>21</sup> Thus USP trains thinkers in the Western mode, as does Tonga's 'Atenisi University of about 100 students (part of the 'Atenisi Institute, which was founded by prominent democracy campaigner Futa Helu, a former student of Sydney University libertarian philosopher John Anderson) (Hau'ofa 1993a; Helu 1993a).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>See Hughes (1994).

<sup>20</sup>There are clear echoes in this of the desires of young Fijians for school education in the early part of the century, as observed by Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna in 1937:

As a body they look down on productive labour connected with the soil. . . . Their reasoning is based on experience. Looking around they see, on the one side, men of education clean and well-dressed — appearances they have been taught to respect — filling all the lucrative posts; on the other, the simple folk dirty and untidy — shortcomings for which they have been whipped — tilling the ground. They conclude that education (in the only form known to them) is a panacea for all human needs, providing for those who partake of it clean and well paid jobs. (Quoted in Macnaught 1982: 107.)

A similar spirit was observed in Tonga in the 1970s:

Parents usually have a clear idea of what they want for their children. They believe that the academic schooling of a European type has given the European his material superiority. It is also the kind of schooling which offers the village boy a hope of release from poverty and the tedium of life on the land. Any deviation at all from the syllabus as devised for English pupils causes anxiety and is regarded as a subtle attempt to fob children off with something inferior. (Tupouniua 1977: 58)

<sup>21</sup>As, indeed, it is against the wishes of many in the West — hence the controversy surrounding programmes of 'alternative' thought.

<sup>22</sup>I did hear one protest, from a maverick traditionalist, against all Western-style education:

[We want] education in a different way. Not the white man's way. . . . The white man's way will turn [Fijians] completely white, in black skins. If we follow your ways, then we'll always be behind. . . . But if we go on our own civilisation, you won't be able to touch us. (Sokonibogi 1993.)

Hence the kinds of effects described above of an increasingly-educated population. But were traditionalists making any efforts to stem the tide, perhaps in primary and secondary education, or through other avenues? And if so, were they enjoying any success? These questions are explored in the rest of this chapter.

I asked Fiji's Minister for Education, 'Does the government have any sort of policy to try to balance education so that students, Fijians particularly, can maintain their traditional identity?' She replied:

We don't have it in the curriculum or anything like that. We have . . . cross-cultural programmes in the schools where . . . different ethnic groups learn [about] other cultures in Fiji, so that they appreciate each other's culture. But a deliberate programme from the Ministry of Education? [No; we aren't] asked to go out and say, "This is the strategy . . . to educate the Fijian child to hold on to what is Fijian traditionally." Even in the world there's not such a programme as that.

But the hierarchical system, where each tribe has a role to play in the village: we [cover] that in our Fijian syllabus, and we extend that to say why you have a role in the Fijian society, you as the chief, you as the [commoner]. And we bring it to modern times: we say that in society usually you have different talents. . . . What we are saying is that while you might like to remain in traditional society, we actually live a dual [life]. (Vakatale 1993.)

Education in Fiji, then, even at the lower levels, is exposing Fijians to other cultures and the modern world. The Tongan Minister for Education gave a similar account of school education there:

Students at the primary and secondary level are taught lots of the social, historical and political aspects of overseas societies, and of the global community, through textbooks, . . . through pictures, [through] the films that they see. They come to Nuku'alofa, and even though it's not a very good representation of a modern type of system, for those in the villages it is quite an experience. And they go back and want to have the same type of things. For those who go overseas, even more so. So through education, other than seeing for yourself, coming here or going overseas, there is a very strong aspiration for things Western. (Kavaliku 1993.)

So far, the picture was much the same as that seen with tertiary education. I asked Kavaliku if there were any attempts to redress that by teaching about Tongan traditions and culture in school. Yes, he said, although my loose choice of words allowed him to make a subtle distinction:

Not so much to redress it, but basically to hopefully let them know who they are before they start moving over to other things. That's why in the primary level the language of instruction is Tongan, and then it's changed to English in secondary school. And that's why Tongan is taught throughout primary and secondary level. We also have a Tongan Studies programme. (*Ibid.*)

A senior education officer, however, did describe these developments as a form of redress, particularly of past neglect in the teaching of the Tongan language:

When Tonga High School [was] established back in 1947 the major aim [was] to train Tongans to be educated abroad, and to achieve high levels of performance in academic situations. It's only in the last ten years or so that we have [been] trying to redress that, achieve some balance about the aims of education. . . . One of the major arguments that we have used is that in order to acquire English effectively, they have to [first] develop literacy competently in their own language. . . . In many ways it also helps us to maintain our traditions and our culture. Because as you know, language is the vehicle through which people are socialised into group membership.

We have been very effective for a long time now, nearly twenty years, [at] teaching the manifestations of our Tongan culture — Tongan dances and traditions. Most of the young generations now who are under thirty went through that system and can dance quite competently, and can make things like baskets or carve wood or whatever it is; they learn through the school system. In the last eight years everybody who has gone through the school certificate has had Tongan at least up to form five level.<sup>23</sup>

We feel that people who grow up feeling confident about themselves and who they are will become better adults, and would cope better with the changes that are increasingly coming to Tonga and at a faster pace than ever before. I did a very big survey when I was doing my doctorate on language attitudes. I compared their attitudes to Tongan and English, and I found that although all groups are very positive in their attitudes towards Tongan, there's a significant decrease in positiveness in relation to age. The older you were, the more positive your attitudes were, and the younger you were, the less positive your attitudes were. . . . The group which manifested the least interest in the Tongan language were the secondary school teachers. And I think that has some impact, certainly, on the attitudes of the children they teach. (Taufe'ulungaki 1993.)

Students in recent years, she said, were noticeably changing:

Children now are much more confident, and they take more pride in the Tongan culture; . . . whereas you talk to a Tonga High School graduate from five years ago, and they will say, "Wipe out the Tongan language; it has no useful function at all in the school system." . . . Children now are moving towards a more positive attitude about their own culture and about



We are deliberately trying to teach Tongan at the Teachers' College — it's compulsory for the three-year period in which they are at the college. . . . We try to make them competent in most of the Tongan traditions and culture, and so when they leave the college, particularly those who are expected to teach at the primary level, they're expected to be able to do Tongan music, dance, art, craftwork. They should be able to put on a dance, compose the music [and lyrics] for it, choreograph the whole thing, and perform it for the kids as well! (*Ibid.*)

Most teachers at primary school level undergo this training, Taufe'ulungaki said, but 'about 70 percent of those who are teaching at secondary level [were] trained overseas'. I asked if they were the people who 'might prove the stumbling block':

Absolutely. The older generation of graduates. The younger ones coming back who went through with the Tongan Studies programme I think are far more positive. (*Ibid.*)

To redress this, the department planned to require all intending teachers to study for their Diploma of Education at the Tonga Teachers' College rather than an overseas institution. Furthermore, Taufe'ulungaki said, 'that's what we are hoping to do with all the others who are doing courses overseas in other areas':

All [would] be required to do one year of an applied diploma here before they join the civil service. . . . That's their orientation back into the system. . . . In education it's much easier, of course, because it's mainly on the methodology and the context of the education system in Tonga. But it would also be a general view of development in Tonga, and the national aims and objectives and priorities within government, allocation of resources, the vision we have of the future, so that everybody who goes out into the workforce . . . is apprised of the big picture of national development. (*Ibid.*)

Such a course could be seen as exactly the kind of effort to 'stem the Western tide' I had been wondering whether existed — and at the tertiary level, no less. I asked Taufe'ulungaki about the course's effect on pro-democracy attitudes (or as she jokingly said, 'The "subversive element" in Tongan society!'). Would the effect of such a course be to counteract foreign ideas?

Yes, I think that's partly it. I don't think the intention is overtly as a kind of "de-subversive" effect! But if people . . . know where they're going, they're far more likely to be effective than going blind into a situation. (*Ibid.*)

It would certainly be unjust to ascribe purely political motives to the promoters of such a policy; but it would equally be naive to suppose that such a policy would have no political consequences. Indeed, one could imagine that the consequences may be significant, as one can for the consequences of programmes aimed at younger Tongans. 'Akilisi Pōhiva is, not surprisingly, wary of the motives behind aspects of school education in Tonga:

In the syllabus . . . they use Tongan Studies; they are putting some of our traditional values into that particular subject area, and trying to influence the thinking of all the students. That has been a common practice here in Tonga

in education. Look at music: they use music as an area for them to promote monarchy and traditional values.

In the capitalist world they use media to promote [certain] interests; same thing here in Tonga. They have been using religion: submission to authority is a common teaching in religion here in Tonga. So they use religion and education. They have been using it for quite a long time. So there are conservative forces and there are innovative forces. They interact and work together, either to make change faster or to make it slow. (Pohiva 1993.)

Many would, quite reasonably, ask what the problem is with teaching language and such 'politically-neutral' aspects of tradition as craft and dance. The problem (though not everyone would see it as such) is people's tendency to regard tradition as a whole, rather than as a collection of individual traditions. In Tonga, as has been discussed in previous chapters, many regard their tradition as a system unified by the monarchy, without which it would collapse. It follows that to promote any particular traditions is, in the minds of many, to promote the whole tradition — a tradition underpinning and underpinned by the monarchy.

Such a conclusion may initially appear tenuous. But consider even as basic a feature of human existence as language.<sup>25</sup> In English-speaking nations, we are familiar with the debate surrounding sexist and racist language, and with proposals to, where practicable, legislate them out of existence. Words, it is argued, shape values. How, then, are values being shaped by Tongan — a language split into three, with certain words spoken only to the nobility, and certain others only to royalty? Surely such language helps reinforce these divisions in society itself. How, then, does one interpret the news that such language is 'beginning to become stronger again':

In schools, they learn all the honorific language appropriate for the nobility and for royalty. My generation . . . were taught Tongan at form one and two for one hour a week, and we were not allowed to use it within the school compound. The children today learn Tongan right through primary . . . and they're very sophisticated and advanced in their knowledge and vocabulary. I sometimes feel ashamed of myself because I have to ask one of my nieces or nephews the correct terms used in a presentation. . . . I'm quite impressed with [the younger generation's] knowledge and their mastery of the archaic vocabulary which [is] no longer used by common people and in ordinary conversation, but only in a traditional context, such as a feast or celebration, or in oratory. I've listened to quite a number of the kids at secondary level delivering public speeches, and I have always been very impressed with their competence in the honorific language. (Taufe'ulungaki 1993.)

Does an archaic vocabulary reinforce archaic values? Need it do so? The answer to the latter is no: an understanding of the system of reasoning or values which underpins such words — and *that* such a system underpins them — would enable the student to consciously accept or reject that reasoning or those values. The same goes for education about any traditions (and, for that matter, for any form of education at all). Whether such

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<sup>25</sup>On the effects of language on social change in the Pacific, see Topping (1992).

understanding is being taught alongside the traditions themselves I do not know, but I would doubt it — in which case I would expect to see further changes in the political attitudes of younger Tongans, and some controversy about the education system to arise as a result.

It should be noted that these first steps in Tongan education face some basic obstacles: primarily a lack of resources. Tongans, adults and children alike, are highly literate, but there are simply not enough books written in Tongan:

We have printed twelve books for Primary One, twelve books for Primary Two. But you can read those books . . . within a day if you so wish, . . . and after that, what is there else to read?

There are only 11,000 books in the Tongan language in the 115 primary schools of Tonga . . . and that's distributed in a population of roughly 15,000 children. So there is not even one book per child. Whereas according to the records . . . we have something like 60,000 English books in the primary schools. (Taufe'ulungaki 1993.)

The situation is similar in Fiji, where I discussed language issues with Paul Geraghty, director of the Institute of Fijian Language and Culture:<sup>26</sup>

There were more textbooks in Fijian in the 1920s than there are now. . . . [There] were Fijian textbooks [in] geography, history, mathematics, English — [even] Latin, for heaven's sake. . . . And that just doesn't exist these days. There are no textbooks in Fijian except [on] how to learn Fijian. (Geraghty 1993.)

The credit for the earlier status of Fijian goes to the missions, who were in charge of education until the 1920s. At that time, however, the colonial government 'was increasingly obliged to take over schools which the Methodist Church was finding it hard to run' (Geraghty 1984: 41), and to this end reached an agreement whereby New Zealand would supply Fiji with teachers:

These teachers had already been brought up in a system which was designed to denigrate the Maoris and their language, and the prejudice that they had against Maori language they brought to Fiji. They used to punish children for speaking Fijian in school; they did everything they possibly could to try and eradicate Fijian. (Geraghty 1993.)<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Geraghty, a preeminent figure in the study of Fijian language, first came to Fiji around the time of its independence. He is originally from Ireland.

<sup>27</sup>Something else of the Eurocentric flavour of education in Fiji in the first half of the twentieth century is suggested by O. H. K. Spate's observation in 1959 that he had seen,

in a "trial leaving" paper for *Fijian students*, the following question: "Give a comprehensive account of the Second French Republic (1848-1851). Why did it fail?" (Spate 1990: 115 (his emphasis).)

Their legacy has been a lingering exaltation of English over Fijian, though of course English remains important for other reasons, not least of which is as a language of communication between Fijians and Indians. Some urban Fijians take this exaltation to extremes:

Many Fijians now who live in the towns and cities speak English to their children, because they think that will help them at school. I do that to my kids. My kids are Fijians [but] they can hardly speak Fijian. (J. Moala 1993.)<sup>28</sup>

This attitude, however, is 'less common than it used to be' according to Geraghty, who had observed a change since his arrival in Fiji in 1969:

People have perceived that it doesn't particularly do them any good. I don't think it makes their English any better, and it certainly doesn't make their Fijian any better, and it deprives them of their roots. Children cannot speak to their grandmother and grandfather, their uncle and aunt, their cousins; it completely cuts them off from any community support. It's a bit drastic. (Geraghty 1993.)

Fijian, said Geraghty, is 'totally lacking in prestige as a language':

However, I think that it is changing; . . . but very slowly. This year, for the first time ever, the [radio] commentary on the international [rugby] sevens tournament in Scotland was entirely in Fijian. Before that, even despite the fact that ninety percent plus of the people who [were] listening [were] Fijian speakers, they [would] have a commentary in English, and then just little comments in Fijian thrown in every five minutes or so.

And then you see more and more politicians making speeches in Fijian. . . . It used to be the case for the politicians never [to] speak in Fijian under any circumstances, practically, where [they could] perceive that the audience was in any way mixed. If there was a political meeting [with] ninety percent Fijians and then ten percent other odd bods, politicians would always speak in English. But nowadays more and more tend to speak Fijian in that case. (*Ibid.*)

What then is the formal status of Fijian? The presence of significant numbers of non-Fijians makes the situation less straightforward than in Tonga. In 1993 a government committee resolved that Fijian be made compulsory in all schools, although this had not been implemented yet:

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<sup>28</sup>I asked this interviewee (the editor of *The Fiji Times*), 'Does that worry you?,' to which he simply replied, 'No.'

It might, but it'll take a long long time. . . . They're not going to commit the money to do it. You've got to train people to do that kind of thing. They did try it in the past; they had what you call cross-cultural [programmes], where they teach Indians Fijian [and] Fijians Hindi.<sup>29</sup> But it's always been done very half-heartedly. . . . The curriculum doesn't exist, of course, and then . . . they look around for somebody to do it, and they say, "He speaks Fijian, so he can put together the Fijian courses."

I often wonder, do Fijians really want other people to learn Fijian or not? Maybe subconsciously they think it's a good idea to have this secret language which nobody knows. (*Ibid.*)<sup>30</sup>

I was also interested in the status of the institute of which Geraghty was director. Its name — the Institute of Fijian Language and Culture — should, one might imagine, appeal to traditionalist Fijians, as should its projects (such as its monolingual-Fijian-dictionary project). I asked Geraghty how the government had been treating the Institute; were they showing any interest?

It's one of the surprising things about the developments of the last six years — that they on the face of it were very nationalistic, but language and culture generally have nothing to do with the nationalism that's around and has been around since the coup and before that. . . . Generally people are quite nice and are interested in the work, but they don't consider [it] to be important.

This was conceived of before the coup. . . . We put it to the Ministry [of Fijian Affairs], and the ministry put it to the Great Council of Chiefs, . . . and they said yes and left it at that. Since then they've shown no interest. We just carry on as best we can. We don't get a lot of funds, but considering

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<sup>29</sup>He later added,

That's what's been in the curriculum for the past five or six years, that primary school children are all supposed to learn each other's language. But the pupil interest isn't there. And it's a bit contentious, because the teaching of Hindi to Fijian kids is not quite the same as teaching Fijian to Indian kids. Especially a lot of kids, say, in Kadavu and Lau: try and teach them Hindi, [and] their parents would say, "What's the point of this? There's no Indians anywhere around here." The second thing is that the Fijian language is unique to Fiji, whereas [there are] other places where Hindi is spoken. So there would be more *a priori* justification for strengthening the teaching of Fijian rather than Hindi. (Geraghty 1993.)

<sup>30</sup>It does not seem to be the case that others are unwilling to learn Fijian:

The way I perceive it, . . . the Indians are much more keen to learn Fijian than Fijians are to learn Hindi. . . . I remember, about [ten or fifteen] years ago, the strongest statement I ever heard in support of Fijian — that Fijian should be the national language, taught to all races in the schools — was made by an Indian, Maan Singh, who was then the Mayor of Suva (he's a parliamentarian now). . . . You never hear a Fijian saying that, or very rarely; certainly not as strongly as that.

Indians who do speak Fijian are generally very proud of the fact, whereas the Fijians who speak Hindi, and there's quite a lot, especially in the Western cane-growing areas, don't make a big show of it because they think of it as a joke. There is something like a national pride that attaches to the use of Fijian which you wouldn't get with Hindi. Hindi's also the working language — Fijians use it and say, "It's good because you can borrow Ram Singh's bullocks [more easily]," or something like that. . . . They're very cynical about the use of it. (Geraghty 1993.)

what some of the other departments get we haven't done too badly. . . . But within the ministry we're the last in the pecking order. (*Ibid.*)<sup>31</sup>

In Fijian villages, however, attitudes to the Institute were 'much more positive':

The one reason is because we have a weekly radio programme, which is very popular, on Fijian radio. . . . We talk about different Fijian known dialects, traditional medicine, handicrafts, myths and legends, all sorts of stuff like that. It's very popular all around the country, especially in villages, places that haven't got TV; it's very important to them. (*Ibid.*)

This popularity is lost on the government, however, because 'most politicians don't listen to Fijian radio — or very little; they think it would be beneath their dignity' (*ibid.*).

The Tongan equivalent of the Institute is its Tonga Traditions Committee. This body of prominent retirees and members of the government and royalty was set up by Queen Salote Tupou III, under whom it was most active. In 1993 I found it hard to track down — it had no formal offices and met only rarely — although I did speak to two of its members, 'Eseta Fusitu'a and Princess Siu'ilikutapu. The Princess discussed its role:

It does not meet regularly, only because most of the members are overseas, like myself and Her Royal Highness Princess Pilolevu; and the rest of them are very busy people now. . . . Do you see people scuttling [around working for it] and their briefcases coming out? No. It's not that kind of activity. But it's a stabilising factor. The media come to [it] on Tongan words, [asking if a word is] the right one. It's the only body that I know that has things written down. . . . It's the official body that is recognised as the [authority on] Tongan traditions; they have to approve of things. (Siu'ilikutapu 1993.)

Its relative inactivity, however, would lead one to believe that its influence in the 1990s has been minimal. Recently, moves have apparently been made to increase its role (such as by appointing specially-dedicated staff to work for it in the Palace Office).<sup>32</sup> The effect these changes might have remains to be seen.

One might argue that the relative neglect by traditionalist governments of formal bodies dedicated to recording traditions is unsurprising. The recording of traditions can serve to fix them, or at least make them more resistant to change, which as I argue is contrary to tradition's inherently changeable nature. Traditionalist governments can make much advantage of the paradoxes of tradition — i.e., that it is changeable while perceived

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<sup>31</sup>Fresh interest was apparently being shown in 1993, but Geraghty was skeptical about whether it would be maintained:

Last week . . . somebody got on the phone and said, "It's the International Year of Indigenous People, and the cabinet has resolved that your Institute will be upgraded as part of the festivities this year." I said, "Very good." I knew this was coming: "Can you write us a paper on how you'd like to see it upgraded?" So what do I do? . . . I just update the same paper I wrote the year before, and the year before [that]. Just to see if anything happens this time. (Geraghty 1993.)

<sup>32</sup>Eseta Fusitu'a reported this at the 1995 Tongan History Association conference at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, 26-28 January 1995.

as unchanging — and as has been pointed out, some educated commoners (who would never have enjoyed power under old traditions) are seeking to do the same. To record traditions and establish certain bodies as the authorities on 'correct' tradition would, by fixing tradition, undermine such attempts.<sup>33</sup>

### Celebration as Education About Tradition

Their neglect of bodies dedicated to recording traditions does not mean that the governments of Fiji and Tonga have no interest in the concept of tradition and its possible uses, political and otherwise. Neither is averse to the public promotion of tradition through formal ceremonial and celebratory events. I close this chapter with two examples of such events which in a sense served as informal political education: Ratu Sukuna Day in Suva on 31 May 1993, and the events in Tonga surrounding the King's 75th birthday on 4 July 1993.

Ratu Sukuna Day was inaugurated in 1992 ostensibly as a fund-raising occasion for the Ratu Sukuna Memorial School. In 1993 it became something more, as 1993 happened also to be the United Nations International Year of Indigenous Peoples. The day served to officially launch a year of celebration of Fijian paramountcy; a year, said one, 'which has been taken in the wrong spirit':

All the ILO covenants and similar groups of rights covenants . . . [don't] really talk about the dominance of the indigenous people, merely about them being in power like all the others; equal rights. (Baba 1993.)

I wondered, as I visited government offices adorned with sea-blue banners printed with the International Year logo and a Fijian warrior, how this celebration would strike

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<sup>33</sup>This will only occur, however, if records of 'correct' traditions are continually consulted for guidance; written records of old traditions *by themselves* do little to preserve traditional knowledge in practical terms (and, of course, so much of tradition is not recorded). Records become historical documents; as part of an ever-growing library of recorded knowledge they may easily become neglected. Even if recovered, they may offer little practical guidance to a future generation for which the entire context of the old traditions has changed. Here the words of National Theatre Company of Papua New Guinea director William Takaku are particularly resonant:

Once you write something down you have no thoughts of it. It's there anyway, so if you want it later on you go and get it and read about it and say 'Oh, so this is it.' In the oral tradition you have to be thinking all the time and telling the same legend to your children every night. It's a practice of telling stories, and discipline, guidance, all these kinds of things. . . . If people are not reading, [writing about culture] is not going to affect anyone. So there's no sense of preservation there. We can preserve it as a written piece of work, but if there's no understanding of it, children will not connect with it. (Quoted in Gorle 1994: 638.)

The best way for a tradition to survive, it would seem, is for it to remain a tradition: that is, for it to remain in use.

Fiji Indians. One said 'we have no quarrel with that,' although noting that the international covenants concerned were 'not supposed to be an instrument of dominance by the indigenous people [over] others' (Chaudhry 1993). Others kept a safe distance, particularly during Ratu Sukuna Day. The only Indians I saw at the events at Albert's Park in Suva were standing at the periphery by their carts, selling Indian sweets.

The day opened with a lengthy formal welcoming ceremony directed to the Prime Minister and other notables. After receiving a large pig, a *tabua*, and a bowl of *yaqona*, Rabuka gave a long speech, first in Fijian and then in English.<sup>34</sup> He commented on Ratu Sukuna's life, and then tied the events to the International Year by citing Article 15 of the United Nations' universal declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, saying that 'indigenous people had the right to own, control and use the land which they had traditionally occupied' (*The Fiji Times*, 1 June 1993, p. 3).

Four or five hours of song and dance — traditional *meke* — followed, performed by many groups from all over Fiji, and were well-received by the audience of 5,000 Fijians and a few tourists. The local police brass band concluded the daytime events with, among other things, a rendition of 'Rule Britannia' (the irony of which seemed lost on the crowd).

The evening's events were the most revealing. Although some tourists braved the sporadic rain, the show was clearly intended for Fijians alone: all loudspeaker announcements and explanations were in Fijian.<sup>35</sup> The further *meke* needed little explanation, but I was as lost as other *kai valagi* when it came to some of the more symbolic events. After an impressive introduction, where hundreds carrying flaming torches circled inwards and then filed away, came a ritual where leaf-skirted men performed war dances and proceeded to lie in a row so that others dressed in bark-cloth could walk over them. A spotlight fastened on a lone warrior standing on top of a tall scaffold, who let out a mighty roar, and the Fijian voiceover spoke in obviously reverential tones. I noted the response in my diary:

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<sup>34</sup>Paul Geraghty commented:

I notice that television people only broadcast the English version. . . . Very rarely [do] they broadcast in Fijian. [It] seems to be a policy. I think if Rabuka had spoken entirely in Fijian they just wouldn't broadcast it; they'd just show him speaking and then run a commentary. That's typical of the English language media; they like to give the impression that Fiji culture is entirely in English. English newspapers do the same. When they quote sportsmen for instance, people who I know don't speak a word of English, they'll put fluent English into their lips. I suppose it's okay as a journalistic trick, but nevertheless it reinforces the impression that everybody in Fiji speaks English all the time. (Geraghty 1993.)

<sup>35</sup>Geraghty noted:

That's another example of [how] Fijian is very slowly coming back in, in that it's being used and not being looked down on [in] a situation like that, even though there are a lot of foreigners present, . . . whereas I think that ten, twenty years ago, the commentary would have all been in English had the same thing happened. (Geraghty 1993.)



Even I could translate the crowd's reaction. To some of these supposedly solemn moments, their response was to laugh heartily. Staunch traditionalists must have been appalled. Was this the "urban Fijian" response, I wondered?

When I discussed the day's events with Paul Geraghty I found that my instincts were correct:

They all think it's ridiculous. The television commentators were coming in, saying, "Why are these Fijians laughing? I don't understand this. This is serious. This is real culture." It's not real culture. For a start, it's a re-enactment. Everybody realises that. Everybody knows that this fellow wearing this very brief dress is Joe Bloggs from over the road, and he doesn't usually wear that stuff, and [he] looks a bit silly. And most Fijians — [most were] watching on television — would just say, "This is stupid." It's got no relevance whatsoever to Fijian life today. (Geraghty 1993.)

The particular ceremony noted above was apparently supposed to represent a traditional cult:<sup>36</sup>

Even as a historical reconstruction it was not very good, because they said it was pre-cession, which it wasn't, and they also said that it was traditional, whereas as it was performed it was a mixture of Fijian and [foreign elements]. The men's clothing was all wrong.

The people who did it — the Dance Theatre of Fiji — are a tourist operation. . . . They feel that they have an obligation to be as traditional as possible, to the point of resurrecting things that Fijians don't consider traditional any more. (*Ibid.*)

Events intended to make a clear political statement about the richness and vigour of Fijian traditional culture, and hence the justice of Fijian paramountcy, ended up entangled in the contradictions of the concept of tradition. The 'tradition' on display was a mixture of half-remembered history, foreign elements and invention — just as is the real Fijian tradition. Unfortunately for the organisers, their mixture was wrong, and it drew ridicule from its target audience; any lasting impression it left would no doubt not have been the one intended.

Tonga's 'Siupeli Siliva' celebrations were not undermined by such mistakes, but they sent an equally interesting message to the observer. Tupou IV's silver jubilee and 75th birthday were marked by an unprecedented level of celebrations; one person, in

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<sup>36</sup>As he explained it to me:

The way it was presented in the Fijian commentary [was] as if this was traditional religion from pre-cession days. In fact what they did [was] read the European accounts of a cult that was current [in the] 1880s-90s which the Europeans called "Naga" — the Fijians didn't call it that — [which] was prevalent in the Serua-Nadroga area, because that's the only traditional Fijian religious cult of which there are any detailed descriptions of the ceremonies. Even then the descriptions are not sufficient for them to reconstruct it, so they make a lot of it up. (Geraghty 1993.)

comparing it to other celebrations of the previous thirty years, said 'this is one of the biggest that we have had' (Afeaki 1993). The week around 4 July was filled with song and dance, all on a large scale, as groups from schools and different regions within Tonga performed at various public arenas. Other events held for the coinciding annual Heilala Festival (promoted as a tourist event) reinforced the mood of festivity, as did the many lavishly-decorated arches which temporarily graced the main roads of Hala Taufa'ahau and Hala Vuna. One arch near the Palace proclaimed in its monarchistic fervour: 'Best wishes to Your Majesty and may the Kingdom be further blessed with your brilliant initiatives'.

The celebrations peaked on 8 July at a royal feast held on Mala'e Pangai (a field next to the Palace). All afternoon, groups of dancers performed before the King and other dignitaries (including Ratu Mara and Adi Lala), usually with a member of the royal family occupying pride of place in the performance. Almost overshadowing the dances was a constant procession of women bearing pieces of cloth and bark-cloth which were carried fully-stretched to emphasise their great length. Their tribute formed an ever-growing pile before the royal enclosure.<sup>37</sup>

Impressive as these events were, they formed only part of the picture. The number of groups of dancers had been limited to ten, 'because otherwise you'd have to be sitting out there . . . until five the next morning!' (Havea 1993). But this proved no barrier to those excluded:

They hired big boats, went out in front of the Palace, and anchored the boats out there, and did their stuff from there. Out there in the sea. And it was five in the morning, eleven in the morning, five in the afternoon. How much more tradition can one get? (Havea 1993.)

The celebrations were one clear demonstration of a living Tongan tradition, and certainly never invited the sort of popular ridicule which greeted some of the Ratu Sukuna Day events. But they did cause some disquiet in the way they were presented, by some, as a symbol of Tongans' support for the monarchy:

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<sup>37</sup>I asked the King's private secretary what happened to this tribute:

When a member of the royal family opens a particular function, it's opened with a donation. And coming from His Majesty or from a member of the royal family, it's always in thousands of dollars. So by this way, everything contributed to His Majesty [is] indirectly distributed. And it's part of the custom to ask a member of the royal family [to open functions]. Sometimes the churches put up a new building; they ask His Majesty to officially open the new building. And during the official ceremony you see plenty of kids presenting mats to His Majesty. [One might imagine] His Majesty must have thousands of mats. But again, when visiting dignitaries come over to Tonga, when they go back, His Majesty gives them all these mats [and] tapa cloths; soon we have nothing in the Palace. When His Majesty gives a present, the present must fit his stature as a king. He doesn't give out a [small] piece of mat — he gives out a hell of a lot of mat! When the President of Nauru returned to Nauru, the whole plane was almost full of Tongan stuff. (Ketui'ionetoa 1993.)

They [spent] a lot of money . . . on getting up the celebrations. It was a real celebration to show strength. I think some people had bad intentions — to show, as it were, the fraud that people are not for democracy, as if we have virtually said that people are for the monarchy. (Finau 1993a.)

There was a conscious effort this time to use it as a political move to take the people's attention from the real problems. There's no doubt about it. . . . You'll never see the royal family so heavily involved in the dancing [as in this celebration]. We would never [have] before. One or two, or perhaps three. But in this case, almost all the King's [family danced], except the Crown Prince. . . . To the conservatives and the government [the] most effective strategy to fight change is the use of traditions in our political world. (Fukofuka 1993.)

Several people indeed described the celebrations to me as a validation of the present system of government:

You have seen what happened during the celebrations: you can tell how the people feel. All the people still stick with the old traditions. Everybody loves and respects the King, the royal family, as well as the chiefs. (S. Tupou 1993.)

I don't think the people's attitude to the King has changed whatever. The greatest and strongest proof [of] that is the celebration that we just had. (Afeaki 1993.)

About three thousand ex-students of these colleges went and took little baskets [of food] to the King, and what were they doing? They were showing that they still love the monarch, and that they still supported its formality. People coming and dancing . . . from the other islands. No one's forced to. They want to participate, [to] show that they still believe in the system. (Fakafanua 1993.)

Clear evidence of the fact that people are still what they were fifty years ago, [that] they're still loyal to the King and the system, is what we saw in the celebrations. (Fusitu'a 1993.)

Look at the school-kids' events. The parents were happy to get their kids ready for that. I don't think it was by force, just a feeling that develops at the time that they should participate. . . . To me it gave an indication of what people really feel in their heart. (P. Ve'a 1993.)

In the following weeks, letters in Tongan newspapers (written by 'a network of [conservatives] who always write' (Fukofuka 1993)) carried a similar message. Some anonymous letter-writers took the opportunity to criticise Pohiva:

[The critics wrote,] "Where was he? He didn't show up [to a particular event]; he didn't want to spend money on buying a tin of fish." (Finau 1993a.)

Yet (as his wife wrote in the following week) he *was* there, as were other prominent pro-democracy campaigners at various events:

I participated; I prepared food twice or three times. In my book there's no obligation; at the same time I still respect the King and the nobles in the traditional sense. (Fukofuka 1993.)

People whom the other side suspected as [being] against traditional monarchy [were] giving their full support in the celebration. There was no sign of any resentment for the King. . . . That even confused the people, because they [had] accused the Pro-Democracy Movement [of being] against the King. So what they're saying now [is] we are playing up to the King, . . . being hypocritical. (S. Vea 1993.)

The presence at the celebrations of these people would appear to weaken their opponents' assertion that the celebrations' success implied great support for the system of government, as would the apparent contradiction between that success and the support shown for the PDM at the election held only months earlier. Oddly, the latter contradiction was sometimes presented as a form of proof against widespread support for democracy:

The whole celebration, to me, was a great success. It seems to contradict the views that Tongans are changing and are not supporting the monarch [and] traditions. (P. Vea 1993.)

More justifiable would be to recognise that a contradiction between two positions proves neither, and is in itself in need of explanation. And the explanations offered to me revealed that in the minds of many, no contradiction existed:

Whatever you saw in the [celebrations] is not really what's in the heart of people. So to me there is not that contradiction. (Fukofuka 1993.)

[At] any meeting, whether government's or churches', people still turn up and participate. So what you see during the celebration does not necessarily reflect how people feel about leadership and what Tonga should do. There are things that you cannot see. . . . What the people have in their minds [is] something that you people from outside cannot assess. (Pohiva 1993.)<sup>38</sup>

Voters have been able to distinguish that politics is one thing; traditional loyalty is one thing; your loyalty to the church is another thing. . . . People know there's a difference between loyalty to your country, and what is just and right to be done. (Tu'itahi 1993.)

One of the basic concepts in the Tongan traditional system is the word *'ofa*, love, which has a lot of levels of meaning. I think it encapsulates what Tongan society is all about. To an outsider it's very conflicting, because we behave according to a certain context. Create a context and put the Tongan

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<sup>38</sup>As Futa Helu said,

The Tongan people have two faces. One is a private face and the other is a public face. In the celebrations they showed their public face. The problem for the Pro-Democracy Movement is to weaken the public face, and emphasise the private face. But the private face has become fairly well hidden. (Helu 1993a.)

Kenneth Bain observed the same process at work a generation ago:

Whoever said "Truth is absolute" can't have spent any time in the Friendly Islands. The Tongan is a skilled exponent of the art of evasive responses. . . . The man of rank may find it hard to get at the whole truth. The reason is that the commoner tells his chief what he thinks the chief wishes to know or would like to hear. Unpalatable tidings are guarded from his ears. (Bain 1967: 95.)

there and you'd be able to [see one reaction]; put him in another context and he will automatically react in a different way. To an outsider it seems inconsistent, but to a Tongan it's perfectly logical. We may spout off about our support of the Pro-Democracy Movement, but put me in another situation where I am supposed to perform my obligations to my chief, and immediately it comes to mind that I have obligations, debts to pay [going] five generations back, which you call forth on occasions such as this. You pay it not for yourself, but on behalf of all the other ancestors you have who would expect you to make that payment. (Taufe'ulungaki 1993.)

Perhaps the most subtle explanation tied the success of the celebrations among Tongan commoners to their lack of access to power within Tongan tradition:

Our tradition . . . refers to only a minor group of people, which is normally the King and his nobles. . . . The commoners have nothing in our traditions; [they] don't have any history, and they don't have any power structure in our tradition. The only thing that they [are] involved [in] is celebration. That's the only thing that [has] kept the tradition nowadays, because that's where they have been a part of tradition. So [even though] there are more developments now of our way of life here in Tonga, . . . [they] still have pride in those parts of their tradition. When you're looking at the political aspect, it has declined.

[When] anything [happens] in the society, [there are] definitely more celebrations. It happens with the family, [with] marriage. That is a sign [it's still their] tradition. But . . . the people have obviously shown that they don't like this whole traditional political structure any more. (S. Ve'a 1993.)

The surprise is not that many Tongans' private views (as expressed in a secret ballot) conflicted with, as some saw it, their publicly expressed support for the monarchy. More surprising would have been an absence of public support for what was a well-organised and enjoyable series of events.<sup>39</sup> After all, Tongans had recently had the opportunity to express their political views at the polls; here they were expressing their respect for their head of state, the King, in much the same way as Americans of all political persuasions will wave the flag for their president. Respect for an individual need not preclude criticism of that individual's actions.

An explanation of the celebrations which casts the Tongan people as overwhelmingly supportive of the present system must explain away those who voted otherwise as hypocrites, which given the numbers involved seems a harsh judgement. The alternative explanation requires no such judgemental stance: it simply recognises the presence of a diversity of political views but near-unanimous agreement on the value of celebration, both as a means of expressing respect and as an end in itself.

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<sup>39</sup>Particularly, one might add, since Princess Melenaite Tupou Mohofo, wife of Tu'ipelehake, had died in March of that year (*Matangi Tonga*, March-April 1993, p. 5). After a prolonged period of public mourning (black was still being worn when I was in Tonga), Tongans of all political persuasions would have reason to welcome an occasion for celebration, if only to lift their spirits.

These examples of government-organised celebrations in Fiji and Tonga both drew heavily on tradition, and in doing so were partly intended to make a strong political statement. They may justifiably be considered as events intended as political symbols, or as a subtle form of political education.<sup>40</sup> Symbolic they were, but it is questionable whether they changed many minds locally. Outsiders would be well-advised to judge the significance of such events with caution.<sup>41</sup>

As informal forms of education, such events face the same obstacles as any formal education intended to inculcate respect for traditional political systems. They are competing not only with types of formal education which have the opposite effect, but with many other influences acting upon these societies today. One of those — money — is practically inescapable in today's world. Its effects will be examined in the next chapter.

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<sup>40</sup>See Babadzan (1988). For a useful brief discussion of the study of 'power and pomp', see Cannadine (1987).

<sup>41</sup>Academic observers probably need no such advice, but those in the media have shown they sometimes do. A television documentary concerning the jubilee celebrations in Tonga, *Fit for a King* (Nicholas Adler & Caroline Sherwood, Titus Films/ABC/BBC, 1994; screened by the ABC on 22 December 1994), ended with the observation that the celebrations seemed to contradict Tonga's reputation for democratic agitation. One should also note that misinterpretation cuts both ways: an Australian official told me that one journalist, having spotted several older women spontaneously singing and dancing on the sidelines at the royal feast (playing a traditional role analogous to that of the court jester of medieval England), reported this 'disruption' in Australian papers as 'anarchy' and further evidence of pro-democratic unrest!

## Chapter Six

### Money: A Vehicle for Change

*Your people, when they are ambitious, stomp on anybody's head. That is business. But our way, no. (Sokonibogi 1993.)*

*When Fijians have any problems they [configure them] in terms of their traditional linkages, but the case is really [one of economics]. . . . You can't explain it to them that way, even though it is in my own analysis undeniably economics. (Mataitoga 1993.)*

Few Western concepts would have had a more profound influence upon peoples previously unexposed to them than that of money. The changes wrought in many societies by the introduction of a cash economy have undoubtedly been immense. Obviously, the time when Fijians and Tongans thought of money (that is, a standardised medium of exchange) as a strange new concept is now long past; whether an awareness of money is changing their tradition is not an appropriate question for a contemporary study. But while today's Fijians and Tongans have always been aware of money, the personal value they place upon acquiring it has changed in their lifetimes and is changing still.

Much of that change is a result of influences explored in other chapters: education; foreign and local media; travel outside one's own rural area. As Fijians and Tongans become increasingly aware of what money can buy, so their desire for it increases, and so they explore and adopt ways of gaining more. And those explorations and behavioural changes themselves end up changing tradition, just as do the influences which prompted them.

Many Fijians and Tongans have become dissatisfied with the impediment posed by some of their traditions in their personal quests to gain and retain money. This dissatisfaction, as one would expect, is gradually promoting change. Many are moving (and not without difficulties) towards a more Western, individualistic outlook; and many are exploring capitalist avenues for gaining money, such as employment, business, and different ways of using land. In the process they are changing their traditions, and directly and indirectly affecting the political processes of their countries.

### Land and Community

As in much of the Pacific, the societies of Fijians and Tongans have long been communal in nature. Their communities share much more than simply the specific

location (town, suburb or municipality) which is all that most Westerners take 'community' to mean. Tongan and Fijian villages share in land and possessions to an extent which makes them more like communes than most comparable communities in the West. When Fijians and Tongans speak of their traditions of communal living, the term, while encompassing shared religious, political, and other non-economic traditions, primarily signifies systems of communal ownership and reciprocal economic support.<sup>1</sup>

One matter which highlights the primacy of economic concerns in these communal traditions is land. Before turning to business and employment later in this chapter, I will examine some of the economic concerns surrounding land, and how they affect Fijian and Tongan traditions. Land systems have developed in considerably different ways in each country. In particular, the presence of significant numbers of non-Fijians in Fiji has heightened awareness of the perceived importance of indigenous people's rights in relation to the land — a concept which itself requires careful examination.

### The Concept of Indigenusness

In this dissertation I have largely avoided the term 'indigenous people', as I find it problematic. The question of the significance of a person's indigenous status (or lack of such) is as vexed as that regarding the importance of identity, and I do not have room here to explore either concept in depth. But some observations on 'indigenusness' are necessary.

First, 'indigenusness' is linked with the concept of identity. To identify oneself as indigenous to a particular place is to distinguish oneself from other residents who are not. But, second, the term is highly relative; its meaning depends on the particular circumstances of any one place. For example, a Fijian descended from Tongans who settled in Lau in the eighteenth century is considered indigenous, while an American descended from Europeans who settled in Virginia in the seventeenth century is not.

This suggests a third point: in popular parlance 'indigenous people' means little more than 'the people whose ancestors occupied this place before Europeans arrived'.<sup>2</sup> While non-Europeans who live elsewhere than their ancestral homeland (such as Indians in Fiji) are sometimes considered non-indigenous, that is almost certainly when their

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<sup>1</sup>The nature of this 'communalism' will become clearer later. Note here the words of O. H. K. Spate:

[The Fijian] village system has been accidentally labelled 'communal', and this gives rise to semantic confusion . . . because it is thus assumed that the 'communal system' is collectivist in production (which it is not, and never was except when taxes were produced in kind and communally in the last century — an alien imposition). (Spate 1960: 169.)

<sup>2</sup>See Mulgan (1989), who discusses some of the problems with the widespread use of the term 'indigenous' to describe, primarily, precolonial peoples. See also Mulgan (1991).



presence is a product of European actions (such as the importation of slaves, convicts, indentured labourers or immigrants).

One might argue that 'indigenous' merely means the *original* inhabitants of a place, and that one can use the term in historical cases where a European presence does not apply.<sup>3</sup> But while those attempting to unravel the complex tangle of pre-European-contact history in Africa, Asia, or the Americas might distinguish between indigenous and non-indigenous groups in this way, they do so at the risk of creating new entanglements. Where in the past does one draw the line? Practically everyone on earth is descended, ultimately, from migrants, and often from many waves of migrants, to the extent that few are clearly and solely descended from the first inhabitants of their specific place.<sup>4</sup>

In popular practice 'indigenous' is not used that way. When we speak of indigenous Fijians, we do so to distinguish them from those of European or Asian descent, not to distinguish between the many tribes whose ancestors lived there two hundred years ago. That the term is used to distinguish almost exclusively between the descendents of 'European invaders of non-European countries (and those they brought with them)' and 'everyone else' is demonstrated by its lack of use to distinguish among the British descendents of Picts, Celts, Anglo-Saxons, Danes and Normans, and by the fact that the label 'indigenous French' seems somewhat tautological while 'indigenous Fijians' does not.

I find this popular usage less objective than others might; hence my reliance on such locally-used labels as 'Fijians' and '(Fiji) Indians' (which convey essentially the same information as 'indigenous Fijians' and 'Indo-Fijians').<sup>5</sup> The term 'indigenous' might become useful, however, if it were defined in relation to tradition. One could say that those who follow traditions developed in (and therefore relevant to) the place where they live are truly indigenous to that place. Two points follow: a transplanted tradition which has not yet adapted to its new location is not indigenous, and neither are those who live by it; and, no matter what their race or ultimate origins, any people can over time become indigenous to any place through the adaptation of their traditions to that place.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Compare this with the Fijian concepts of *taukei* and *vulagi*:

The *taukei* are the indigenous or the original or the first to be in a locality or those who conquered them in war. Any others who arrive later to settle with the original settlers (or subsequent conquerers) of that area are known as *vulagi*: visitors, or foreigners. (Ravuvu 1991: 58.)

<sup>4</sup>Polynesians from outlying island groups, such as Hawaiians and Maoris, may be among the few who qualify on this last point, owing to their ancestors' relatively recent occupation of previously uninhabited islands.

<sup>5</sup>See my comments in Chapter Four on my use of these labels.

<sup>6</sup>There is a corollary. As human societies develop in a common (Western-style) way which removes people from their natural surroundings and the specific details and limitations of their

While some might like to see this meaning applied to the term,<sup>7</sup> it is not its primary meaning today (and therefore I will use the term in its widely accepted sense). Significantly, however, it is a meaning embraced by Fijians, if one considers their attitudes towards other races, and how completely (and why) they accept certain members of them:

There's definitely no question about it: Fijians on the whole don't like Indians on the whole, and the feeling is mutual. There are a lot of exceptions. The point I like to make is that the Indians who are accepted by Fijians are the ones who are good at speaking Fijian and know something of Fijian custom. No doubt about that. And there are a lot of Indians in that kind of situation, of whom Fijians will say, "He's not really an Indian, he's Fijian," because they're just so assimilated. (Geraghty 1993.)<sup>8</sup>

### Indigenoussness and the Land

The overwhelming concern of those in the West who speak of indigenous land rights is not whether land is being used by the people whose traditions are well-adapted to it, but whether it is being used by the descendents of its pre-European inhabitants. That is certainly the situation familiar to Australians, Canadians, and New Zealanders.<sup>9</sup> One may object that if the latter condition is satisfied then the former follows, but I would disagree, for two reasons. First, while the traditions of pre-European inhabitants may have been well-adapted to their lands, their descendents might have changed those traditions, which may no longer be as well-adapted to the land, perhaps to the extent that these people should gain no special consideration over others. And, second, the traditions of the non-indigenous will have changed since their ancestors arrived, perhaps

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place — for example, when cities and suburbs around the globe, from Miami to Melbourne, become practically indistinguishable in terms of both appearance and the type of life which may be lived there — then many of their traditions will become adapted not only to their place but to all such places. At that point one may argue that the people following those traditions have ceased to be indigenous to one specific place. I hope we never reach that point completely, although one could say that over the twentieth century many of us have moved closer towards it.

<sup>7</sup>Many descendents of colonists who settled in America four hundred years ago might consider themselves to be 'indigenous' Americans.

<sup>8</sup>Geraghty added:

That's why when things are said like, "Fijian should be compulsory in schools," you never hear an Indian complain against that. They all want to learn Fijian. But they've never been given the opportunity. They want to become more accepted, when it's either that or get kicked out. (Geraghty 1993.)

<sup>9</sup>Worth mention, however, is the landmark 3 June 1992 decision of the High Court of Australia over the Mabo case. The High Court has established that Aboriginals who can demonstrate a continuing traditional link with their land have a prior claim to that land. This ruling has been controversial, drawing criticism from among both non-Aboriginal Australians (because it threatens some of their claims to land) and Aboriginals (because not all Aboriginals can demonstrate such a claim); but it accords with the discussion of indigenoussness which I develop here.

making them as well-adapted as those of the indigenous inhabitants.<sup>10</sup> Possibly, furthermore, the ancestors of the indigenous may not have been particularly well-adapted to the land themselves; or the invaders' traditions may, by chance, have been as well-adapted as those of the indigenous inhabitants.<sup>11</sup> Whether any of these points is true depends on the history of each particular place; they are highly contingent, and one cannot assume that 'indigenous' implies 'well-adapted' — let alone 'best-adapted' (a matter even more difficult — perhaps impossible — to judge objectively).

However, those who promote indigenous land-rights (whether themselves indigenous or not) often argue more than simply that indigenous people were there first.<sup>12</sup> If 'indigenous' does not automatically mean 'best-adapted', what foundation exists for their special claims to the land?

Often a spiritual connection between the indigenous and the land is made. One can see this particularly well in Fiji:

The land is [Fijians'] identity. Land is the source of their security [and] their pride. . . . You don't have Fijians who are landless; they're tied to the land, and the land is tied to them. It's [a] very spiritual relationship that they've got. (Lasaro 1993.)

To the Fijian, land is not something that will help them economically; land is everything. It's like God. Everything on that land matters. . . . They pray to the land. . . . They call [it] *vanua*;<sup>13</sup> that stone, that animal, that insect,

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<sup>10</sup>Most would agree that the land-management practices the British brought to Australia in 1788 were ill-suited to the Australian landscape. But those practices have since changed; partly, even, through the conscious incorporation of some Aboriginal practices (for example, by using controlled burning-off to reduce the risks of bushfires). While some may say that modern Australian practices are not well-adapted to the land, that is a matter for argument, and in that argument one cannot dismiss the possibility that two different practices may be equally suitable for the same purpose. Even if modern non-Aboriginal tradition is not as suited to the Australian landscape as that of some Aboriginals, the day when it is might eventually arrive.

<sup>11</sup>This is not often conceded by those who exalt indigenous peoples' relationships with the land. 'The indigenous peoples have never left the earth poorer than they found it,' goes one such claim, 'or at least they never did until compelled to do so by colonial and industrial masters.' (Blackwell and Seabrook 1993: 67.) One could note that those making such claims rarely mention the indigenous people of Easter Island (the Rapanui), whose population grew to exceed the capacities of their home, leading to deforestation and starvation, and causing their 'unique and highly accomplished indigenous cultural edifice to crumble some time in the 17th or early 18th century' with no help from Europeans (McCall 1983: 239). See also Barsh (1990).

<sup>12</sup>Certainly, that argument is also offered, but it draws criticism from the non-indigenous of the kind indicated in a previous note: 'My family has lived here for four generations'; 'I have lived here all my life'; 'We are all ultimately descended from migrants'. Such criticism is not, however, accepted by the head of a fringe Fijian group called *Tagi ni Vanua*:

The Indians are attacking us . . . so that they can be level, [saying] we are migrations; and I am saying no, we are not a migration. We are from here. The archaeologists and all are coming to me and . . . they say, "You have to prove it." I say, "Why should I prove it? You people prove me wrong. I say I come from here. . . . The chiefs came later; that's recorded, yes. . . . But we were here before the chiefs came." (Sokonibogi 1993.)

<sup>13</sup>On the complex meanings of this Fijian word and the political uses to which it is put, see Williksen-Bakker (1990). See also Ravuvu (1987a: 14-15).

all these are part of [it]. When the Fijian talks of land [they're] not just talking about acreage, they're talking about everything on that land, which is very sacred to them. That is the difference between a Fijian land-owner and an Indian land-owner. When [an Indian] looks at land [he] is simply concerned with what he can get out of it. But the Fijian really is quite content to leave the land idle for years and years. (J. Moala 1993.)

This 'spiritual connection' with the land is considered something unique to indigenous peoples by many indigenous and even non-indigenous people, a point I find problematic. In arguing this I am forced to draw upon personal experience, being unequipped to argue objectively about spirituality (if such objectivity is possible).

It is certainly possible to feel a special connection with the homeland of one's ancestors. I have felt such a connection myself where Britain is concerned, especially during two visits there. Significantly, however, the focus of my affections has been British tradition, the source of much of my own tradition; the landscape has only been especially significant when it plays a part in that tradition, as icon or influence.

One can also feel especially connected with the place where one was raised. I feel such a connection with Tasmania, though I am not indigenous to it.<sup>14</sup> And the Tasmanian landscape *is* significant to me (perhaps even more so because I was raised in the country rather than the city); it is filled with markers of my life.<sup>15</sup>

Taken together, the places and cultures of Britain and Tasmania have significant meaning for me. They contain all the major influences which have shaped my identity. Much of the confusion about indigenous peoples' spiritual connections to their land arises, I believe, from the conflation of these two factors. For me, the home of my ancestors and *my* home are not the same. For indigenous people, they are — keeping in mind the idiosyncracies of the popular usage of the term noted above. For the indigenous, one place carries *all* these special connotations in a way which, for the non-indigenous, no one place does.

Indigenous people, seeing that non-indigenous people have no special connection to only one place, might assume that they have no such connection at all, or perhaps that they have a connection only with their ancestors' homeland. They cannot know from their own experience (for they know only one place) that such a connection can be made with two or more places taken together.

Furthermore, many non-indigenous people might feel no particular connection to two or three specific places. Their ancestry may be too mixed for them to feel connected to any particular homeland; they may have moved many times, giving them no special feeling for any one home of their own; or the places in which they lived may have had no

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<sup>14</sup> As I was not raised in the place of my ancestors, I am presumably not indigenous to anywhere; furthermore, my ancestors were of the European-invader variety, which in itself casts me as non-indigenous.

<sup>15</sup> To a lesser extent, I have feelings for all those places in the world which are more than merely places I have passed through as a tourist.

special features which stamped themselves upon their identities (for example, they may have lived in a succession of similar suburbs). Such people may then be convinced that special connections with the land are unique to the indigenous.<sup>16</sup>

This I do not believe, because I see such a connection (with a collection of places) in myself, although I would avoid labelling such connectivity 'spiritual'.<sup>17</sup> Any argument that the non-indigenous do not have (and by implication can *never* have) such a connection, where 'non-indigenous' means mostly 'the descendents of European invaders', may well be considered by some to be racist, even if unintentionally so.

If 'indigenous' were defined in terms of tradition, however, such objections would disappear. I would then define this sense of special connectivity as 'the connectivity one feels with the major influences which have shaped one's identity', among which are one's traditions. I would agree that one whose traditions are adapted to a place feel more connected to it than one whose traditions are not as adapted. If the former people are labelled 'indigenous' and the latter 'non-indigenous' then certainly the indigenous feel a special connection with their home which the non-indigenous do not.

Once such a definition is accepted, however, then indigenous people must accept that, because traditions change, a time may arrive when the traditions of non-indigenous residents are just as adapted to the land as their own.<sup>18</sup> At that point, in fact, everyone will be as indigenous to that place as each other.

I believe that many indigenous people *do* accept that, and that this is illustrated by the tolerant attitude displayed by Fijians towards Indians who know something of their language and traditions. Although this study is concerned with Fijian tradition rather than Fiji race relations, here those views on race-relations are relevant:

Some Indians do not want political power. They prefer to leave it as it is, because they've got on well with the Fijians in the rural areas where they live. [They have been] accepted into village life, accepted into the family, into the *mataqalis*; [they] sleep together, eat together, drink grog together. But here at the political level there is this conflict in the Houses. (Kalou 1993.)

[The relationship between Fijians and Indians] is much better in the West [of Vitilevu] than it is here, because there's more interaction. They cut cane together, they plant cane together, they work together in the cane gangs, and so on. And therefore there's much better appreciation of each other, definitely. . . . The areas in which the greatest difficulties [exist] are areas where there is very little contact. (Reddy 1993.)

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<sup>16</sup>For an important discussion of non-indigenous attitudes towards the indigenous, see N. Thomas (1994); page 28 is particularly relevant here.

<sup>17</sup>Rather, I would seek to understand it in terms of the theory of human learning discussed in Chapter Two.

<sup>18</sup>This could be true even if the traditions of each remain different — though it is probably more likely that, by a process of mutual influence (in which one side may exercise more influence than the other), the different traditions will become increasingly similar.

[In the] villages the Indians and Fijians eat together and work together and talk together, harmoniously. . . . In the towns it's different, in spite of the schools [being] multiracial and international. Even today . . . intermarriage between the two races is very scarce. . . . Time is a healing factor. Our kids . . . have more opportunities to play with each other in schools, in workplaces, in cinema, night-clubs, so they intermingle. I think the future is good. (Lasaro 1993.)

Intermarriage will begin to break down this barrier. . . . The problem [is that] we continue to put races in compartments; we are not encouraging intermarriage. Fijians could be marrying Indians and creating new races. . . . [In] the village it will be difficult, because the races will still be in their own little groups. But in towns and cities [everyone mixes in clubs and the like]. The Fijians and the half-castes and the Indians get drunk [together] and eventually they get married. [It] will slowly begin to break down barriers, which I think will be good [in the] long-term. (J. Moala 1993.)<sup>19</sup>

While there was a belief among some that 'time would heal all wounds', there was also some recognition that Fiji politics, in reacting to those wounds (whether real or perceived), has kept them from healing as quickly as they might:

In years to come, maybe two or three generations, who will really care [about race and the Council of Chiefs]? Politics will probably take on quite a different tone. But our politicians have always encouraged racial division, because it helps them in their vote-[winning]. . . . There's really been no attempt . . . to unite the races. Even the 1970 constitution encouraged the racial divisions by its electoral system, always saying, "You're Indian, you're Fijian, and you're other races. You shall live like this forever." . . . Back in [the 1960s] when they were talking about the constitution in London the Indians wanted a common roll. Now I begin to wonder what would have happened if they had accepted a common roll then. Then you would go to vote not as a Fijian but as a citizen of Fiji. . . . What if we had accepted that? Maybe we wouldn't be worried so much about traditions. (J. Moala 1993.)

In many places around the world, however, the time when indigenous and non-indigenous will become one is not yet. The arrival of the non-indigenous often happened too recently for the traditions of both sides to have changed sufficiently for them to be considered equally well-adapted to their surroundings.<sup>20</sup> Places like Fiji can, for a while yet, expect their share of Butadrokas:

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<sup>19</sup>Jale Moala put his comments into perspective:

I'm married to a half-caste, so my views are probably different. Probably a quarter of [my son's] blood is Fijian; because my father was a Fijian, and I'm a Fijian, he's a Fijian. But then he will probably marry an Indian or maybe another half-caste. His son would have very little Fijian blood. It wouldn't [matter]; he wouldn't even go to the village except to go on holidays. Who cares, you know? (J. Moala 1993.)

<sup>20</sup>Of course, in most places shared by indigenous and non-indigenous, the most recent arrivals came as a result of European colonisation; hence the popular understanding of the word 'indigenous' in relation to European colonial history. We should not, however, let our historical proximity to those events blind us to the longer-term, more neutral meaning of the word.

This is why my motions say "Indians must leave". . . . I say it as a Christian. . . . Even after the coup, I can't burn, I can't chase, I can't throw. They're human beings. . . . [But] this is the right time to leave [for] these people. (Butadroka 1993.)<sup>21</sup>

The existence of such reactions to difference does not mean, however, that such difference cannot disappear as a result of change on both sides; and such changes will most likely result from increased mutual understanding. Where 'the land' is concerned, that requires an understanding that indigenous people have no *unique* connection which the non-indigenous can have no hope of acquiring.<sup>22</sup> In the process, stereotypes must be dispelled. An Indian looking at land does not see simply 'what he can get out of it'. That may be one of his concerns; but he may also see in it his home, and his parents' and grandparents' home; and his distant descendents, should they remain there, will see it as the home of their ancestors as far back as they can remember.

### Issues Relating to the Land

The preceding discussion of indigenoussness focussed on Fiji, as Tonga is in the enviable position (many Fijians might think) of containing few non-indigenous residents, leaving Tongans in control of all Tongan lands. Both Fijians and Tongans, however, are experiencing difficulties with their practices of land-management which are worth comparing. Again, because of the high profile given to these matters in Fiji, I will start there.

As a consequence of Fiji's colonial history, its land is divided into three basic categories: native land, which accounts for 82.16 percent of the total land area; state land, which accounts for 9.45 percent; and freehold land, mostly concentrated in and around the cities and major towns, which accounts for the remainder (Lal 1988: 24).<sup>23</sup> Freehold land may be purchased outright by anyone; the category encompasses most of the lands alienated by European settlers before Fiji was formally colonised. Their historical legacy has caused lingering resentment among some Fijians:

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<sup>21</sup>Butadroka has been saying essentially this for the past twenty years: see, for example, Brown (1978).

<sup>22</sup>As Mulgan (1989: 381) argues, 'Reserving the concept of indigenoussness for precolonial peoples . . . implies, wrongly, that descendants of settlers can never put down roots in a new land, and that all subsequent settlement is but a continuation of the original colonization.'

<sup>23</sup>These 1980s figures only approximately indicate the proportions of total land area in each category, as they are fast becoming out-of-date. As Lal has noted, the Rabuka government is promoting the buying-back of freehold land by *mataqali* (through a F\$2 million fund to provide interest-free loans payable over 30 years), and transferring the administration of many crown lands to the NLTB with the intention that eventually these lands will revert to native title (Lal 1994: 7).

While we own 83 percent of the total land area of this country, why not ask how much of those lands are arable? . . . The best land in this country was sold during the days of early settlement, to the Europeans, and they have gone away from Fijian [hands]. Those are the better lands . . . on the river banks, by the sea-side. [The Fijians'] 83 percent [is] mostly the hilly country, which is very difficult to grow [on] unless you have very high-tech mechanisation. (Lasaro 1993.)<sup>24</sup>

The colonial government's . . . biggest concern was making sure that they brought to fruition a system of government that would at the very least justify [the retention of] lands that were already taken by the European settlers. . . . The first major step that they took . . . was the setting-up of the 1876 [Land Claims] Commission. . . . The discussions that preceded [it were] very clear as far as Ratu Seru Cakobau was concerned.<sup>25</sup> At the very least [he could] expect something like seventy percent of the land titles which were supposedly granted to have been returned to Fijians. But . . . less than ten percent of the lands that were alienated prior to cession actually went back. . . . There was no attempt by the respective commissioners to get into the issue of whether these lands were actually — given even the existing legal order of the day — properly alienated. It is those things [which have caused Fijians] to really [question]. (Mataitoga 1993.)<sup>26</sup>

I'm fighting for the return of the freehold [and] crown land [to Fijians]. They tell me this is very difficult to do now. Well if Papua New Guinea has done it, if the Solomons has done it, if Vanuatu has done it, and the whole of Africa has done it, why can't we do it? (Butadroka 1993.)<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>See also Ward (1985: 32):

It is sometimes asserted that the Native Reserves lock up large areas of high-quality land which might be used more efficiently if available for leasing more freely. [Government sources indicate that] about 60 per cent of the Reserve land is suitable for agricultural or pastoral use — and this is probably a considerable overestimate. . . . Even if all Reserves were revoked, no great area of accessible, high-quality, vacant land would become available for use by non-Fijians.

(Native land is divided into reserve land and lease land, as is further explained shortly.)

<sup>25</sup>Cakobau was the high chief and King of Fiji who ceded Fiji to Britain in 1874.

<sup>26</sup>See also Mataitoga (1991).

<sup>27</sup>The difficulties faced in returning freehold land to the Fijian community have been exposed by the case of the people of Suvavou, a village on the outskirts of Suva inhabited by the descendants of the original (pre-colonial) inhabitants of parts of downtown Suva, who were displaced by Europeans and moved to Suvavou. In 1993 Suvavou inhabitants were making claims against the government for restitution for this perceived injustice against their tribe. I discussed this problem with the Managing Director of the Native Lands Trust Board:

All sales of land before cession [were] thoroughly investigated by the Land Claims Commission. Suvavou [was] investigated, and whatever the position [was] at that time is the status quo now. Suvavou is saying [that that decision] was wrong; but government cannot just change that overnight, because it's not only Suvavou: you're talking about all the freeholders in Fiji that were investigated by this Land Claims Commission. If government starts changing those positions, . . . everybody else will want their land back.

Government is looking at ways that will help them. For example, [it has leased] them a piece of land right in the middle of town . . . where they could build an office complex that could be rented out and receive the income from that. . . . But what they're saying is they want the land back. That's impossible; I don't think we can do much about that now. That



Of more pressing concern, however, to most Fijians (and to most people in Fiji) is the fate of the 83 percent of land classed as native land. Indeed, that can be (and has been) argued to be a key factor behind Fijians' support for Rabuka's coup. As one put it:

The two basic fears of Fijians [are for] their land and their leadership. They don't want Indians to be running the country for them, because they think that by doing that the Indians would eventually somehow amend the laws, [which] will then cause Fijians to lose their land rights. (J. Moala 1993.)

Whether such a fear is justified is somewhat beside the point; what is significant is that it exists. And it exists not only because of Fijians' perceptions of Indians, but because of their perceptions of the land. Their 'special connection' to the land is not the whole picture, as other statements show:

Land is part and parcel of the way of life for the Fijian. [The word] *vanua* includes the land, the people that live on it, their customs, their traditions: it's all tied up with that word *vanua*, for it's part of their way of life. (Volavola 1993.)

I belong to the land, and the land belongs to me, . . . to my extended family, my kind and my clan. Traditions and customs tell me even how to use [the land]: use this land because it is yours, and do not touch that sacred land, because it's the place of our ancestors. . . . I do not touch [certain parts of] the sea, because the fish breed at this particular part. It gives meaning to me; it gives meaning to my life. (Lasaro 1993.)

That is rather a different conception of the land than the 'spiritual' one Lasaro had mentioned. To consider land in unison with the traditions which help one make use of it is not spiritual but *practical*. Traditions, I argue, are a group's practices and beliefs — primarily, beliefs about what practices work for the group's members. Many traditional practices will only work in the context of a certain place, and that 'place' will consist not only of the society and its built environment but also the land on which they are built.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Fijians value their land: it is not only their birthplace (and their ancestors'), but the place which physically supports them. So, while some of their feelings towards the land will have a different source, some will stem from the economic resource it represents. Fijians' fears about the fate of their land have some foundation in their fears for their own physical well-being.

How, then, is their land being managed? I asked this of the Managing Director of the Native Lands Trust Board (NLTB), Mosese Volavola:<sup>28</sup>

Native land cannot be sold like freehold land or state land. It can only be acquired by government for government purposes. Native lands are broadly classified through [two] divisions. One is native reserve land, [which] is for

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is the basis of our ownership at the moment, the Land Claims Commission who met after cession. The only way they might be able to do it is take it through the courts. . . . They are putting some pressure on the government. (Volavola 1993.)

<sup>28</sup>Volavola was also formerly a member of the Bavadra government.

the subsistence use of the Fijian people, and is not available for lease by other races. . . . Then they have land outside the reserve which [is] available for lease to all races; it's well-protected under law.<sup>29</sup>

Under the law, before we lease out any native land, we have to consult the land owners: we have to find out whether or not the lands are being beneficially used by them at the present time, and we also have to consider their future requirements before we lease out their land. As far as native reserve, we have to get the land-owners' consent before we give a lease to one of their members or [use it for] government purposes. . . . So we cannot unilaterally [grant] leases within the reserve. Similarly, outside the reserve we will have to consult them. Their interest will have to be foremost. (Volavola 1993.)

But therein lies the catch. Fijians' interests will have to be foremost, but which Fijians, and which interests? Commoners or chiefs? Spiritual interests or practical economic? The answers reveal some of today's economic pressures on tradition, and some of the influences of tradition on Fiji politics.

Rents for leased native land are collected by the NLTB and, after it takes its share, are allocated biannually to various individuals and groups according to their position in the hierarchy of *mataqali*, *yavusa*, and *vanua*. Native titles are communally owned, and all members of the land-owning groups are supposed to receive some share of these proceeds. But problems arise from their allocation:

[Suppose the chief is] the head of the *yavusa*. In most cases . . . he is also head of one *mataqali* and of one *tokatoka*. So he gets a share [as] the head of the *yavusa*. . . . And then the same chief will get his cut as head of the *mataqali*, . . . as head of the *tokatoka*, and . . . as [an ordinary] member. . . . By the time he's taken all his shares there's only about forty-five percent left for the other people. There's a chief just down here in Lami [near Suva], Tui Lami, [who personally] gets \$110,000 a year in his pocket. (J. Moala 1993.)<sup>30</sup>

One can see that this might breed resentment among commoners of those chiefs — particularly at the upper levels — who are collecting large amounts of money solely by virtue of their position in the hierarchy:

That again is why people are beginning to question the role of the Council of Chiefs. Whereas in the past the chiefs owned nothing, and simply were looked after and catered for by the people, now they're quite wealthy. That is why you see, especially in the Western division or in areas where there's a lot

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<sup>29</sup>He added,

Land use is covered by the Department of Town and Country Planning. But within the [native reserve areas] that law doesn't apply; it only applies outside reserve. Land is placed aside for agricultural purposes, or residential, commercial, all different types of uses. (Volavola 1993.)

<sup>30</sup>The official distribution of rents is 25 percent to the NLTB, 5 percent to the head of the *vanua*, 10 percent to the head of the *yavusa*, 15 percent to the head of the *mataqali*, and 45 percent to the members of the *mataqali* (Bolabola 1978: 157). Further distribution may occur within the *mataqali*.

of native leases, that chiefs are being challenged, and when the new chief is to be installed, he can be challenged. In Ba, they've got two chiefs, because each of those titles are worth quite a lot of money. . . . [In] some parts no [rents] come at all; in Lau there are no leases. . . . Lau doesn't have a problem with the chiefly titles, because as far as it's concerned the chiefly title is not worth any money. But in Ba you have two chiefs, because the title is probably worth \$100,000 a year. . . . The poor guy who's trying to send his five kids to school is in a difficult position when he sees the chief sitting there with a hundred thousand dollars a year. (J. Moala 1993.)

The political effects of giving chiefs their due have been dramatic in other ways. Joeli Kalou, who was Minister of State for the Environment at the time I interviewed him,<sup>31</sup> told how post-independence governments used chiefly rank in a manner which undermined Fijians' sense of security in their land-owning position:

The Fijians had always agreed to requests [by government] for the use of their resources, particularly land. [There would be] two roles that the person approaching them holds: [one] as a chief — there is respect given to the chiefs — and the second one is this position of government, being a high-ranking minister, so that these sort of feelings [of respect] come out of that.

Non-Fijians would in a similar situation [receive] the market price of the resource that government wants to use — say if government wants to put a road through, or [an] airport. . . . The land in that case would be freehold. . . . [In] the case where Fijian land is used by government, then it is always given free.

This sort of trend [has meant] that Fijians have come to feel . . . that all this time they've been using their resources for the benefit of everybody, and very little goes to them. Whereas in the past, prior to the coup, that sort of situation was accepted with a quiet grudge when the government was represented by Fijian chiefs, when the Coalition came into power in 1987 the Fijians felt that the government was changing hands to be an Indian-dominated government. (Kalou 1993.)

The implication is that Fijians feared that an Indian-dominated government would continue to expect them to surrender their land for free. The irony is that this fear derived from a pattern of behaviour established by a Fijian-dominated government.

In the post-1987 pro-Fijian atmosphere, Fijian dissatisfaction over the returns received from their land has manifested itself in various ways. The NLTB has been criticised:

Some don't like the way the NLTB is running things. They feel that there's too much money being spent on the administrative costs of NLTB. (J. Moala 1993.)

Rents have increased, to the advantage of some but to the continuing dismay of Indians:

Every five years they're reassessed, and our experience in the last fifteen years has been that they virtually double every five years; it's becoming too burdensome. (Chaudhry 1993.)

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<sup>31</sup>Kalou was another former member of the Bavadra government.

But most ominously for tenants, persistent calls have been made for the return of leased lands to their owners:

In the West there's all this [talk] about the land leases, not renewing it for Indians: . . . "It's our land; they can go back where they come from." (Keith-Reid 1993.)

[On] the Western side of Vitilevu, where most of the best land is being leased to cane-farmers, they want their land back. It's been leased out for fifty years, and they've got kids now, and there's nowhere to plant their food, and they can't plant their cane. . . . But then the question arises, "What do you do with the Indian tenants?" It's a big problem. But some Fijians . . . think, "Giving [it] back to the Indians for fifty years — that's nearly a generation. [A generation with] no land — what will they do?" Fijians now plant up on hillsides and mountains and places like that. They see their best land being farmed out to Indians. All the best fields have been stripped and lost. . . . In a few years' time when these leases expire, the landowners will take their land back, and there will be a lot of trouble if the government wants to extend the leases. (J. Moala 1993.)<sup>32</sup>

Thus, besides an increasing burden in rents, Indians face major problems of security of tenure:

The complaint of the Indian community has been that leases are for too short a period, and they really cannot invest in land knowing that after twenty years or so the leases may not be renewed, and [not knowing] what sort of compensation they will get. So this is an impediment to heavy investment in land. (Chaudhry 1993.)

Indians' worries are not only for their own personal livelihood, though naturally those concerns are great. Their political leaders stress the important role Indian farmers play in Fiji's economy:

Land is of course important, but what is equally important is that it should be put to productive use. There's no use having land lying around idle. This country remains an agricultural country; forty percent of our income from overseas comes from the sale of agricultural produce, so the land is very important. Also the land-owners are reaping the benefits of being owners in terms of the rent that they earn. It's a question of recognising that the Indian tenant community is contributing very generously to the economy of the country. (Reddy 1993.)

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<sup>32</sup>Note also the observations of John Overton:

There is an understandable reluctance to accede to new leases, a feeling exacerbated by the very low rentals received through the NLTB system. . . . After chiefs receive their cut, there is very little left for distribution to all ordinary members of the *mataqali*, many of whom may be resident elsewhere. In Draubuta in 1985 a total of \$530 was paid in rents for 23 hectares under NLTB leases but less than \$240 of this went to the scores of households in the landowning clans — little wonder that they conclude there is nothing to be gained by agreeing to leases. The feeling seems to be that it is better to share what land is left than allow any one person (Indian or villager) to lock up land in a tenancy agreement for which there is minimal return. (Overton 1992: 335-336.)

As FLP leader Chaudhry noted, 'Indians comprise about 75 percent of cane farmers, but they produce about 85 to 90 percent of cane' (Chaudhry 1993), which implies that a shift in cane-farming to more Fijians could mean a drop in national income from cane. Chaudhry adopted a fatalistic attitude towards the impending review of existing leases in only a few years' time:

The attitude, we know, certainly cannot improve with time. If in 1966 and 1976 they were not prepared to consider leases beyond thirty years and then twenty years, it's unlikely they will consider anything longer the next time. . . . Indians will have to come to grips [with] this reality, and maybe make alternative arrangements. They must realise that some day in the near future we would best opt out of this, because clearly land leases are quite unsatisfactory. You cannot plan the future in a situation like this. (*Ibid.*)

The social and political implications for Fiji of this impending revision of land tenure arrangements are undoubtedly great.<sup>33</sup> But it is important to note that the main force behind Fijian pressures for such revision is not the anti-Indian racism that many commentators may expect, or that one may see on the surface; neither is it the 'special connection to the land' discussed earlier. Rather, Fijians are facing basic problems of economics and population. Their numbers have grown over the past century to the point where in some places their native reserve land is insufficient to support them acceptably in their subsistence lifestyle. The rent-derived money which might relieve these difficulties is shared unevenly; in theory, the chiefs' greater share is to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities to their people, but some neglect those responsibilities and keep a large share of rents for themselves and their families.<sup>34</sup> Commoner Fijians are left with two broad options — challenge their chiefs, or increase the burden upon Indian tenants — and the latter is often more politically expedient.

With no large non-indigenous population, Tongans have no such politically-expedient option, and the problems arising from land in Tonga offer less in the way of such (superficially) simple solutions.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>The Fiji press has been reporting a growing uneasiness about what will happen when ALTA (Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act) leases start falling due for renewal in 1997. The government has attempted to play down such fears; Foreign Minister Filipe Bole has assured that 1997 will not be a 'panic year', since only four of the 45 leases due for renewal that year are unlikely to be extended (*The Review*, June 1995, p. 9). But up to 5,000 leases will expire between 1997 and 2005 (*The Australian*, 22 June 1995, p. 15). Of the first 45, 27 are cane-farm leases supporting 80 families (*The Review*, June 1995, p. 32). Some Indians are resigned to the loss of farming land their families have worked for generations. See *The Review*, June 1995, pp. 44-52, for a revealing series of case-studies on this matter.

<sup>34</sup>See Overton and Ward (1989: 210).

<sup>35</sup>On land in Tonga, see van der Grijp (1993: 182-197, 226-227). See also S. Fonua (1975) and Marcus (1977: 225-227) for earlier discussions of then-emerging problems related to land-use.

The present land system of Tonga dates to the time of King George Tupou I. On the surface, it appears remarkably egalitarian, as was noted with pride in a budget speech as recently as 1991:

Land in Tonga, unlike those in other countries are not purchased but are granted to Tongans free under the Constitution of 1875. Each male over 16 is entitled to one town allotment and one 3 1/3 hectares (8 1/4 acres) farm lot. Hence Tongans have been fortunate as a people. (Quoted in Wickramasekara 1993: 8.)

Again, however, an increasing population has put the system under some strain, as the Minister for Lands explained:

The law is still there, but we can't do it now; we can't give everybody a piece of land. . . . Even if we come down [to] four [acres], still we have more and more males. Now we are trying our best to give them a piece of town allotment so that they can have a piece of land of their own in town, in the village. (S. Tupou 1993.)<sup>36</sup>

The problem is exacerbated by the small geographical size of Tonga and the limits on the amounts of available arable land:

We can't use all the land for planting: . . . out in the country you can see a lot of bush-land [which has] not been utilised for cultivation. . . . We give them lands in the lagoons, and wherever we can give them the land; they will reclaim the land and try their best to build their own land. (S. Tupou 1993.)

One person noted disapprovingly that there were pressures from university-educated types for a more strictly-enforced system of equal distribution, 'something that has never existed in the culture of the Tongan':

Land is life to Tongans, because your father's land should come to you. . . . Equal distribution is contradictory to our way of living. . . . Sharing is what we did. . . . The land goes to your father; . . . the son doesn't have a share in the land, but [you] have a right to live from your father, not from the [person] next door as you would [under equal distribution]. (Fifita 1993.)<sup>37</sup>

Although the existing system is communally-based, it encourages continuity of ownership within families:

The land that belonged to my grandfathers belongs to me now. If I changed the land law, the whole law for the country would change as well. My father planted certain trees with the idea that each generation of grandchildren will

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<sup>36</sup>See Wickramasekara (1993: 8): 'In 1976 only 35 per cent of all eligible persons held a tax allotment, although this position had improved by 1984 to 51 per cent. About 10 per cent of those were residing overseas. It has been estimated that about 90 per cent of eligible males will be landless by the year 2000 at current rates of population growth.'

<sup>37</sup>He added, 'That is why education interferes a lot with things; . . . when you come back home you . . . invent new things that never existed in your society.' (Fifita 1993.)

[reap its] harvest. All that good aspiration would be shifted tremendously [if the system changed]. (*Ibid.*)

Land titles are actually held in the names of nobles (although by the constitution, all land is the property of the King, who grants it at his pleasure (USP n.d.: 383, sec. 100)).<sup>38</sup> Changes in the land system have had significant repercussions for nobles:

Until the last twenty-five years, [nobles] could hold on to their land, and even if you were living on that land they didn't have to give it to you legally. . . . They could also tell you to leave, even if you had legal title to be there. . . . Now most of the lands belonging to the nobles have been distributed, and most of them have been now legally [instated] under individuals' names, so they cannot be kicked out at the whim of the holder. . . . Of all the lands that could be distributed in Tonga that are still left, the churches hold most of them. . . . Indeed, a majority of the nobles now do not have any land; it's all been distributed. So before, they had their responsibility because they had the land. Now because it's divided up to everybody else, they don't feel they have a responsibility. (Kavaliku 1993.)

The nobles are responsible for distributing land amongst families ('land is given to us, but it's still owned by families' (Fielakepa 1993)):

For example, the previous owner of the land passes away, and the older son wants to live in Australia. Automatically the land goes back to the noble. Then the noble canvasses: 'Who's the next of kin? Let him use the piece of land.' (Havea 1993.)<sup>39</sup>

Nobles, said noble-family-member Havea, try to keep particular pieces of land within particular family lines where possible. But some find that this is not always an easy task:

A lot of problems [are] more or less a family problem. [Say,] I'm the eldest, my father owns one piece of land. I come to a marriage now, wife and my whole family. . . . I gave up the land to some of the others. That makes two or three fairly unhappy. . . . [Or say I] gave the land to [my] brother-in-law, or the other side of the family. That sort of thing is making a lot of people unhappy. (Fielakepa 1993.)

Nobles expected to act as arbitrators in land matters can find themselves in an unenviable position. As Tongan aspirations for prosperity and its prizes increase — as they increasingly require land to farm in order to make money, or land on which to build a comfortable home from their earnings — so squabbles over entitlements to particular

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<sup>38</sup>See Marcus (1980: 5):

All lands of Tonga are formally subdivided into (1) hereditary estates held by noble and *matapule* titleholders; (2) hereditary estates held by the king and royal family; and (3) estates held by the government as crown property. Over half of the land of Tonga is held as hereditary estates (categories 1 and 2 above).

<sup>39</sup>Some nobles' behaviour in the allocation of land has not always been admirable, with some commoners required to make 'numerous gifts' to noble estate-holders each year in order to retain their land; see James (1993b: 223).

allotments of land can increase. Just as Fiji Indians want security of tenure before making improvements on their leased land, so a Tongan (or a Fijian, for that matter) spending hard-earned savings on a new house will desire the same. To date, Tongans have relied upon a spirit of sharing to ease any difficulties arising from land-shortages:

They used to go out and ask people who have eight acres and more land to do their planting, farming, in their land. (S. Tupou 1993.)

But such a spirit will become increasingly unreliable as Tonga's population grows and its society becomes more impersonal.<sup>40</sup> Nobles cast as arbitrators in such circumstances can find themselves becoming the focus of resentment, even when doing their best to meet people's expectations of some land of their own (as is their constitutional entitlement).

Communally-based land systems meet difficulties once demand exceeds supply; but few Tongans seem to desire the alternative of private land-ownership. I asked the Minister for Lands if anyone was proposing a change to such a Western-style system; he replied, 'As far as we know there's not many people [who] think that way; they still try to stick with the old way' (S. Tupou 1993).

### Trends Towards Business

In the distant past, the land provided for all Fijians' and Tongans' needs, its capacities setting limits upon those needs. Today the nexus between land and life has been broken, at least partially, for many Fijians and Tongans; they are exploring new ways, such as employment and business, of providing for their wants and needs of today.<sup>41</sup> One impetus for those explorations is the diminished capacity of the land to provide for all. Another is the desire for the trappings of a Western lifestyle:

[There are] things that money can buy these days which can no longer be provided through the traditional system — through our land tenure system, and through our old traditional roles [for] providing food [so that] we need only to go fishing or to go farming and so on; we now need money to buy the other things that we need in the modern life. To buy clothes, to buy an education, to buy overseas travel, to buy the luxuries and the material things

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<sup>40</sup>Epeli Hau'ofa's *Our Crowded Islands* (1977), an essay on problems of population growth in Tonga and the Pacific, remains important and relevant. In it, he described the beginning of a trend now well-established:

Several foreigners have commented to me that when they meet individual Tongans for the first time, the latter would not normally introduce themselves by name; they merely shake hands. . . . When we meet we take it for granted that we are Tongans and need say no more. We assume that we know or have heard of each other, or of the families, *kainga* or villages to which we belong. Personal introductions are for complete strangers, and this alien custom is already creeping into our country indicating a degree of estrangement among ourselves. (*Ibid.*: 21-22.)

<sup>41</sup>Van der Grijp (1993) explores many of the themes discussed here as they relate to Tonga.



that we need or desire from the modern world, which is the Western world. We increasingly do not look towards the group for the provision of those things. (Taufe'ulungaki 1993.)<sup>42</sup>

Money is becoming a very strong influence now, and everything you've got, you've got to buy. Not like before; before [when] you went to your plantation, you walked, or you had a horse, or you had a cart. . . . [Now the] automobile is around. You . . . have to drive to your place. People realise that those things involve money. So they've got to work for the money. Church things . . . depend on money. And the money will come to you in either way: you can run your own business, sell your own produce; or you work for somebody. Everything is money now, because Tonga is driving slowly towards the Western style. Not [just] the Western style, but a world style. (Uata 1993.)

At least some impetus towards making money, however, has come from tradition itself.<sup>43</sup> Most of my interviewees would be regarded (and would regard themselves) as 'urban' Fijians and Tongans, part of precisely those groups which are most heavily involved in the world of employment and business. And a fair number voiced, with little or no prompting, dissatisfaction with the economic costs of observing particular traditions:

You can preserve your culture, but at the same time you have to work maybe twice as hard to be able to meet the traditional obligations. If you're required to pay \$200 towards a village thing you've got to work twice to earn another \$200 to pay for that. (Delaibatiki 1993.)

Obligations that we have, like the [royal] celebrations, like funerals: that sort of obligation is a reciprocal thing. [If] you have a funeral, I come to you, . . . so when mine comes, you come. . . . Business-wise, it's rough. When we have a funeral, it's a major expense. But that major expense is not as bad when the extended family all pitch in. (Afeaki 1993.)

It's good in the sense that it brings people together, the ties are there, but at the same time it can be a tremendous burden on families, a drain, because so many people come in and they have to reciprocate. . . . Because of procedure you've got to provide some material welcome, but they don't have the means to do it. So they borrow money to hold these things, and afterwards they pay for it in the neck. (Finau 1993a.)

From birth until death, there are numerous customary rituals. And [in] today's terms it means money. Last week I had to attend a funeral for a relative of mine [who] was living in Suva. . . . [I was] asked to spend money because [of the] feasts involved. And so my week's pay [went to that]. I received a week's pay today: that money belongs to the whole *mataqali*. . . . Youngsters are complaining. I am complaining — but what can I do? . . . The ideal style of life is what we have seen now, where we

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<sup>42</sup>Compare this with the words of Fiji's Ratu Sukuna in 1947: 'Today, what the Fijian is silently crying for is education and, to pay for that education in its widest sense, markets for his produce.' (Quoted in Scarr 1983: 412.)

<sup>43</sup>Kerry James has noted that, in Tonga, 'cash is probably used more often today to attain cultural ideals than to subvert them' (James 1993b: 217). See also Hailey (1987: 65-78); and Rutz (1978: 796): 'All authors have commented on the complaints of Fijians themselves about the burden of Fijian custom with respect to ceremonial obligations.'

live individually, where your money is your money, where you have very scarce relationships with other people, where you do not have any traditional obligations. We'll take generations to discard [the old ways]. (Lasaro 1993.)<sup>44</sup>

Even I complain of all these clan and village commitments which we have to give money to, . . . even though it's [for] a good purpose, [like] for somebody to develop the village. Every Fijian over 21 years of age has to [pay] provincial tax; that goes to the development of the province. . . . If a person dies in your village, [or even within your district or province.] then you have to give some money. . . . In Suva, if a person died [who was from the] same province, then you [would] have to collect mats, . . . drums of kerosene, money contributions. That's one of the things that we can do away with. (Tonawai 1993.)

A lot of Fijians today still follow tradition; when a relative dies we follow rituals. . . . Sometimes it can get expensive. When my mother died I spent about \$5,000. In Fiji that's pretty high. I had to follow [tradition] whether I liked it or not. If I had my way, I [would] have [done it in] one day: get the families together, bury my Mum, and forget about it. But I have to follow the tradition. (Delaibatiki 1993.)<sup>45</sup>

Delaibatiki, the editor of *The Daily Post*, foresaw that these economic pressures could promote change in the traditions themselves:

Sometimes we do things in excess. Probably by [changing] in certain areas, without actually doing away with the system, we can accommodate [these pressures]. [Instead of] a funeral gathering for four days, you can have it [over] two days; instead of [having] four nights that you mourn after the dead, you can cut that down. Some of these customs have been modified to suit modern-day needs. People can't afford it. Today economic pressure is actually forcing a change in the way we do things. (*Ibid.*)

Uili Fukofuka of Tonga's Pro-Democracy Movement tied these pressures directly to increased political questioning:

The Tongan aims to meet his obligations, that's all. To be able to educate his children, to be able to give to the church when the church wants money, and to fulfil his traditional obligations. When there's a funeral in the family, [or] a wedding, he has to go to that; he has to do all the traditional things right. If there is something that the chief needs, [or] if the government says that something has to be done, he has to fulfil that. . . . When he doesn't have those things, then he feels very hard off. It all boils down to what he gets to meet his obligations. And Tonga is getting less and less. . . . Seven, eight years ago [people] didn't know that the money in the government was theirs; now they know. When [people] see . . . that money going to personal

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<sup>44</sup>And this is from one who — as can be seen from earlier quotations — values his traditions and questions Fijians' moves towards a more Western lifestyle.

<sup>45</sup>He expanded upon the expectations which were upon him:

We have to follow certain rituals, some of which are expensive. I had to work to buy live animals [to feed the] people . . . who came [to] pay their tributes; and the funeral gathering is set at four days — four days of feeding people. . . . After the funeral we had to do another ritual where you present [carcasses] as a thank-you to the people who [brought] live animals. Very expensive. (Delaibatiki 1993.)

schemes and not to help them meet their obligations, then they start questioning. (Fukofuka 1993.)<sup>46</sup>

One can see the irony of the situation emerging: that the need to fulfil traditional obligations is partly responsible for an increased focus on money matters which in turn is changing tradition. The irony gains an extra twist from the observations of Ratu Mara, who noted that urban Fijians are sometimes among the more active when it comes to traditional ceremony:

You will find that some of the urban people are more traditional than people in the villages. There are traditional things that are being done in urban areas that people in villages never thought of ever doing, because they cannot afford it. But when you are in a good job then one must have this. . . . Now they can afford people joining them and they don't mind having a good time [at] social gatherings. There seem to be more traditions in the urban areas.

Usually the death of non-chiefs, commoners, in the villages, is a matter of two or three days mourning. As you go up the scale then you probably have a function on the tenth night, then the hundredth night, [and] then a year after you shed your mourning clothes. Usually [that] only exists [for] up to the top ten or so in a tribe. But now everyone in Suva wants to have it because they can afford to do so. Well, no one can say you can't do it; if you can afford to . . . provide the food for a week for people to come, then why not? (Mara 1993.)

The motivation behind this increased activity, Mara believes, is partly a search for identity, partly a yearning for escape:

It's [people in] the urban area trying to find out who they are. It's a pressure of economy. [When] you become a cog in the wheel of a garment factory, . . . you don't feel very nice about it. When there's an occasion for you to express that you're somebody, there you go. (*Ibid.*)

As will be discussed in the next chapter, this is not a universal trend among urban dwellers; but that as prominent a figure as Mara has noted such a phenomenon is surely

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<sup>46</sup>Deputy Prime Minister Kavaliku outlined the interactions between traditional obligations and economic demands which are straining relations between nobles and their people:

[Nobles] still feel that, as tradition is still alive, the people should still give them something. . . . The relationship between the noble and his people, even if it's really not too unstable, has changed because of the land system. The cash economy has made it very difficult for a man to survive in the communal system [and] at the same time maintain his traditional obligations at the level where it should be. So there tends to be less and less relationships based on traditions between the people and the chief, and so the distance is getting bigger and bigger. So the chief feels less attentive to what is ideally his position, [which] is to look after his people. His view basically now is, "I've given them all my land, they don't give me much, I have to look [out] for myself." So whatever land he has, some of it, he arranges for foreigners or somebody with lots of money to lease. They give him lots of money, and he says, "I need it." And in some ways he's right, because he has his obligations to other chiefs and to the King that he has to meet. (Kavaliku 1993.)

significant.<sup>47</sup> The ironies of these interactions of traditional and money-making activity need not be considered paradoxical, however, if one keeps in mind the individual decisions which drive a change in tradition. Clearly, ceremonial traditions are under pressure to change in some direction. During this transitional period it is hard to predict the outcome of this process, particularly when pressures are apparently being applied in opposite directions; but the process can be understood. Different individuals are making individual decisions which balance their personal capacity to afford certain traditions with their desire to maintain them. The outcome of these many personal decisions will dictate how those traditions change, leading to either an increase or decrease (or perhaps no net change) in the amounts of these particular ceremonial activities, or to change in the kinds of activity undertaken.

### **Tradition as a Barrier to Business Success**

When Fijians and Tongans attempt to increase their personal incomes, for whatever reason, they can find that tradition becomes a barrier. This has been the observation of the managing directors of both the Fiji Development Bank and the Tongan Development Bank where small businesses are concerned. Despite a widely-held assumption that both societies' communal character should benefit those wishing to set up small businesses, they have observed the opposite:

A lot of people say that Tonga's culture [and] traditions [are] very conducive [to] economic development on a communal basis. I don't agree. (P. Vea 1993.)

Where [Fijians] have gone into business on a communal basis . . . there is a very high rate of failure. It's a development that probably a lot of us did not expect, because we are communally orientated, and one would think that when we do things on a group basis we would tend to succeed. But the opposite is happening in the business area. What is coming out is that the individual Fijians or family units tend to be succeeding, and if one examines those who are succeeding, you will find that they are not mixing social obligations, traditions, together with business. They are able to separate the two. (Qarase 1993.)

Communal ventures, said Vea, fall victim not only to tensions which may already exist within the group, but to new ones which may arise from the business itself:

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<sup>47</sup>The observation was echoed by Minister for Education Taufa Vakatale, who made a connection with education as well:

Perhaps the more educated Fijians are, the more they appreciate the position of the chiefs. I think the urbanised Fijians, the ones who have been alienated from their roots and who find frustration living in the urban centres, want to sever the traditional links, because they are struggling themselves to eke out an existence in the urban areas. The well-to-do Fijians, because they can afford to be urbanised, can afford to maintain the traditional links. (Vakatale 1993.)

We have seen a number of cases where church groups or brothers and sisters try and run a business on their own. . . . You've got two brothers who want to run a business jointly; they've got their wives, and it puts [them] in conflict. Whoever is running it . . . may be doing his best, but if the business is no good he will always be blamed by the wife of his brother or something. People get suspicious sometimes. (P. Vea 1993.)

As a result, people will question the value of a communal venture: 'Why join your brothers to run a little place [for the] same profit margin; . . . why not run it yourself?' (*ibid.*). The only group ventures Vea saw succeeding were those based on activities which have traditionally been performed in groups or which are beyond the capabilities of individuals, such as some traditional craft activities.<sup>48</sup>

Greater obstacles to small business success, however, seem to be, again, traditional obligations, and a traditional spirit of sharing:<sup>49</sup>

Not many of us recognise that if one wants to succeed in business [then] we must get rid of some of these social [obligations]. . . . We have very good examples of Fijians who meet their obligations quite well and [are] a success in business. . . . But we Fijians tend to really mix the two up together. An example: say [there is] a funeral gathering in the village [where] I own a shop. The temptation for me just to carry goods, whatever the amount, from the shop to help out is very great, and a lot of people fall for that. They cannot resist. . . . [Those who succeed are] really those people who are able to keep business strictly as business, and at the same time meet their obligations through proper means by normal drawing from business, rather than taking ten bags of flour, ten bags of sugar, which can easily happen. (Qarase 1993.)

You can't run a business [in the village]. You can't even run a shop. Because our style of life is [such that] when you haven't got anything you just turn [to someone else and ask], "Can you give me something I can use?" If I go and fish I come and share the fish. (Lasaro 1993.)

This is why some of the trade stores are unable to keep up, because the money is used elsewhere, not to build up the stocks and things like that. And people don't pay it back because you're relatives, friends in some cases. If they set a limit — say, your account, . . . the level I believe you will pay —

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<sup>48</sup>He commented:

In certain areas group effort could be working, like the women's groups: this is mostly on handicrafts, making tapa and mats and things like that. But that is the way these things are made, so it should work in that sense: you are taking advantage of the way these things are done; it can't be done by individuals. . . . Rural women have to get together and get one done, otherwise it will take years for one individual. So we lend to them on a group basis. (P. Vea 1993.)

<sup>49</sup>What I have loosely called a 'traditional spirit of sharing' is actually underpinned by many precise traditions which spell out certain people's obligations to certain others. Fijians, for example, have *kerekere*, the practice of borrowing from friends and kinsmen when in need (with some obligation persisting on each side), and other traditions which require people to give any of their belongings to particular types of relatives when asked to. One can easily see how such traditions would undermine any system of private property: there would be little incentive to amass personal property which might have to be forfeited at any time. I have not gone into detail about these particular traditions here, however, as my aim is, as always, to outline some of the broader implications of the interaction of tradition and (in this case) business.

it's difficult for Tongans to stick to that. . . . If he goes beyond the limit of fifty dollars, he needs something, somebody's sick, or [there's] a feast, . . . it's a bit difficult for Tongans sometimes to say no. Whether they agree or not, they will entertain such requests. (P. Vea 1993.)

Maybe in our culture we were never meant to be millionaires. We [were] just meant to be a people that share. There's no poor in Tonga *per se*. It's because of that underlying sharing principle . . . I see somebody down the road that's needing something, we take something to them. . . . I have twenty dollars left, but [if] my brother needs it, it goes to him; I know he will do the same. . . . You look out for each other. It would be unheard of in a white man's world. Why do I give the only twenty dollars I have? I would do it, most Tongans would do it, and I think that's what the Tongan way is all about. (Afeaki 1993.)

Sharing may be the Tongan (and Fijian) way, but many are changing their ways. TDB manager Penisimani Vea observed that some even use their economic debts as an excuse for fending off such expectations:

Some people are using their borrowing from the bank as [an] excuse to refuse or deny credit requests from their relatives. . . . They find it much more comfortable to say that; "I've got these big debts to the bank and I've got to repay them, so please don't come for credit," or, "Reduce and pay up your debts, because I've got to meet my obligations to the bank." It's easier [than] just to deny [them] outright; the owners always feel a bit guilty, they can't say no. (P. Vea 1993.)<sup>50</sup>

As people in both countries have noted, Tongans and Fijians must choose between meeting every traditional obligation and making money:

Some Fijians try to do business, but you can see [that the] majority of them fail, because they try to bring custom and business together [when] they don't go together. . . . It's easy: if you want to succeed [in business], just do away with [your] customs. (Tonawai 1993.)

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<sup>50</sup>Ve'a finds, however, that these excuses are not echoed in the priority people place upon repaying their debts to the bank:

Other obligations rank higher than repaying a loan to the TDB or to the banks. . . . It does cause a problem. We realise that it's the way things are. . . . We used to have in our early days [a system of] repayment where we gave a grace period to consult before harvest, if it's a three-month crop, a six-month, or a year. But we found that by the time that the full payment of the loan was due, it [would] fall into arrears and make our books look very bad. Because . . . people had other obligations which they would rank higher. So what we've done is have a small repayment, beginning in the period that you might call their grace period, so as to cover interest perhaps. Then you get a gradual repayment when you start to [grow the] harvest, but spread [over a] much longer time than this actual period for the crop to be harvested. It seems to be causing less problems with arrears and having a big lump-sum payment at the end.

When people have a big [amount] of money in their hands, and if there is something happening, they will spend their money on that. They will make sure that that is done properly before they repay us. Even school fees. Traditions [are] very strong; if somebody's putting up a feast if he's got a good harvest, I think he will try and make sure that it's done before he thinks of the bank. Meeting traditional obligations is very important. (P. Ve'a 1993.)

It's often said here now, more as a joke, but I think down deep it's true, that if you really want to be a successful businessman, you have to forget that you are a Tongan. . . . If you are a Tongan you have all sorts of material obligations to various types of relationship. And if you are a businessman this will eat up all your profits. So to be successful you have to be a person that does not follow Tongan custom. (Kavaliku 1993.)

Many Fijians and Tongans, unconsciously or not, *are* choosing business success over traditions. But even some of the most successful business people, like Tonga's 'Ulitu Uata (who is also a pro-democracy people's representative), recognise that this is a difficult decision to make:

[In] our tradition, [because of] our family ties, we help each other. They come to me when they need help, I go to them when we need help. But when it comes to business, it's a bit hard; you cannot mix tradition and business, because business is business. (Uata 1993.)

When I asked Uata whether people had objected that he was not following traditions properly, he replied:

I have had that a lot of times. But I . . . spend time with them to try and explain to them, and ask them to forgive me if I have done something which [goes] against our tradition; that's the best time for me to explain how business functions. They slowly understand.<sup>51</sup>

What I'm trying to do is to teach them slowly — and they are now half-way [there] or more — [that] the business is not mine. Even [if it] is in my [name], it is another organisation. If they need anything [through] our family relations, they have to come to my house. If they want some food, they [can] come to my house, and if I have food there, . . . yes, I will give them that. But not from the store. It's working; but there are some relatives [from] the old days [who] have some [problems] working out how to do that. [It's] lucky they don't come often now. But before, yes.

I think every Tongan [in business] is having the same problems. . . . From time to time there is an improvement. I could say we've passed halfway already now. We don't have much [of a] problem now from the family. (*Ibid.*)

Uata has also found Tongan ways to be an obstacle for employees adapting to a working environment:

We [were] raised in a place [where] time is not important to us. We can walk slowly to work; we take it easy. Sometimes we don't go to work on time. Sometimes we go away before the time is [up]. Sometimes we don't turn up to work because there is some traditional occasion happening in the village or the family. . . . In the early days [of] my business, a lot of the time half the

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<sup>51</sup>By way of example, he said:

Relatives of mine came to Ha'apai and tried to get on a boat [of my company's]. They did not [want to] pay, because I'm their relative. When my agent in Ha'apai called us, he had to ask them to pay; [the staff here had said,] "'Ulitu is not here to give us instructions.'" When they suffer because they can't get on a boat, they learn . . . either to contact me first, or to look for money. (Uata 1993.)

workers didn't turn up — we wouldn't know where they were. Some people went to funerals, some people went to [weddings], some people went to church occasions, some people went to their family; any excuses. When we don't give them pay, it didn't really matter to them. But we taught them slowly, and it's up to a stage now where we [can] start to be happy. I don't blame the Tongan, because we [have only been] in business in my generation. There [were] only *palangi* [businesses] around here in the early days. . . . People [would] usually go to the plantation [to do] their own farming. But they [have] started employed work; . . . it's slowly changing, and I'm sure it will [eventually] be completely changed. Jobs will be important to everybody in the near future. (*Ibid.*)

And, while on the subject of the notorious 'Tongan time' (a label with equivalents throughout the Pacific, all of which refer to the sometimes enormous length of time it takes to get things done in the islands):

If there is one single personal frustration I have in this place, it's that doing-nothing attitude. . . . The bureaucracy here is absolutely incredible. They really believe you've got to slow things down. Just [taking a form] from one desk to another takes six weeks. That's frustrating, the way it gets. (K. Moala 1993.)<sup>52</sup>

### The Desire for Economic Success

Fijians and Tongans, when attempting to make money, face similar obstacles which arise from their similar traditions. They also face obstacles arising from their countries' positions in the world economy.<sup>53</sup> And they face an even more fundamental problem familiar to members of capitalist economies the world over: we can never make quite enough money. The accumulation of capital is driven by desire, and people's desires

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<sup>52</sup>*Taimi 'o Tonga* editor Kalafi Moala was speaking from personal experience. Having returned to Tonga after many years overseas, Moala had gone to the appropriate government offices to register his newspaper company. After filling out all the forms and paying the necessary fees, he asked how long he could expect to wait for a result. Two months, he was told, or six weeks if he was lucky. Flabbergasted, he left, but thought, 'No, I've got to go back':

I said, "What do you need to do?" She said, "It's got to go to my boss's desk." . . . It was right there, and it couldn't have been more than three, four metres away.

Moala said, 'I'll do you a favour.' He took the forms, walked over to the boss, and got them signed on the spot. Then he walked over to the appropriate government minister's office, where he encountered another secretary. He asked if he could have an appointment with the minister:

She said, "No, no, he's busy. Two weeks' time. After he comes back from Fiji then you can have a —" Just as I was talking, the minister walks out.

Moala interrupted the departing minister, quickly showed him the forms, and again got them signed on the spot. 'What would have taken six weeks,' Moala said, 'I did within an hour.' (K. Moala 1993.)

<sup>53</sup>The macroeconomic difficulties of the Third World in general, and Fiji and Tonga as part of it, have been extensively studied; I will not examine such issues here.



must either remain unfulfilled or be replaced by new desires in order for the capitalist system to function.

Capitalism, too, creates disparities in income — 'winners' and 'losers' — and therefore an environment in which resentment can breed. When those disparities are perceived to be associated with membership of particular groups, that resentment can fuel tensions between those groups. Such resentment is behind much of the tension between Fijians and Indians. Calls for 'Fijian paramountcy' are as concerned with economics — with employment and business — as they are with politics:<sup>54</sup>

The current view of the Fijians is we'd like positive discrimination in terms of economic enterprises to enable us to meet some sort of economic parity before we start to give up our [political supremacy]. (Kalou 1993.)

Political control is one of the factors, but equally important is . . . economic control. Economic control . . . is a much different kettle of fish; that is something that we have recognised. (Tabu 1993.)<sup>55</sup>

In the first twenty years of independence [those in political leadership] decided that they wanted to encourage multiracialism. What [the Fijians] found out during that period [was] that more lands were alienated under very long leases with no financial return to the land-owners; Fijians were lagging behind in education; in the legal field in 1987 there were, out of 158 lawyers in Fiji, less than ten Fijians. [Looking] at the domestic economy, we had less than five percent control. . . . It came to a point that some [Fijians] were really feeling [that there was] something wrong; that the only way we were going to be able to do this was to forget about democracy — restructure it and renegotiate a lot of things.

What the Fijian is looking for is equitable treatment. . . . It was not until 1991 that the figures started changing our way. . . . Fijians will not feel safe in their country unless they are seen to be in all these important [positions]. In six [or] seven years' time there will be a lot more obvious presence of Fijians in law, in accountancy, in those areas. The fear that they have, the bogey that's there, will lift. Then we can talk about a much better Fiji society.

[It's] essentially a land problem again. Fijians are not being given the kind of access that they need to get into the commercial sector. There's a lot of people who are going around . . . saying, "Why should Fijians be given this preferential treatment? They've got plenty more here for it." . . . None of

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<sup>54</sup>Ralph Premdas compares the doctrine of 'Fijian paramountcy' to the Monroe Doctrine of the United States (an 'insignificant part of a presidential speech' which 'backed by force and repeatedly invoked . . . assumed the authority of a "doctrine" with a life and power of its own, several decades after it was first enunciated' (Premdas 1990: 5)). 'Despite lacking any firm documentation,' says Premdas, 'the "paramountcy of Fijian interests" . . . developed life and authority by repeated usage.' (*Ibid.*: 5.)

<sup>55</sup>Tabu stressed the caution necessary in taking that economic control:

Look at where most of the African countries are today. They were good in trying to grab the political power, but they were very bad managers of the economic affairs of the country. . . . When the Fijians want to go into the economy, it's not a matter of going and grabbing all the land, and grabbing whatever belongs to non-indigenous [people]. Because by grabbing them we can actually end up in the same situation Africans did. . . . It's retrogressive. (Tabu 1993.)

the big Indian companies in this country survived without government assistance. . . . The total cost to government [of] businesses that are owned by non-Fijians in this country in terms of simple tax-concessions runs into millions of dollars every year. (Mataitoga 1993.)<sup>56</sup>

Similar sentiments are heard from many sides, inevitably reinforced by stereotyping. As one Fijian said, 'We like to think of ourselves as these open, generous people, compared with the Indian community who are rampantly individualistic: . . . stereotypes which have very little basis in reality' (Madraiwiwi 1993). The stereotype of Indians' 'desire to get as much as [they] can, every penny, to the extent that Fijians [take offence]' (Kalou 1993) takes its toll, whether or not it accurately reflects reality. But Fijians wishing for increased success in business find they must acquire the very traits of which they disapprove:

We have been lagging behind in business enterprises, and [don't] fully participate in commercial enterprise, simply because [of our] customs and culture. . . . Commerce is in the Indians' blood, whereas Fijians don't have anything behind it. Even in Suva, have you seen a Fijian own a shop? They're all owned by Indians. It seems rather difficult for us at this point in time to take part fully in commercial enterprises in comparison to the Indians and Chinese, particularly because we haven't got the skills at present, . . . [or] the know-how [or] the aptitudes. (Lasaro 1993.)

[It's] a contradiction. . . . Modernisation and commercialisation of Fijians means that they will be increasingly like Australian businessmen, American businessmen, Gujerati businessmen. (Anonymous A 1993.)<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Mataitoga added,

Not to mention the fact that a lot of them do not pay their taxes anyway, and that runs to something like \$203 million. . . . And if you look at the . . . wage-earners of this country, at least seventy percent of those are Fijians. . . . Those people have no way of running away from paying tax; . . . it's the business owners who don't pay their tax. (Mataitoga 1993.)

<sup>57</sup>Examples of such contradictions are to be found in the recent writings of Asesela Ravuvu (1988; 1991). Professor of Pacific Studies at USP and Director of USP's Institute for Pacific Studies, and a prominent academic supporter of Fiji's post-coup regime, Ravuvu has demonstrated in his work a solid awareness of the forces for change affecting Fijian society, and in one book argues that those forces must be controlled:

A more selective and critical approach to external influences of all types must be exercised if Fijians are to reduce dependence on outside forces. New cultural influences which create new demands must be analysed with greater foresight and care. . . . Cultural dependence on metropolitan powers should be eliminated. This can be achieved by ceasing to downgrade Fijian cultures, reforming the educational and religious systems, and constraining excessive foreign media dominance. Fijian values and beliefs, local languages, knowledge and skills could be more fully utilized. (Ravuvu 1988: 187.)

But on the next page he says:

It is . . . imperative that positive discrimination be practised in favour of Fijians in education, politics, business development and other areas in which they are lagging behind. This must continue until they are at par, or beyond those who have been well established through close relationships with colonial and capitalist elites. (*Ibid.*: 188.)

Of course, not all Fijians consider Indians' commercial ways to be reprehensible. And, conversely, not all consider them to be worth emulating:

The rich people, the Indians alone: they've [brought] everything from the West in. They bring in staff so they've got international and national and regional networks. There's no hope [competing] with that. The only hope for the Fijian people is to go back and use their traditional ways, because they've got the land, they've got the resources; the world is coming, I can see, where these things will be eradicated. Money will come in later. If you rush the Fijians now you're rushing them into prison. They're being rushed into something which they haven't evolved into. (Sokonibogi 1993.)

How can you start a shop in Suva? Because the Indians are unbelievable. . . . They're very good at making their money. This is the worst part now Rabuka's come in. . . . He talks about [the] money economy all the time. As soon as you talk about a money cure and you believe in it, you [end up] with the Indians. Because you will, if you act like these people, [improve their position]. . . . [The more] you try to [improve] the money economy . . . the less it is you concentrate on your own people, the Fijians. I thought that the government after the coup might do well for the Fijian people, but now I [am worried]. . . . Rabuka has now fallen into the same trap where Ratu Mara fell: highlighting economic survival. You make your choice: if you go [the way] you are, you [can] forget your Fijian people. (Butadroka 1993.)

Fijians may regard many of their economic difficulties as being a unique consequence of Fiji's multiracial composition:

I would like to think that this would [configure] itself differently in Tonga, because of the fact that it's mono-ethnic; they really, strictly speaking, are not talking about survival in the sense of competition from another big racial group in the country. (Mataitoga 1993.)

But those difficulties would have less to do with the particular characteristics of Indians and Fijians than with the difficulties of adjusting from a non-capitalist traditional system to a capitalist economy (difficulties which Indians do not face), or with the divisions between the successful and the unsuccessful within the Fijian community itself.

That similar problems have been seen in Tonga lends support to this interpretation. Uata noted that Tongan churches (and through their influence most Tongans) once viewed business-people with suspicion:

[In the] early days they thought business people were dishonest. They make too much money, and so on. They didn't trust [them]. The public treated business people [as] dishonest people. But time [passed], [and] we started to realise that business people were making the economy move. And the church no longer treated business people as dishonest people, but started to get them to participate in church functions, and they looked for donations, and stuff like that. I was in parliament [from] '75 to '80. I was having a tough time trying to get in. And when I got in, I easily lost my seat, because of the things that I'm trying to explain. I [went] in again [because] I saw that people are starting to look to business-people, and starting to rely on them heavily. (Uata 1993.)

Tonga's Minister for Labour, Commerce, Industries and Tourism agreed, noting that such church-inspired disapproval of money-making still lingers: 'Leave it to the Jews to make the money, not us: that mentality still permeates' (Fakafanua 1993). Uata noted that 'even the government didn't really like us before, . . . but now government is starting to see that business people are driving the front wheel of the economy of the country' (Uata 1993):

So they start to make policies to [get] business and the private sector moving and taking over the things that the government is still operating. Of course they are still trying to protect the businesses operated by government, but as time goes by [and] they can't make profits, they start to listen to the advice from [people] educated overseas: "You are not designed to run a business; let the private sector run it." So they slowly . . . give out business. . . . And they know that the people start to understand the process. (*Ibid.*)

During such a transitional phase, people who hold to old attitudes are liable to suffer:

[It's okay] if we go into a really money-oriented kind of system, as long as everybody's aware of that. Because if [they aren't], then somebody's going to take advantage of everybody else. There's always a dumb guy who doesn't know it and sticks to his traditional ways, and he gets ripped off all the time by other guys who don't care about him. (Fonua 1993.)

And, as a consequence, there are expressions of caution — expressions rooted in a respect for tradition:

There's nothing wrong with money, but we have to be sensible about it, not to get carried away with it and forget to love and to respect our people. . . . Because it's a new thing, we could easily slip away with it, and forget everything else. . . . It can happen. But I think fortunately because we're from a poor country, [that] itself helps make it impossible for us to completely [do that]. But then [it] could work the other way — because we are so poor it will probably make it more possible [to] think of only the dollar and nothing else. But then everything else seems to be working out. Tonga being a Christian country in itself helps with that area; it makes people so self-conscious. And we still very much have our family ties. (Fonua 1993.)

A similar attitude of caution rooted in tradition, combined with a recognition of the inevitability of change, had been observed in Fiji by Simione Durutalo:

For some Fijians the revival of traditional culture is seen as a sort of refuge . . . from modern economic forces, competition from other races, particularly the Indo-Fijians. It's always expressed in a sort of fatalistic way by the Fijians: "Well, if we let open competition come, we'll always lose out to the Indians, unless . . . we use our culture or the power of the government or the military to give us some [advantage]. Otherwise it's open competition, [which] these Indian guys are quite used to; that's why they will beat us hands down." So it's clearly seen as a refuge and a [way] of softening the impact of the modern world on them; as a shield under which they can take their time to progress. . . . This is the way they see the so-called positive discrimination in their favour; . . . the paramountcy of

Fijians, and so on. And there's an increasing awareness that this can only work for a certain short period of time. (Durutalo 1993a.)<sup>58</sup>

Such attitudes help explain the widespread Fijian support for a government which on the one hand is considered traditionalist and on the other aggressively promotes Fijian entry into business — a situation which would otherwise have to be considered paradoxical. The post-coup governments have, one might say, consciously or unconsciously kept subliminal the implications of a thoroughly capitalistic Fijian society for traditional leadership, although some Fijians I spoke with had not:

We've got to go into commerce, and [there are] all these conflicting forces. We have to [ask] whether it's better to encourage the most able and successful Fijians in commerce and so on. How will that affect the chiefly system? Maybe we should look at a new type of chief: people who are the most successful, . . . instead of following the succession principle. . . . We may have to do that. Rabuka is a very good example. Rabuka is not a chief; he's treated as a chief now. He's come to power through Western coup-style ideas, from the military. He's set an example. (Dakuvula 1993.)

What has been the government's aim in Fiji? One government-aligned figure (although not himself a member of it), the President of the Senate, Ratu Tu'uakitau Cokanauto, saw the government's role not as one of pushing every Fijian into business but of showing them what can be done:

It's very hard to just take someone who knows nothing about business, and give them money and say, "Go out and make money." It's like a fish out of water. He feels totally lost. You've got to do a progressive programme . . . to make the Fijian aware that he can also become commercially successful; he can contribute to his economic well-being through commercial and industrial pursuits. This can be done through an educational business programme. . . . You really can't force it down their throat, and I don't think any amount of legislation can guarantee Fijian success in business. It's a matter of the Fijian, in combination with legislation and the availability of finance, having the desire to go into commerce, and [knowing that] there are things which you are used to as a Fijian which unfortunately you can't carry into commerce. (Cokaunoto 1993.)

Tonga's Minister for Commerce described a similarly gradualist approach:

We change very slowly, and we do it our way, and we choose how we want it done. This is how the government's worked. We don't suddenly turn around and say, "This is a good idea." Making Tonga more commercial, and making Tongans work a lot more actively, and becoming more entrepreneurial rather than more capitalist if we can help it, is going to take time, and we're still working towards it. (Fakafanua 1993.)

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<sup>58</sup>Durutalo illustrated this by example:

I was just talking to somebody on the bus on exactly this subject, and he happened to say, "The way I see it is we can't ever beat these guys; we've got to use the government or something like force, particularly for this generation who are not educated; and then at the same time we have to educate our kids . . . [so that they will] be able to stand on their own and meet the oncoming competition, both [from] the modern world and from other races." (Durutalo 1993a.)

In an echo of Dakuvula's comments that Rabuka was 'setting an example', Fakafanua too was pleased that traditional leaders were showing the way:

I'm really happy that nobles and the royal family get into business and make money . . . because they have to show the Tongans that making money's not dirty. . . . You expect them to be out front, to work hard, because everyone else looks up and says, "That's how we should be." (*Ibid.*)<sup>59</sup>

In Fiji, however, critics complain that government is 'showing the way' not for grassroots Fijians but for those who need the least encouragement or financial support — i.e., those who have already enjoyed some success:

There are a number of schemes to promote the . . . situation of the Fijian community in business, particularly soft loans and tax concessions. But by and large there's been a complaint that the ordinary Fijians do not benefit from this. It's largely politicians and senior Fijian civil servants and other . . . people with influence and power who are able to take advantage of these various schemes. Down the line the ordinary Fijians find that they're still having to comply with the normal business requirements if they want to obtain loans, et cetera. The other thing is that they're going about just buying out shares in existing companies, paying exorbitant prices for these shares. They have bought into Carpenter's, into the brewery, into the salmon factory and all this sort of thing. But this is on an institutional basis — they create companies [like] Fijian Holdings, and these companies buy. So it's not really getting the rank-and-file Fijians into business as shopkeepers or as hairdressers or as whatever you want. (Chaudhry 1993.)<sup>60</sup>

The traditionalists think they are smart! [They] could really [have] organised their case much better than they have done so far. . . . The kinds of business that they're pushing Fijians into aren't the kinds of business that they are [trained for] by their learning organisations, and very often they do not succeed. They want Fijians to fish, to drive taxis — all these things that are not really very productive. . . . The bulk of the money going to Fijian business really [is] taken over by the educated Fijians, who are public servants. You just have to look at the . . . top public servants who are directors of Fijian Holdings, who are buying . . . shares for themselves and their families, borrowing money through soft loans from the Fiji Development Bank, including the Director of the Fiji Development Bank, Mr Qarase.<sup>61</sup> . . . So the beneficiaries of this programme are invariably the educated Fijians, indigenous Fijians who are able to exploit these opportunities. These opportunities are not known to the ordinary Fijians. Sure enough,

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<sup>59</sup>Not all Tongans have been pleased with the thought of the royal family increasing its wealth through business ventures. The revelation in early 1995 that Princess Pilolevu personally stood to make US\$25 million from a scheme to license Tonga's satellite slots attracted public criticism (as well as requests from some for financial help from the Princess). The Princess has denied making that much money, but has not disclosed her earnings from the venture. (*The Australian*, 7 March 1995, p. 11; *Matangi Tonga*, January-March 1995, pp. 19-21.)

<sup>60</sup>Fijian Holdings Ltd. was created by the Council of Chiefs in 1984; see *Islands Business*, December 1984, p. 47, and further discussion here which follows shortly. On its economic performance in recent years, see Cole (1993: 50-51).

<sup>61</sup>These accusations were aired by Senator Manu Korovulavula in May 1993, prompting the Senate to pass a motion calling for an inquiry into Fijian Holdings Ltd. The Minister for Fijian Affairs, Ratu Timoci Vesikula, called for Qarase's resignation from the company's board, but soon (and without explanation) backed down. (*The Fiji Times*, 22 May 1993, p. 1.)

there's a lot of money being used, but if you look at [its] allocation, these little people [are missing out]. (Baba 1993.)

There are critics among the ambitious educated Fijians, also:

The thing is that the Fijians still [get] the small cookies; the crumbs that fall off the table. . . . We have a lot of Fijians [out there], but bloody hell, look at them: they're all driving taxis, they're running small shops, corner shops, village shops. That's not business. . . . We want the big bickies, and we don't seem to get that. Our problem is that problem of security: the bank wants security, we don't have security; the bank wants financial input, we don't have that. So it's a vicious circle. We have a Fiji Development Bank that's open for Fijians; they [say], "Come in, we'll look at your proposal." . . . [It's] not as easy as its pamphlets and brochures say. Very difficult to get loans from them. (Anonymous 1993.)<sup>62</sup>

As FDB managing director Qarase describes, the government pushes on with its policy, driven by a widespread perception that Fijians are economically disadvantaged, while at the same time (as Qarase notes) no study has been done to give that perception substance:

The Bank [has] been one of the main agencies for promoting the government initiative. We have special loan facilities here; we can take equity in certain projects and hold them for Fijians later on. So we are playing a very active role in implementing government policy. . . . Particularly since 1987, more specifically since 1989 when there were new incentive policies that were introduced (and mainly implemented through this bank), we have seen quite a significant upsurge in Fijians in business. Fijians are buying into existing businesses, setting [up] new ones; so the ownership of the corporate sector or private sector — Fijians are getting a fairly significant proportion of that. No one has done a study to measure the gap that exists; it would be quite an interesting exercise if that was done now, to just take stock and see where the Fijians are in relation to the other communities. . . . But that exercise has never been done. It's a fairly wild guess at the moment on the sort of proportion of the private sector which is [down] to Fijians. (Qarase 1993.)

And this policy is supported right up to the pinnacle of the traditional hierarchy. The Council of Chiefs orchestrated the creation of the Fijian community's big business venture, Fijian Holdings:

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<sup>62</sup>This Fijian journalist believed that post-coup governments had missed their opportunity to get Fijians into business:

This thing about supporting Fijians in business is a load of bull. . . . They did the coup in '87, and they have gone back quite a lot on that. . . . They should have gone the whole hog and done it completely. By going back and forth like this you're just prolonging the agony for everybody. . . . What they should have done in '87 [was], if they wanted to convert all businesses into Fijian [businesses], do it — . . . bearing in mind that [humans] all have short memories; a few years time down the track they'll forget. Look at Uganda: it's certainly not in the world's [spotlight]; . . . they had done worse things than Fiji — terrible things. Because in a way, this world is a magic world. We don't wallow in things; . . . we have to live with each other. There's an international society that we have to fit into. Australia [and] New Zealand [will not ignore Fiji] for the rest of their lives — they can't. So what they should have done is do it early. The aim of the coup was to give Fijians political domination and economic; I thought it was more important to go forward in economic interests than political interests. (Anonymous 1993.)

The Council of Chiefs has endorsed and supported our message; . . . [there's] very strong support from them. In fact in one of the meetings some years back, the Council of Chiefs commissioned a committee to find out the reason for failure of Fijians in business. That was done, it was taken back to the Council, and on the basis of that there were suggestions to the government [for] some policy measures to try and assist them.

[Fijians] realised that we couldn't get into big business on our own. So what the Fijian community did — the Council of Chiefs initiated it — [was] we set up a large company, Fijian Holdings Limited, and we had some financial assistance from the government that enabled Fijian Holdings to acquire equities in some big organisations. . . . At this point it is probably the second largest commercial organisation in the country.

So we are really attacking the question at two levels: at the individual level, where they come in here and borrow at concessionary rates and set up their business; and at the macro level where we have set up this large corporation and that does the acquisition, and now Fijians are acquiring shares in that one. (*Ibid.*)

What is relevant here is not so much the success or failure of Fijian Holdings, but that it exists at all, and that it is being promoted by traditional leaders through the Council of Chiefs. It is a symbol of how deeply the desire for economic success has penetrated the Fijian psyche, and of how that desire will change Fijians' lives — for it is inevitable that the tradition of a capitalist (or entrepreneurial) Fijian society will be different from the tradition of a communal Fijian society.<sup>63</sup>

And what of Tonga? There, too, the message comes from the top that economic success is the answer to Tongans' woes:

Education was the thing in the past — that was our gold-field. Everyone pushed that. It's still the same now. . . . Tonga is simply one of the best-educated [countries in the Pacific] in terms of number of graduates. [Now] it's business that is the new frontier. . . . [It's being] pushed by government, and the world. There's more acceptance of the private sector, . . . and not only that, but moving away from the land, fishing, to a cash economy. . . . It's a common policy, to open up our markets and give incentives for development, lower taxes for companies. (Fukofuka 1993.)

The message comes not only from government but from the very peak of the traditional hierarchy. The King himself has become known for his grand schemes intended to make a fortune for the country — though again, not without drawing criticism:

He's hurt the country more economically than he has done anything good economically. . . . He's come up with the wildest ideas. His thing of burning old tyres from the United States to produce energy for Tonga. . . . We've got an airline right now that has made losses like you wouldn't

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<sup>63</sup>As Alan Ward has said, 'When pressed most indigenous peoples opt for a larger share of the economic action in preference to being very traditional and very poor' (Ward 1992: 93).



believe. He's got this dream . . . to buy MD-11s. He went to Spain on a trip [and] bought a Casa plane that we're still owing on; it's a useless plane — now it's in spare parts.

He's a good visionary; he would have made a great sheik, somewhere with [the money to] carry out all his dreams. And in that way I have respect for him; . . . he's a man with ideas. But boy, the execution of those things has hurt the country. We don't have the resources, and . . . the amounts of money that have been lost through all of those projects [are] just amazing. (Anonymous 1993.)<sup>64</sup>

The details, while revealing, are (as with Fiji) most interesting here in that they provide evidence that the money-making mentality has penetrated to the highest levels.<sup>65</sup> In Tonga, the time is coming when business success will be a major measure of one's importance in society, though at the moment it hangs in a fragile balance with respect for the traditional hierarchy:

We believe [that] those who work and have success will become the nobles in the future. Not take over [from] the nobles; but their importance with the public will be the same. People who [are] in business, or whoever helps the people, will be a step up [in] their importance to the people and the country. And it's already happening now. But by the same token, myself and other [business] people, we still respect the nobles. We [are] still going slowly

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<sup>64</sup>This Tongan critic's discussion of Royal Tongan Airlines is revealing:

When they started, there were photographs passed all over town, actual photographs [of the MacDonnell Douglas MD-11]. They were trying to inform people [that] this is the kind of plane we're going to purchase as part of the King's great ideas that will allow us to fly directly from Tonga to Tokyo.

That went on for a year; then the salesmen disappeared. Then all of a sudden a Spanish Casa plane [arrived], because the King's made a trip to Spain and said, "We'll start off with this one." And nobody could fly it, because the plane was totally outdated. There was a guy from Kiribati that could fly it, so they brought the guy over [and he] worked here for a year. We build up a *big* company, Royal Tongan Airlines, and all this time, money is going down the drain.

Finally this year the government make the decision . . . to close down the international services of Royal Tongan Airlines. That's after three years of losses. But we're going to continue it through seat sharing [with Air Pacific and Air New Zealand]. That's something that any new airline normally starts off with, and if they get better they go onto other arrangements. But no, because we are the Kingdom of Tonga we do things differently. . . . I can name things like that all over this country. And yet here we are . . . begging for [foreign] aid to help prop Tonga up. (Anonymous 1993.)

<sup>65</sup>Epeli Hau'ofa has, when speaking of the whole region (but, in making references to 'parts of Polynesia' with 'aristocratic rules and Christian church traditions', implicitly speaking about Tonga), told of the tendency of some island leaders to 'blame the poor for their own conditions':

They are said to be too culture bound to see things as they should be seen and to act accordingly. If they could only be less traditional and less indolent . . . they could easily raise their standards of living. I submit that this is a red herring. . . . The very sections in island communities which preach against adherence to what they think to be outmoded traditions, are the very groups that simultaneously try to force the dead weight of other traditions on the poor. . . . Increasingly the privileged and the poor observe different traditions, each adhering to those that serve their interest best. (Hau'ofa 1987: 11-12.)

with that, because we never say any bad things to them. If they appear in public together with people like myself, we talk nicely to them, we respect them. . . . If the noble appears, I will [pay] a little more attention to him, to respect him. [In that respect] business is not really affecting our living here in Tonga. (Uata 1993.)

While 'Akilisi Pohiva draws criticism from those who believe he acts prematurely in his campaign to modify the importance accorded to traditional leaders in Tonga's system of government, they would find it difficult to disprove his longer-term assessment of the trends within Tongan society:

Education . . . has become a vehicle for the commoners [in this process of change]. Money, business, competition, is another; . . . they are powerful forces. If you are a commoner but you really work hard, run your business well, you will catch up, nobody can stop you. Eventually you will get economic power, and once you get economic power you automatically become very powerful in politics. That's how things work in any capitalist country or democratic system. So this is where we are moving into now. People who are reluctant to change — I think they are fighting a lost battle. Tonga has become a part of the . . . international community, and nothing can stop that. (Pohiva 1993.)

Tongans and Fijians may have fought a battle with the concept of money in the past, but today that battle has been well and truly won, and money has emerged victorious. Pressures on the land which have affected the subsistence mentality, pressures from the international economy, pressures from individuals who desire the goods and services available in capitalist countries, pressures from tradition itself: at all levels of society, these pressures have shaped people's actions and pushed them into economic activity. And those activities themselves are shaping the new traditions which are evolving in Fiji and Tonga, traditions which have major implications for the political future of existing traditional leaders.<sup>66</sup>

Those leaders might be tempted to take refuge in the belief that the forces of education and money cannot destroy the heart of Fijian and Tongan tradition: the family, and all that stems from it. But the changes being seen within this most basic unit of society indicate that those forces, along with others like the media, will eventually reshape Fijian and Tongan tradition to a profound extent, in which case no position of traditional leadership will escape unaffected. The next chapter will address the effects of these forces of change on traditional family life.

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<sup>66</sup>As one academic has described such situations,

Where nationalism is associated . . . with a traditionalist revival of ancient values and ways of life, it may become an obstacle to economic development, especially by its opposition to a thoroughgoing rationalization of social life. Thus, although nationalist political leaders have powerful forces on their side they also confront serious difficulties arising from the conflict between traditionalists and modernists within their own ranks and in the society at large. (Bottomore 1993: 81.)

## Chapter Seven

### Further Signs of Change in Family and Society

*[There's no way you could properly] understand Tonga, particularly from the perspectives of politics or economics, . . . unless you get to the core of it, which is the family system. ('E. Fusitu'a 1993.)*

The two previous chapters have explored the major influences for change at work in contemporary Fiji and Tonga: education and money. But one must always keep in mind, when considering these influences, the main sites in which their effects are felt. As has been argued here, one such site is the individual's mind, over which the individual, in deciding how to act, has unilateral control. Another is the nation — the realm of national politics. But between these extremes there are many intermediate and intermediary groups: the province or the island group; the village; the family. At all of these levels, different effects of individuals' changes in behaviour will be seen — effects which accumulate at each level of society until their repercussions are felt in a major way throughout society as a whole.

This chapter starts by examining the fundamental social group, the family. Fijians and Tongans consider the family to be at the heart of their traditions, in which case the indicators of change in this institution are perhaps the most basic indicators of change in tradition. The scope is then widened in order to consider further signs of variation within Fijian and Tongan society, followed by some forces which have not yet been examined (such as travel, church, and media) which are influencing individuals, families, and hence society.

#### The Importance of Family

The importance of the family in relation to tradition was particularly impressed upon me by Tongans, which may in itself indicate a subtle distinction between Tonga and Fiji. The distinction is not in the relative importance of the family in imparting knowledge to individuals about how to behave: this role is crucial throughout the world, particularly in a child's formative years.<sup>1</sup> The distinction is, perhaps, in the knowledge being imparted: Tongan tradition may have been influenced by Western forces to a somewhat lesser degree than Fijian tradition (Fijians sometimes told me that Tonga was 'more traditional' than Fiji), and hence Tongans emphasise to a greater degree the role of the family — the

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<sup>1</sup>See Toren (1993), which may also be read in the light of discussions in Chapter Two about the nature of learning. See also Kavapalu (1991).

source of 'old' tradition (i.e., knowledge of non-Western ways) — over the role of the external influences which are shaping 'new' tradition.<sup>2</sup>

The role of family as the source of traditional values was recognised by people from both sides of politics. Uili Fukofuka of the Pro-Democracy Movement saw these values as coming 'from the family, reinforced in school':

[When] you grow up, you're told that the brothers have to [listen to] the sisters . . . to be a good member of the family. You're told the right way to behave in every situation. The Tongan etiquette is so elaborate. . . . So you get that every day when you grow up. [In] the schools, if you don't behave then they simply say, "You never grew up in the family; you must have grown up in the bush." (Fukofuka 1993.)

The most vocal exponent of the family-centred view of tradition in Tonga was Deputy Secretary to Cabinet 'Eseta Fusitu'a. 'The tradition that you see outside the household,' she stressed, 'is all given birth to in the household. That is its origin and that is its source.' ('E. Fusitu'a 1993.) As this was the central theme of her discussion of tradition, her comments deserve to be quoted at length:

Take the concept of authority, which you'll find in our society, and is translated into politics: trace that back and its source is in the concepts of authority in the individual and the extended families. . . . You have certain basic rules. Number one is that the father is the head of the family, the mother is the support. Number two: the older . . . have authority over the younger just by virtue of being the older . . . and they also have obligations to look after the younger. Conversely, the younger are taught that they must obey the older . . . and also they have the right to expect protection from the older. . . . This is your two-way relationship. . . . Your third family concept is that the sister . . . is more chiefly within the family; she has superior status over the brother.

So the concept of chiefly is born in the individual family. . . . When you take those three fundamental concepts which your parents teach you from the day you were born, and you mix those up according to your state in the family, male or female, whether you're father . . . or daughter number three, . . . so you are continuously ranked inside your family and in your extended family according to those three main concepts. So the Tongan concept of chiefly is not one that is derived from having a king, from having nobles; it's the other way round. It's derived from . . . a ranking within the family.

Then you combine, say, the families in the village. . . . The eldest male descended from the eldest male line is the chief of the village. . . . Then when you move out of individual villages and you have a combination of villages, say you have your clans, then the head of clan A is the eldest male descendent of the senior-most male line in that clan. Then you combine the clans to form the Kingdom of Tonga, and there you have the King who heads all the clans.

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<sup>2</sup>One must be cautious, however, in drawing too strong a conclusion of this kind from my interview sample. As people most involved in politics, they were drawn from the capital cities, and Suva is certainly more metropolitan than Nuku'alofa. Fijians living outside Suva — even in towns such as Nadi or Sigatoka, which are closer to Nuku'alofa in scale — may discuss 'non-Western' influences, such as family, to an extent more like that of my Tongan interviewees. I will discuss relative differences between city and country later in this chapter.

If you do not understand that line of kinship communication, if you do not understand the family concepts which are translated from the individual family to the village, to the clans and districts and to the kingdom, you won't understand what takes place. (E. Fusitu'a 1993.)<sup>3</sup>

The concept of hierarchy within families would certainly be familiar to many Westerners. One or two generations ago the picture of eldest over youngest and father over mother would have been an accurate description of the ranking within a Western family.<sup>4</sup> Today that hierarchy has broken down to a great degree — Western ideas about sex roles, for example, have changed dramatically in the last thirty years — but it is by no means eradicated: seniority within a family on the basis of age is a tradition with obvious foundations (the eldest were here first, and have more experience of life) which remain applicable and are far from being eroded.

But while traditional hierarchies within a family may have natural foundations such as these — a father will always be older than his daughter, and at least during her childhood this will give him considerable authority — the application of those hierarchical concepts to society as a whole is a different matter. The meaning when one talks of the eldest in a family is clear; but what does it mean to talk of the 'eldest (male) line' in a village? Can one family line be literally *older* than another? The answer is no. The sense intended is certainly one of seniority, but not seniority in terms of age; how could it be, when a chief is not always the oldest person in the village? Rather, that seniority within the social hierarchy has been established by the events of history — the jockeying for social position by different individuals down to the present day.

Tongans may consider their social hierarchy a reflection of their hierarchies within families, but it is not a precise reflection of those hierarchies, nor is it based on precisely

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<sup>3</sup>No doubt 'Eseta Fusitu'a, the government official chiefly responsible for liaising with the foreign media, has met many foreigners who do not trouble to consider Tongan politics in the light of Tongan concepts of family, and hence has good reason to wish to emphasise family's importance to visitors such as myself. But I could not help but feel somewhat defensive about the implication that Westerners 'would not understand' these matters, a view I encountered a few times:

My brother is growing squash; we have gone for three Saturdays in a row and helped them out for nothing. That's part of tradition. And you don't have that in Australia pretty much. Everybody's on their own. (Afeaki 1993.)

Perhaps my defensiveness comes from my personal background: I have a strong sense of family, and have done my share of helping out at my aunt's and uncle's place twenty minutes' drive from my parents' rural home where I lived until my early twenties. I have fostered links with many of my relatives beyond my immediate family of mother, father, and brother. Of course this is not the case for every Australian, and I would agree that Australia has less-closely-knit families, on the whole, than Tonga. But even that does not necessarily mean that Australians cannot understand what it is to be part of a large extended family. In younger generations, true, an understanding based on personal experience of such families must be becoming rarer; but older generations would still retain it, and as an idealised image the concept remains strong.

<sup>4</sup>The place of the sister over her brother is a more specifically Tongan feature, but one could even argue that it has echoes in pre-feminism Western customs of men's deference to women in public — giving up seats on buses, for example.

the same foundations. To say that 'the structure of Tonga is a family structure: the father, the children, the mother' (Fifita 1993) is therefore misleading.<sup>5</sup> It implies that Tongan society is structured as it is for the same basic reasons as families are structured as they are; that the King is the head of Tonga for the same reasons that the father is head of the Tongan family. While the King is head of the *royal family* for those reasons, the royal family's vaunted position in Tonga has different foundations.

It may seem pedantic to pursue so vigorously what may be considered, after all, only metaphor. But when Tongans speak of themselves as one big extended family, as some would to me, the temptation for them to think of the King as the 'natural' head of that family must be strong. In such an environment the acceptance of certain behaviours in the family context becomes the justification for such behaviour in wider society, to the distress of some:

We have a social structure here in which authority is normally not questioned. Children don't question their fathers, they just do it. . . . In the West, too, sometimes, the kid says, "Dad, why?" and Dad says, "Because I say so." What are you saying? Does that mean just because I'm a father, therefore my word carries [force]? And it's not necessarily [that] the kid is rebelling; he's just wanting to understand. It's the same attitude here; it's part of our culture. (K. Moala 1993.)

The idea that there is some strong link between hierarchy in family and hierarchy in society — that is, that the former can exist only in the company of the latter — is unjustified. Many Western societies have moved over time from a situation of strong social hierarchy to a more egalitarian arrangement, but those changes have not been matched at every step of the way by changes of an equivalent magnitude in family hierarchy. The remarkably egalitarian Australia of the 1950s was composed of extended families ranked by age and sex to a much greater degree than is seen in Australia today. That Western countries now often have loosely-structured families and weak social

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<sup>5</sup>Fifita stressed the reciprocal nature of hierarchy (on which point, see also Toren (1994) on Fiji):

We are hierarchically structured; that is [the] structure [of our] political system. [The] educated don't want it. . . . But to me, that is [a] very appropriate structure for mankind. . . . It needs a father to look after someone underneath.

The Bible [tells] the children to listen to their mother and respect their father. But you see, there's equality there. . . . The father should be a servant to the children, and the children should love their father, and they know that very nicely in a place like Tonga where it is poor. (Fifita 1993.)

Others made even stronger claims:

The population is so small that this is a little family. The King is not so much the head of state [as] a father figure of this country. . . . The whole system hangs on him; the structure hangs on him. Drag the King out, the whole structure collapses. Everything collapses, take it from me. And it would take another century to put it together. There'll be chaos. All the families, all the traditions, the customs, hang on that. (Fusitu'a 1993.)

hierarchies should not be taken to mean that the only alternative is strong hierarchy on all fronts.

Does this also mean that loose family structures can coexist with strong social hierarchy? That is a question I cannot answer, although sociologists may be able to provide valuable insights. But it is not the most important question, I believe, for Tonga or Fiji, because the forces which are attacking social hierarchy there are eroding family hierarchy also. And in a society where social hierarchy is considered to be based on family hierarchy, the realisation that family hierarchy is breaking down is bound to cause some to reassess the reasons for maintaining the existing social hierarchy.

### **Change in the Family**

The evidence for familial change comes from all sections of Tongan society:

[One] thing, to me, that is very sad [is that] it seems to me now that people's relatives — there's no feeling between them. There's a gap that has emerged. Before we had a better system, [the] extended family. Our cousins [were] our sisters and brothers. They [would] come here, stay for so many [days]. . . . [Now] we can just drive up and down, say hello, and then [move] on. (Fielakepa 1993.)

Certainly there's a lot more broken families than, say, five years ago; and much more [than], say, fifteen years [ago]. . . . And with that you can certainly say that there [are] weakening family ties already. . . . Something [the Catholic Church] didn't do before, but we have done in the last seven years, [is] St. Vincent de Paul. Because we began to see . . . some families with the mother [as] head of the show, with the husband overseas, and after a while no more help coming in. There may be extended family, [but] they're not doing very much to help. Or sometimes elderly people . . . are left here and not looked after properly [because their children] have gone overseas. And on top of that, there's people from the outer islands coming here [who] don't have that extended family system that they have in their own islands. . . . In that sense . . . the extended family is certainly waning. There are things missing. But there are also things that keep the extended family system alive: funerals; weddings. (Finau 1993a.)

The basic tenets — some of the extended family system, marriage, funerals, brother-sister relationship, father-mother relationship — are still pretty strong. But at the same time, compared to what it was even twenty years ago, there have been a lot of changes in terms of the level of the relationship: . . . what you do, and the way you feel, and the type of things that come up in that relationship — it's gone down in terms not of value, but in terms of the volume of the relationship, and gifts, and things of that type, and even emotional ties. . . . We in Tonga, because we were so much involved in it I guess, don't really realise that we're dealing with changes. . . . One could say that we still value and honour the older generation and our parents. But at the same time we would also see in actual relationship issues that there have been changes, and that . . . in certain circumstances lots of the young people now don't adhere to it, [although] they will tell you that they are. (Kavaliku 1993.)

We have seen a lot of fragmentation within the family set-up. [For example], the compartmentalisation of compounds in villages. You see fences all over

the place. That's a very visible manifestation of the fragmentation within the family, because in the old days, you had a household which consisted of many generations, . . . and within that particular compound, you would have houses where the young men would be kept, young women and so on. There were obligations, but they were general obligations, for women of a certain age group, for men of a certain age group. There were group responsibilities, but there were no specific individual responsibilities. Now with that current fragmentation you break down that particular set-up, partly because of the economic system that we now have, partly as a result [of] adoption of the various institutions that we have had, such as the land tenure system. We are now fragmenting the family so that we are increasingly moving towards a purely nuclear family with nuclear family obligations, so we only activate the extended family for specific things such as funerals, birthdays — some of the celebrations involving the life-cycle. (Taufe'ulungaki 1993.)

What is promoting this move towards nuclear families? One major influence is economics:

There is a great deal of competition among individuals of [what] used to be the extended family in the old days, both for individual benefits and for immediate family benefits. Instead of benefitting the whole group from our group labour, we now want to develop our own individual things because the individual is becoming far more important today than the group. You can't keep earning money and providing it at this rate to everybody. What you actually need, let's say to send your son overseas or to send him to school, [is] to earn the money, and to save it in order to buy that particular item, whatever it is that you desire. (Taufe'ulungaki 1993.)<sup>6</sup>

'Akilisi Pohiva echoed this message (and note the similar link made with education):

While we appreciate our cooperation, while we still appreciate our extended family, and all of these kinship ties, we cannot run away from the fact that we have a nuclear family to support. That was not the case before. We are becoming more individualistic now than in the past. Why? Because of those very powerful Western elements. Education. You cannot educate your children if you still live together under a collective or extended family. You can only do that if you move away from the extended family and [establish] your nuclear family, father and mother and children. . . . In the extended family, very few people work. They get money, but they can't afford to look after everybody and give them the same chance. That doesn't happen. If they want their children to be promoted in the new structure, to be more effective in this kind of competition, they've got to allocate most of their resources to the education of their children. (Pohiva 1993.)

Fijians have perhaps on the whole travelled somewhat further along this path. One Fiji government minister saw the need for greater individualism almost as imperative:

We are not an individualistic society like Indians. We work communally all the time. That to me is a drawback, but what can you do about it? Because that is tradition. . . . But we have to learn [that] if one [is] to be successful in this world then one [has] to be independent. You will find that the

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<sup>6</sup>See also Hau'ofa (1978) and Morton (1987), both of which also relate to discussions in the previous chapter.



independent family always gets much more than one who relies on community. . . . I've reached the top by being independent. . . . I have an independent family, and they've been [told by others that] I was too independent. But I go back to the village, and I show them that this is what we have to do to be successful. That's all there is to it. There's no two ways about it. (Matatolu 1993.)

Other voices in the SVT, however, questioned government programmes which were promoting greater independence among young people:

When I was young, I was used to being told what to do. . . . Now, in the village for example, father and grandfather, son and grandson are voting together: elders can be outvoted by young people. The government has a Ministry of Youth. [Through] youth programmes in villages, the government, consciously or unconsciously, is developing young people. They become a formidable task-force. . . . The young person is earning some income from farming et cetera. He is finding he is doing much better than his forefathers. If the programme is successful, it can drive a wedge between young and old in the village. That is one of the dangers. It is a good thing that we are developing young people, but at the same time we are upsetting the traditional system. It is a different thing for young in urban areas. They are merged into their surroundings, not driving a wedge between themselves and their elders. Out in the village, this will be the crucial issue in the 1990s and beyond: the upsurge in young people being independent, not being told what to do by elders. . . . In doing that the government is going to upset the leadership role of elders and chiefs in the village, which is really the basic unit in this country. (Wainiqolo 1993.)

Partly as a result of this trend towards greater independence within families, changes have been observed — even at the upper levels of the social hierarchy — in the family's effectiveness as a conduit for past traditions. I heard this in Tonga from Princess Siu'ilikutapu:

We're not doing our duty as parents, the way our parents did to us. . . . The '50s generation like mine — we're too busy with other things. [We think,] "Leave tradition to the ceremonial days," especially dance. That's all right I guess, because we have those priorities now; but it's a loss of our culture.

My generation . . . used to just obey our parents . . . without question. Now my children are questioning. I can't remember questioning my parents. . . . But I find that I have to explain to my sons [why they should follow certain traditions]. . . . I didn't do it beforehand when they were eight or ten; I got away on just saying, "It's tradition." (Siu'ilikutapu 1993.)

A similar observation about change — about changes in the types of behaviour permitted within the family — was made by Ratu Mara in Fiji:

Whether my grandfather would recognise what we now call tradition and custom, I don't know. I lived with my grandfather until I was thirteen, when he died, and I . . . am sure that he would not approve. . . . I have my doubts that he would recognise [today's Fijian custom] as such. I'm blessed with a life [long enough] to see changes, and as I say [they're] dramatic. I never used to be able to eat with my father, and my father never used to eat with my grandfather. I can't have my meal without any of my children

[getting a stool and saying], "What's the matter with you? You haven't got enough for me." But I never used to do that.

Ratu Sukuna . . . was one of the highest chiefs living at the time of my grandfather; people approached him as a god. If by chance someone touched part of his clothing, or [consumed] leftovers from his food and was told [afterwards], "That was part of the chief's," he would get sick; this part of the body would swell. Because they believed that.

I come in at times and I get annoyed that my children have eaten something I want. Times have changed. When I say that my father wouldn't eat in the same place as my grandfather, he would also not eat before my grandfather [had]. Similarly [with] me. My father used to sit at night with a bottle of rum until about ten o'clock, and we [would] all sit where we were until eleven o'clock. (Mara 1993.)

When I asked Mara what he thought had caused these changes, his answer was a familiar one — the pressures of a nine-to-five job:

If I [was] to become a good civil servant then I couldn't afford to be tied down with some traditions. . . . I couldn't afford to sit waiting for my father; fortunately for me I didn't stay with him after I came back to [Fiji to] work — I was away. But when he came to my house, I didn't eat at home, because the whole place was for him. I [went elsewhere]. (Mara 1993.)

Perhaps the most telling indicator of significant change within the Tongan family was the change which had been seen in the brother-sister relationship — a feature considered most 'typically Tongan', and a favourite subject of anthropological study:

That I think is also gradually dying out. It's still practised, but it's not as practised as it was many years ago. Some families are still trying to give respect to their tradition — the sister's children, or the sister, has priority over the [others]. Of course we have these laws now [where sisters would have a claim traditionally, but not under the law]. So again that has to be . . . not too demanding. There's a limit to everything. . . . Maybe the practice of it is changing, but the spirit of it is changing to a lesser scale. It's practised by fewer people, but it's still practised. Also the extent of the goods and services which are involved: . . . the sister and her children are less demanding. (Tapa 1993.)

[We] still have it. But . . . only through the immediate family. It's not going as far as before, to a second class sister. (Fielakepa 1993.)

[In] the old traditions of Tongan homes, the relationship between brother and sister [was] very strict. . . . That respect concept [is still] there, but it doesn't have to be like in the old way where . . . the brother's not allowed in the house if the sister's there. . . . The principle is there, you still have to respect your sister, but it doesn't mean you have to run away every time you see your sister. . . . The mode will change, but the principle will remain. (Fonua 1993.)

'The mode will change, but the principle will remain': I heard these sentiments often when the subject of family was discussed:

We have changed in many ways materially; out of all recognition. If our eighteenth century ancestors were to materialise today, they would probably die of shock. But I think our psychology hasn't changed very much. One of

the things I think the pro-democracy group didn't bargain for is the strength of this residual feeling, emotion, that people have for their blood-ties and your obligations within that system. (Taufe'ulungaki 1993.)

Without wishing to appear overly pessimistic, I must sound a note of scepticism here. Western societies are replete with examples of traditions, cultural practices, and social structures where (so we like to believe) 'the mode has changed, but the principle has remained the same'. It is hard to see how such statements are much more than wishful thinking. A change in mode is a change; one may still value — perhaps even idealise — the principle behind the old mode, but if one does not act upon it that principle is effectively dead — or has, at least, come to signify something completely different (i.e., it has become purely symbolic).

Many of the principles underlying ways of life in centuries past have died in this way. Thanks to written records, we may still know about these practices — we may even consider them 'quintessentially' Australian, English, or Fijian — but we no longer live them, and they tell us little about how life is lived today.<sup>7</sup> Their status is the same as that of Latin. We know a great deal about Latin, about its vocabulary and grammar, and as the root of many European languages it remains highly significant and symbolic; but a knowledge of Latin alone would not enable us to speak with most Europeans today.

The old Tongan brother-sister relationship may not have died yet, but for it to have moved from a position of extreme taboos (such as their not being allowed in the same house) to one of simply 'respect' is a *major* change, and to say that the 'principle remains' may blind one to the wider implications of that change. The same applies to any such practice, in any country. We in the West may still acknowledge the principle of respecting our elders, but what good does that do our elderly relatives if we bundle them into retirement homes against their will?

Nevertheless, some Tongans take solace from this persistent family spirit. 'Eseta Fusitu'a was optimistic that Tongans would restrengthen their family ties once they fully realised the disadvantages of an independent existence:

Some are feeling the discomforts, and some are feeling the human toll of not having as much family as you used to have before, for when you fall ill, for when you need a baby-sitter for your children, for when you have a problem in your life. All of those were borne by family before. Now we're beginning to feel the beginning of the absence of that, and we're coming face-to-face with the end of the line, when you sever the human ties which your Tongan family system gave you.

The most widespread view is that if you want to get ahead in business you must live and think more individualistically. . . . Those views tend to reflect a rather immature adoption of the *palangi* views of how to get ahead. . . . Development was not part of our way of life. The *palangis* taught us to use this word "development", and they gave us the content of what development is. . . . We've swallowed that for the last two decades.

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<sup>7</sup>On this matter, see a footnote in Chapter Five.

Now I think we are beginning to . . . mature in our thinking of what constitutes development, only because we have begun to experience the consequences of the first phase of development. We have begun to see how families are falling apart. We have begun to see the expenses of increasing the size of the police force to cope with the consequences of the falling apart of social sanctions. We have begun to experience the human traumas from divided families where the father has had to go and work in New Zealand to earn some money to send it back to his wife and children. We have gone through nearly two decades of that. We have the severe human costs. So our total acceptance of individualism as the means to getting ahead [has] been shaken. And to me it's a good sign. I've long waited to see Tonga waking up to that. (E. Fusitu'a 1993.)

Against this, one must note that no Western society, so far, has turned back from individualism; despite its costs, individualism has brought benefits to many people — the very kinds of benefits which Tongans and Fijians are pursuing. The costs may one day be thought to outweigh those benefits, but few in the West would predict the imminent return of the close-knit extended family. One should exercise caution in predicting the same for a Tonga which has only just started down the individualistic path.

### Women in Politics

One factor which 'Eseta Fusitu'a considered would refocus attention on the family was the increasing role played in politics by women. 'As women's participation in decision-making [increases],' she said, 'one of the by-products of that is the insistence that the family be kept intact,' although she conceded that 'as yet, women don't have a strong voice in politics' (E. Fusitu'a 1993).

This lack of a strong female political voice caused me some concern when I was interviewing Tongans and Fijians. I was selecting whom to approach to interview on the basis of their positions, and most of the relevant positions were filled by men. Although this in itself says something significant about politics in these countries, I was concerned that my picture of Fijian and Tongan opinions about tradition would be unbalanced as a result. (Fortunately I interviewed enough women to provide some balance.)

This prompts important questions. Are the political difficulties women face, and their approach to politics, different from men's? I assume this to be true, although women in politics would usually, when I asked them about such matters, reply that they considered themselves Fijians or Tongans first and women second. Any study which sought to examine these issues in detail would need to be considerably more focussed on them.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>It would also, I suggest, need to be conducted by a woman. I am sure that there are matters which Fijian and Tongan women would discuss more freely with another woman than with a man, just as there would be anywhere. This would be especially true in an interview, which while not as formal as a public speech is far from being an informal chat.

A related question is why there are so few women involved in politics. Relevant here is another comment by 'Eseta Fusitu'a:

In politics . . . our voice is very weak. But elsewhere, in the family, very strong, in the churches, very strong, in the villages, very strong. ('E. Fusitu'a 1993.)

The implication is that, for Tongans, family is seen as women's 'realm', while politics is not. On a later occasion I discussed some of the implications of this view with 'Eseta Fusitu'a.<sup>9</sup> She said that Tongans indeed thought this way, and that this thinking stemmed from the past, when men and women had separate and clearly-defined realms of influence within society. This, she said, explained women's dissatisfaction with the current conduct of politics in Tonga; the political realm, women feel, is intruding into their realm, that of family.<sup>10</sup>

These views may be earnestly held by women, but they could cause problems for them should they remain detached from politics. While the rule of men in the past may well have been restricted to certain realms, modern governments in both Tonga and Fiji are potentially universal in their reach (within their geographical jurisdiction). They make laws which affect women as much as men — laws which may intrude, intentionally or unintentionally, into what was once (and may still be considered) women's realm. Men cannot, even with the best will (which might not always be present), hope to understand the needs of women in every situation.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>That occasion was a workshop discussion at the January 1995 Tongan History Association conference on 'Linking our Sea of Islands: Fiji, Samoa, and Tonga' held at Auckland University. 'Eseta Fusitu'a attended this conference; comments made here about our discussions and her remarks are based on notes made at the conference.

<sup>10</sup>She noted a 1994 petition which had been presented to parliament by women who felt that one parliamentarian was setting a bad example for Tongan children:

On the last day of the 1994 session in November . . . a petition by more than 400 women was presented to the House. . . . The piqued women petitioners were seeking action to be taken against 'Akilisi Pohiva, because they did not like him calling the King of Tonga a dictator in an interview he had made with a US newspaper. (*Matangi Tonga*, October-December 1994, p. 41.)

<sup>11</sup>Signs sometimes appear which indicate that such good-will is not always present. In 1995 a Fijian Senator, Ratu Talemo Ratakele, outraged many women when he

told parliament's upper house [that] articles in the Fiji Times [on women's rights] were an invasion of the men's world. The articles angered men, who would rape "just to get back at the columnist", he said. "Those kinds of thoughts also cross my mind, but I control it," he said. (*The Australian*, 1 May 1995, p. 7.)

See also Niumeitolu (1993: 75-76) on the unenviable position of Tongan women during their first years of marriage.

A study of the relative status of women and men in Fiji and Tonga, and how any attendant problems could be overcome, is beyond this dissertation's scope.<sup>12</sup> But it seems clear that in order to protect their interests Tongan and Fijian women must become more involved in politics proper.<sup>13</sup> There are hopeful signs that this could happen: 'Eseta Fusitu'a reported that girls were performing significantly better than boys in Tongan high schools, and thought that they would inevitably play a greater role in the future.<sup>14</sup> The effects this will have on politics, should it prove true, remain to be seen.

### Differences Between City and Country

Looking from the family to the village and beyond, one might expect rural areas to follow older traditions more faithfully (or to be 'more traditional') than urban areas, since they are comparatively freer of foreign and modern influences.<sup>15</sup> This indeed appeared to be true.

In Tonga the distinction between urban and rural areas is less pronounced than in Fiji; in Tongatapu, I was told (and personally observed), there is 'very little difference' between Nuku'alofa and the country areas (none of which are a great distance from the capital, the island being small) (Ketui'ionetoa 1993).<sup>16</sup> The other island groups, particularly the outermost, are a different matter; there is 'quite a marked change in them':

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<sup>12</sup>Notable for her work on Pacific women is Caroline Ralston (1992; 1993), who pointedly argues that 'as long as it is believed widely that Pacific women played subordinate, domestic roles in precontact times, any present-day call for a return to traditional ways and values limits the roles women can "legitimately" demand to play' (Ralston 1992: 168) — although I believe that the flexible concept of tradition held by Fijians and Tongans provides some cause for optimism (even if only some). See also Emberson-Bain (1994); Gailey (1987); Lateef (1990); Preston and Wormald (1987: 53); Tongamoā (1988).

<sup>13</sup>Princess Siu'ilikutapu in Tonga espoused a similar view:

We have one woman member of parliament. I was the first one — '75 to '77 — and then Papiloa came after me for one term. And there was a long silence, and now we have 'Ofa Fusitu'a. . . . I've heard quite a few women talk about politics, and I find myself saying . . . they should get in as a ticket that is relevant to the women. Don't go in trying to solve our bad roads and things; leave that to the men. Just stick with issues that [matter] to them, because there are more women in Tonga. (Siu'ilikutapu 1993.)

<sup>14</sup>Sir Len Usher noted that the influence of women in Fiji politics should not be underestimated:

Don't overlook the women; in some ways, among Fijian people it's the women who are showing the greatest amount of leadership. [It's] not always acknowledged, and not always shown in appointments or as positions, but the influence is there. (Usher 1993.)

<sup>15</sup>One should, however, keep in mind the comments of Ratu Mara quoted in the previous chapter; urban Fijians are often better able to afford to perform certain traditional ceremonies, and hence are more 'traditional' in that way.

<sup>16</sup>USP professor in sociology Epeli Hau'ofa noted:

They still stick to the old customs. [When the King visits the islands,] dancing is performed from the morning. The purpose of this traditional dance is to wake up His Majesty. And in the evening there's a different form of dancing or singing, the purpose of which is to bring His Majesty sleep; . . . verry soft music. . . . Here, you can see dancing only on special occasions. But in the islands, it's a daily event. People come to visit his majesty, [to] pay their respects. (Ketui'ionetoa 1993.)<sup>17</sup>

Princess Siu'ilikutapu had observed the great differences between Tongan ways of life on a recent official visit to the northernmost outliers, the Niuas:

They don't have so much as an electric stove, the very basics that we take for granted here in Nuku'alofa. Very simple life. They're very concerned just about nature, and the ship that should come and the pay that comes in; the last pay was in November last year.

Here in Nuku'alofa, they're talking about what's in the paper. . . . More modern. Not really concerned about the weather, because they stay indoors anyway. More concerned about . . . increases in the electricity rates; very much like the Tongan women that I'm involved with . . . in Auckland. (Siu'ilikutapu 1993.)

These differences have visible consequences in parliament:

[The] small islands . . . have very vociferous representatives bringing [their problems] up, whereas in Nuku'alofa there are more opportunities. This lack of cash income is not very apparent [in Nuku'alofa] because there's a law which allows [people to ask for money/credit] at the store provided that they do it peacefully; you cannot do that [in] the two Niuas when others don't have it. The concentration of population and wealth and jobs is on this island. (Tapa 1993.)

One feature of the capital is that many people living there have come from elsewhere in Tonga, and in moving have broken their bonds to a particular chief:

It's more relaxed in Nuku'alofa than you will find in the village. This doesn't mean that it's so rigid in the village situation, but here you don't feel that you are tied down to that chief or that chief. Say I come in from a village in the Western side of the island, then live in Nuku'alofa itself; I don't feel that I am

There's no real rural areas on Tongatapu, because the whole place is interlinked with Nuku'alofa, . . . but the villages in Tongatapu were all . . . for the Pro-Democracy Movement, and they were the ones that were most closely associated with the biggest chiefs. The King now lives on the Southern side, there's a big village there — they voted for the Pro-Democracy Movement. His brother's village, Tu'ipelehake's, also.

The two polling stations that they lost: one was a north part of Nuku'alofa, and one was Laki Niu's village. . . . They won handsomely everywhere else. So villagers voted more for the Pro-Democracy Movement than the people in Nuku'alofa, which is very interesting. One would expect the urban area to be more solid. (Hau'ofa 1993a.)

<sup>17</sup>Ketui'ionetoa said that in his experience the King would travel to the other islands about three or four times a year. An average trip would last two weeks:

One week to Vava'u, another week in Ha'apai. I'm sure His Majesty would like to go to the other islands more, but it costs a lot to travel, and that's why he limits his visits. (Ketui'ionetoa 1993.)

obligated to do what this particular chief [will ask]. He is the chief, as I reckon him, of another village; unlike your own village, where you have your chief, and you pay respect to him and accord him with the honours and privileges that that office has. (Taufa 1993.)

For many reasons, then, the outer islands (and to a lesser extent the rural areas of Tongatapu) are considered more traditional. Health Minister Sione Tapa extended this to a general observation about society:

The smaller the unit size-wise and population-wise, the more traditionally-minded and [determined] to preserve the Tongan tradition [it is]. An example: one of the Tongan ways of life has always been to share amongst relatives and friends. . . . The bigger the population and bigger the area, this Western tendency of nuclearisation of family is more marked. . . . Whereas in small islands, if you take the two Niuas, if they don't have money, they would still share their foods, so that there's no famine; they'd share their friendship, they'd share their time. . . . That's only one aspect, of course, of tradition — daily subsistence. The smaller the unit, [the more] they're preserving and carry that out. (Tapa 1993.)

Does this cause resistance in such areas to the PDM? While Pohiva recognised that Tongatapu was its power-base, with a 'very powerful foothold in Ha'apai' placing those islands next, he believed that it was only 'a matter of time' before its influence would be extended by a campaign to raise awareness:

One good thing about Tonga which makes our movement work more effectively is the fact that Tonga's a very small place, [with a] small population. It's not like New Zealand, Australia, [where] you've got to get yourself known by people, [via] TV, papers and radio. You can spend only three days to cover the whole of Tongatapu. Go from village to village and talk to people. (Pohiva 1993.)

In the other islands people were 'aware of what is happening' ('A. Havea 1993). One critic of the PDM even suggested that the more simple nature of life outside Nuku'alofa might be working in its favour:

The people out in the country and to a great extent in the outer islands are not as educated as people here in Nuku'alofa. Those that are uneducated don't think very much. All they listen [to is] what is being propagated. The great majority among the people in the outskirts of Tongatapu [simplistically accept] the Pro-Democracy Movement, because they don't know [better]. (Afeaki 1993.)

In Fiji urban/rural differences are more marked. Suva and Lautoka, the two largest cities, are far more identifiably urban than Nuku'alofa; the 1986 census identified approximately one third of Fijians as urban-dwellers. The rural areas, as in Tonga, are identified by Fijians themselves as the more traditional:

People who are living in the village seem to follow our customs very well, and their type of thinking is not as [advanced as that of] those people who are living in the urban areas. (Tonawai 1993.)



Traditional politics will continue to play its life in Fiji, because the greater percentage of our people live in the rural areas. They . . . [are] more attuned to traditional ways than are the majority of their Fijian counterparts who have lived in Suva or the urban areas all their lives. . . . [For] the Fijian in Suva, unless [through] traditional family influences [he] understands and practices his custom, most of it will be quite foreign to him; whereas his Fijian counterpart born in the village still has the *turaga ni koro*, the village headman;<sup>18</sup> he still has his traditional chief; he still knows what his role is within the village and the *mataqali*. (Cokaunoto 1993.)

[Tradition] is very important out there in our provinces. But as you move into the urban areas, like Suva for example, you have a change taking place amongst the Fijians. . . . Most of our young Fijians have a lack of understanding. They . . . probably haven't been informed by their parents as to their roots. So changes are taking place within the urban areas. . . . But I think most parents now are beginning to try and help their children to know their way back. (Kubuabola 1993.)

There's certainly significant change taking place, particularly amongst people who were born here in urban centres. Most of them who have never been to their village have very little idea of culture, tradition and all that, and if their village community in the urban centre is not strong and getting them together, then [among] those people you will find a lot of change. They are more individualistic. (Qarase 1993.)

It was, as has been noted, these more individualistic urban Fijians (rather than Fiji Indians) who were largely responsible for the shift in voting which saw Bavadra win power in 1987, a point which even the SVT will now concede:

Bavadra won because of a shift among urban Fijians, not the traditional constituency. Urban Fijians tend to vote according to issues that affect their everyday life, rather than what provincial constituents were voting for. (Wainiqolo 1993.)

Rural Fijians are considered the staunchest supporters of the chiefly system, even though some may question particular chiefs:

Even if they don't support the personality, they support the system. And it identifies them in their own position in the society. (Vakatale 1993.)

One result of this was the over-representation of rural Fijians in the 1990 constitution's electoral system, which the Secretary-General of the SVT openly implied was done because of their greater support for the chiefs:

There are 37 [Fijian] seats. Of those, 32 are from the 14 provinces. Urban areas have only 5 seats. There are over 110,000 urban Fijians. Namosi has a population of 6,000: 2,000 voters and 2 seats. What do we base representation on? Maybe it would be best to reduce Namosi's [representation] and increase [that of] urban areas. But in urban areas there are no villages, no *tikina*, no provinces. In provincial constituencies, the role

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<sup>18</sup>The *turaga ni koro* (literally, 'gentleman of the village') is appointed by the villagers, and is not necessarily a chief of traditional rank.

of the chiefs is still strong, while the same cannot be said of urban areas. (Wainiqolo 1993.)<sup>19</sup>

The result is a perception that the traditionalist rural areas wield the most power (even though that perception may, some suggest, be inaccurate):

Our problem has been [that] the people in the provinces are seen to be ruling the people in the urban areas. . . . When you have a problem here [it goes to] the Council of Chiefs, and they come from the rural areas, and they don't like to [merely let it be] — [if they do] they're not working, they're not doing anything. (Matatolu 1993.)

That deliberate disenfranchising of urban people doesn't ever go unnoticed. The urban people are the same people who had stayed in the rural areas. This idea of trying to give the rural people a better voice through a disproportionate vote was meant to try and quell the urban Fijians. What they should have tried to do was to incorporate the ideas of urban Fijians. . . . Taking the votes and [putting them in] the rural area doesn't solve anything, because the same urban guys are standing in the rural areas, so they'll come up with their old friends and their ideas. I doubt whether they're very educated anyway. We talk to people here in parliament — they're just the same as the parliamentarians that were there before. (Anonymous A 1993.)

Politicians and civil servants, whether themselves urban Fijians or not, find that they must account for the traditional nature of rural Fijians and their resulting expectations:

If I [went] to my village today with this [suit] on, half of the people wouldn't listen to me. . . . I must come in the right way, conduct myself in the right protocol. I may be the Director of Public Prosecutions of the Republic of Fiji, [but if] I come to a village and I don't perform the [right] protocols, they will sit with me, they [will] probably laugh with me, [but] they will not *listen*. (Mataitoga 1993.)

But even though 'people are more traditionalist in the village', they are subject to many of the same influences (albeit in a delayed or indirect fashion) which are shaping urban Fijians' outlook. As a result of urban and Western influences 'a lot [of] changes are taking place out there in the rural areas' (Kubuabola 1993):

Surprisingly, most of the rural areas that you go to are changing [of their own volition]. They realise [that] they've got to do away with many things, because [they] can't afford [them]; . . . [they're] a drawback to their going forward together. (Matatolu 1993.)<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>He further justified this malapportionment of seats using a rather unusual needs-based principle of representation:

I am not saying the urban areas are under-represented: their figures are proportional. [We] tend to look at issues in urban areas, but at basic needs that affect us in rural areas: roads, airports, ports, health centres, schools. They have more basic needs than urban areas. Urban areas are just like others of the world today. It is not true that urban Fijians are under-represented. They have roads et cetera already, [whereas] Namosi is all hills and valleys. (Wainiqolo 1993.)

<sup>20</sup>John Overton has also observed this:

And rural Fijians' political awareness is also increasing:

Obviously the developments of '87 . . . brought about an awakening amongst Fijians of what politics is all about. . . . It's amazing, [when you go down to villages,] what they talk about: the interest there, the kind of questions they ask. They hear these things, and they want to know what is happening. . . . A lot of people [have become] aware. . . . In urban areas people are asking questions publicly, while in rural areas they are asking questions privately. But they are still asking questions. (Nata 1993.)

As a result, rural areas expected to deliver seats to the SVT have produced surprises at elections, such as the strong showing of the Fijian Nationalist Party in May 1992. FNP leader Butadroka felt that the chiefly system was 'falling irrevocably' because it (and Rabuka's government) had done nothing for 'the people in the village':

They're mostly dealing with tourism and other economic [matters]. . . . There's nothing done for the Fijians here. Nothing at all. You call for telephones, you call for electricity, you call for medical facilities, you call for roads: what do they have? . . . Nadroga: you go to the village, [the roads] finish. But you go where the Indians are, the Chinese, the Europeans — tar-sealed roads. (Butadroka 1993.)

But one minister saw hopeful signs in the current political environment:

What's happening now [in] parliament, the Great Council of Chiefs, provincial councils, [is that there are] ideas being exchanged from within the rural areas and also from urban areas. The more we have that exchange, . . . the better it is for the Fijian people. (Matatolu 1993.)

Both Tongans and Fijians, then, generally agree that their rural people are more traditional (i.e., hold more closely to older traditions). But this is no cause for complacency for traditional authority figures. The same influences for change which are most apparent in urban areas are at work in rural areas — more gradually, indirectly, and unobtrusively, perhaps, but at work nevertheless.

### **Expatriate and External Influences on Society**

Education and money, the two main influences affecting Fijian and Tongan society, tradition, and politics, have already been examined. But there are others, and the rest of this chapter deals with some important ones.

One significant influence upon an individual's life and views — and hence, by a cumulative effect, upon society's — is travel, particularly to other countries. While one

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Villages are not bastions of traditional Fiji (whatever that might be) but reflect the complexity of social and economic relations throughout the country. Moreover, villages are linked strongly through kin and economic networks to other places — rural, urban, and international. (Overton 1993: 65.)

might imagine that few people in Third World countries would have the resources to travel overseas, travel has a significant influence in the form of tourists travelling in and locals travelling out.

Thanks to Fiji's accessibility by air to Australia and its importance as a transit stopover for trans-Pacific flights, tourism is clearly a significant influence there: in the 1990s annual numbers of visitors have passed 300,000.<sup>21</sup> These numbers provide a startling contrast with Tonga's: in 1991, for example, Tonga had 22,000 visitors, at least 80 percent of those being expatriate visitors rather than tourists.<sup>22</sup> Some Tongans commented to me on the influence of tourists there, but after travelling to Nuku'alofa directly from Suva I could guess that such influence would be slight by comparison. Nuku'alofa might see a few non-Tongan faces wandering its streets every week, but even during the supposed 'tourist festival' of Heilala Week such faces were rare. Those who mentioned tourism to me appeared to be quite happy for that situation to be maintained.<sup>23</sup>

Fiji, with its high visitor numbers, is another matter: tourism is an essential part of the Fiji economy (the other main sector being the sugar industry) and generally accepted as important. Consequently, Fiji is wide open to the negative and positive effects felt by any popular tourist destination. (Not every area, however, sees these effects directly. Most tourists keep to specific areas: Nadi, the Coral Coast of Vitilevu, and Suva, rather than Vitilevu's highlands or north or Fiji's other islands.)

The study of the effects of tourism is an important area within sociology, and this is not the place to rehearse its arguments.<sup>24</sup> In any study of influences upon tradition, however, its importance must be recognised. Not only does it provide income for many Fijians through either employment or the sale of craft souvenirs, but one reason why Fijians, even rural Fijians, will aspire to a Western lifestyle (or at least such features of it

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<sup>21</sup>320,000 people visited Fiji in 1994, an increase of over 10 percent on 1993 figures (Economist Intelligence Unit, 6 June 1995, Reuters Newsbriefs Article Ref. 000656992581).

<sup>22</sup>Figures from *Matangi Tonga*, May-June 1993, p. 10. The number of bona fide tourists visiting Tonga in 1991 was therefore under five thousand, less than one percent of the total visiting the Pacific islands region. Trends for the following period showed a decline in numbers; but in the 1993-1994 financial year tourism 'increased its revenue by 10 percent' (James 1995: 167).

<sup>23</sup>On tourism in Tonga, and Tongans' attitudes towards it, see Urbanowicz (1989), who says that 'Tongans cannot tolerate being regarded as members of a "cultural zoo"' (*ibid.*: 113) and 'seek to ensure the active preservation of the traditional Tongan way of life and culture by integrating traditional patterns into mass tourism and not making traditional culture a contemporary "phony-folk-culture"' (*ibid.*: 115). See also Hatcher (1994: 26.)

<sup>24</sup>Particularly interesting are MacCannell's studies, *The Tourist* (1976), which anticipates many of the themes of postmodernism, and *Empty Meeting Grounds* (1992), which elaborates them. Also noteworthy in this context is Harrison's discussion of Swaziland (1992), where the government (itself rooted in traditional institutions) packages tradition for tourists in ways which have a significant effect on tradition itself; on this subject, see also Macmillan (1986). A further noteworthy article on a similar theme is Gordon (1990), which examines the impact of the film *The Gods Must be Crazy* (and the resulting increases in tourism) on Bushman culture in southern Africa.

as education and money) is that they can see its products — tourists — for themselves. They see well-dressed people eating steak, buying souvenirs, taking photographs with expensive cameras, and so wealthy that they can take weeks off work just to sunbathe.<sup>25</sup> Whether such perceptions promote an accurate understanding of the Western lifestyle's pitfalls as well as its benefits is another question, but somewhat beside the point: what is important is the changed aspirations and behaviour of Fijians which can result from such perceptions.

If such changes in outlook can arise from contact with visitors, how much greater the impact must be of seeing other countries for oneself. Travel abroad or emigration appears to be less common, and thus of less significance, for Fijians than for Tongans. I was told that 'most of the civil servants and people in regional organisations have travelled abroad', but also that for 'Fijians that travel, more than any part of the region [they go] to Tonga' (Momoivalu 1993).<sup>26</sup>

Tongans, conversely, have considerably more personal contact with other countries,<sup>27</sup> mainly because of the large number of expatriate Tongans (and their nuclear families) living in New Zealand, Australia, and the United States. The figure usually quoted is that 60,000 Tongans live overseas (compared to 100,000 in Tonga), although its accuracy would be hard to gauge.<sup>28</sup>

Money sent 'back home' by these expatriates to other family members forms a considerable part of the country's income,<sup>29</sup> and one might well wonder what will happen when family ties weaken with successive generations<sup>30</sup> and these remittances dry

<sup>25</sup>These thoughts stem from many discussions about tourism with Rod Ewins.

<sup>26</sup>Note, however, the influence here of military life (members of the Fiji military are almost all Fijians), as was described by Asesela Ravuvu just before the coup:

Young Fijian men are . . . encouraged to serve abroad in international peace keeping forces, a new industry which keeps them employed for a while and provides a backdrop to their understanding of international relationships and political struggles. These overseas military experiences emphasise Fijian political solidarity and identity, but at the same time they serve as a modernising influence on the enlisted young men, many of whom are drawn from traditional village life. (Ravuvu 1987b: 231-232.)

<sup>27</sup>This was symbolised, for me, by a taxi driver I caught a ride with a few days into my stay. He had visited both Australia and the United States — a claim I doubt many Third World taxi drivers could make.

<sup>28</sup>On Tongan migration, see Cowling (1990); Gailey (1992a); Tongamoa (1990); van der Grijp (1993: 151-157).

<sup>29</sup>Estimated at T\$12.2 million in 1981; T\$21.1 million in 1984; and T\$30.8 million in 1987, in which year the trade deficit was T\$45 million (James 1993a: 359).

<sup>30</sup>Not everyone, however, would agree that family ties will so weaken:

Some people think that a second generation in a cosmopolitan countries will lose all of these personal roots. I think that's completely wrong. You will find that they will become people of two worlds. They still stick very firmly to their traditional roots. (Taufa 1993.)

up (tighter immigration policies in the popular destination countries will restrict the further migration out of Tonga which would keep fresh remittances coming in).<sup>31</sup>

But for now the family ties remain strong, and this promotes travel between Tonga and these other countries:

The people are extremely mobile. They're familiar [with] Western cultures. . . . So they have been for the last twenty years quite intensively influenced by what's going on [elsewhere]. (Hau'ofa 1993a.)

Then there are the expatriates themselves, a minority of whom eventually return:

Some of them are coming, the majority are not. Because by the time they retire, all their families are over there, and only the extended family is still here. (Afeaki 1993.)

In most cases it's older people who come back. . . . You meet a lot that come back here with their families. (T. Tupou 1993.)

Some of them, of course, get lost when green pastures are available overseas, but some of them do come back and take their place here in the community. ('A. Havea 1993.)

What brings them back? Fusitu'a was in no doubt:

What pulls them back, knowing that the place is poor, [that] they will make a few more dollars in Australia, America, New Zealand; knowing that their kids would have a better opportunity for education? Something which [is] dragging them back like a magnet force — what is it? It's tradition. . . . Once they reach sixty you see them making tracks home. . . . Is it just the atmosphere, just the climate? I don't think it is. It's something very deep. (Fusitu'a 1993.)

And yet these people are bound to bring some of their overseas life home with them:

Tongans who are overseas are moving back into Tonga — there's a steady trend. Coming in with investment and so on. You will find a new social force emerging in Tonga: . . . there are Tongans here now with some real money power. . . . Many of them are infiltrating back into Tonga through business, and a lot of them don't care about our hierarchy system. (K. Moala 1993.)

Their direct influence, however, is perhaps minimal:

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<sup>31</sup>See Finau (1993b: 310). Ian Campbell paints a bleak picture of the consequences of a fall in remittances:

Any lessening in the level of remittances will cause an abrupt fall in Tongan imports . . . [which] would have a seriously adverse effect on government revenue directly and lead to further losses from the contraction of other activity. . . . A reverse multiplier effect would cause many bankruptcies in the retail sector, the contraction of government services, and a declining standard of living that would force many people back into the subsistence economy, with increased pressure on land and kinship relationships. Political upheaval could be a further downstream effect. (Campbell 1992b: 72.)

They do [bring different attitudes and ideas]. But there is one thing that should be noticed. Whatever change or idea comes, it has to go through the kava set. We talk about it and think about it, and conservatives will speak with the liberals, liberals will talk to the conservatives. Maybe this streamlines the edges, say, and helps the people to understand. ('A. Havea 1993.)

They come back to Tonga with some critical eyes, but that's just for a little [while]. Then they will try and fit themselves in. One of their main efforts when they come to Tonga would be to try and grow their roots better in the Tongan soil again, and be accepted and recognised by Tongans as Tongans. . . . Certainly they're [bringing] certain influences, but I think it's for the good of the culture; enriching influences. Some of them are not particularly good influences, but you have to remember that Tongan culture, like many others, is very highly selective. Whatever fits into our system we accept, and whatever doesn't fit we reject immediately. (Taufa 1993.)

Other comments suggest that the influence of returned expatriates would not necessarily be a Westernising one:

As the Tongans drift far away from home, some of them seem to value it more, and they start reviving all of their traditions. . . . [Some things] not practiced here, you'd be surprised to find them being practiced by Tongans living [in] Sydney, Auckland, and all those places. The majority are very traditional in their thinking. . . . Once they're going in to the Western ways of life . . . they feel a bit homesick. They feel lost. So they try to get back to where they are comfortable. (Fonua 1993.)

You would find that most of the Tongans living overseas now in general would be more conservative than the Tongans who are here, except those who have decided to adapt to the American, Australian, New Zealand way of life, . . . because being in an overseas country is a strange and a new environment, and they tend to think back to their beloved Tonga. (Fukofuka 1993.)

The phenomenon of expatriates holding strongly to old traditions is unsurprising, not least because they have been cut off from the process of change taking place in the 'home tradition' (and so are unaware that they have become, in effect, time capsules of tradition). Not all expatriates are 'conservative'; the PDM has 'strong support overseas from the migrant communities' (Hau'ofa 1993a). But such supporters are likely to be those who have taken to Western ways whole-heartedly — or even half-heartedly:

Tongans overseas . . . still feel proud; [when] you talk to them, they'll have teary eyes about Tonga. They feel very Tongan. And they love their king and so on. But they really hate the system. Some of them would never come back here to live. They think it's oppressive. Whether it's oppressive legally or it's oppressive socially, they don't care about the difference; they just feel that our system here is oppressive. (K. Moala 1993.)

And this suggests the most significant point. Those who might be the loudest voices against the present system should they return to Tonga are those least likely to return. The eventual repatriates will more likely be, as Fusitu'a suggested, those with the greatest attachment to Tonga and its traditions. In terms of significant influences for change, then, one would do better to look elsewhere.

## The Church in Politics

One extremely significant social force in both societies is the Christian church. In Fiji this primarily means the Methodist Church, of which about two-thirds of Fijians are members (Lasaro 1993); and the same is true of Tonga, although Tonga has two breakaway Methodist churches (Hau'ofa 1993a) and several other prominent denominations, of which the Catholic Church has been the most politically active. Recent years have seen the rise of fundamentalist groups in both countries, a trend especially noticeable in Fiji since the coup.<sup>32</sup>

Although the Christian church is significant, the question of its impact on contemporary tradition is a vexed one. I asked some church leaders whether there were traditions of which the churches disapproved, and received answers such as this:

There are [certain rituals] which the Church forbids which were traditionally vital. . . . For instance, we can't accept polygamy, which [in] pre-Christian days was much practiced. (Lasaro 1993.)

But pre-Christian days are now long past. Christianity's greatest impact on Fijian and Tongan traditions was felt in the nineteenth century, not the twentieth. 'It's the most important thing that's ever happened in Fijian history, [the] coming and acceptance of Christianity,' said Paul Geraghty (Geraghty 1993); 'It changed a lot of things. When you talk about Fijian custom and tradition nowadays, it's all within the Christian context.'

Christianity has become part of Fijian and Tongan tradition. In Fiji this is certainly argued, as in the case of the ban on Sunday commercial activity instituted shortly after the coup:

Even [for] the Sunday ban, the argument is that it was tradition. . . . [For] how long? (Baba 1993.)

Since Christianity came into this country, Sunday has become a day of village worship. . . . The [opinion] is around now that trade restrictions on Sunday are a waste of time; it's a loss of money and economy for this country. But . . . we see Sunday as a day in which we can renew our lives. . . . It's a way of reinforcing the traditional links. The patterns of our relationships. It's a way of [getting] spiritual enrichment and rest and leisure, a time [when] you can come together as a tribe and have tribal meetings, because [on] Monday everybody goes out. The practical

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<sup>32</sup>As one observer commented:

Christian denominations in this country, particularly the newer ones, are . . . full of Fijians who are unhappy with [their] denomination. I know people who have changed denominations about seven or eight times; . . . it's like a supermarket. . . . You have Fijians who have constantly this need to keep on adopting the latest fad, . . . the latest denomination. (Madraiwiwi 1993.)



implications of Sunday for us outweigh the economic ones. Money is not everything. (Lasaro 1993.)

In Tonga, Christianity has underpinned the entire system of monarchy:<sup>33</sup>

The church of course has always been part and parcel of Tongan politics. Sometimes Tongan politics uses the church, and sometimes the church uses Tongan politics, but from the earliest stage of [the church's] introduction, the two [have] never really been very far from each other. Tupou I used it himself to establish his own system and win his kingdom. In many ways government [would] like to too. (Kavaliku 1993.)

The ideology is that the monarchy [is] chosen by God, by birth, that we're a Christian society, and puritanical in outlook. . . . We all think that he did [choose] the monarchs, he chose the nobles and the commoners. (Fakafanua 1993.)<sup>34</sup>

But today, as religious doubt begins to surface, that close identification with the church might imperil the monarchy:

The underlying current has been people [asking,] "Is God really there?" They don't know. And so the secular society, these aspects which are very strong outside, are now coming into the Kingdom, which undermines the foundations of the monarchy, of that particular ideology that God is in control of Tonga. (Fakafanua 1993.)

Thus, one might argue, the church in each country is part of the tradition under threat of change, not one of the significant influences for change in tradition. But that would be too strong a claim, for the churches' role is also changing, in Tonga at least:

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<sup>33</sup>See James (1992). I heard a similar comment in Fiji (which also relates to the spiritual notions of the land discussed in Chapter Six):

We liken chiefs to Mother Earth. Our chiefs were divinely appointed and created. In a stormy night you find lightning coming down: [it] hits the earth and disappears. Chiefs are like that: they absorb nature's forces, whether it's a traditional dispute [or not]. They absorb criticism; you can curse them, but they absorb that. (Wainiqolo 1993.)

On Fiji, see also Toren (1990: 142-144, *passim*). For a Micronesian example, see Meller and Meller (1985: 261).

<sup>34</sup>The identification is so close that many Tongans believe that the King is actually head of the Methodist Church — a belief I heard from people on both sides of politics. This is in fact not true, as the president of the church stressed:

It's a complete misunderstanding of the relationship between the church and the King. The King as a person is an ordinary member of the church.

Out of traditional respect to our own King, we make provision in our constitution that he should take part in the induction of the president of the church. But after all, it's the conference that decides who should be president, and he's only informed afterwards; he gives his consent, but [it] wouldn't matter if he was not informed. You see, we want to retain our good relationship with our people, and whether it's at the traditional structure of the society, or the modern structure of the society, we want to retain our identity as one people. And we respect those from the higher rank. . . . The King's counsel is sought on this and that, but he himself knows full well that it is the conference that makes the decision, and he will speak for himself on this matter. (Taufa 1993.)

There is this sort of Christian morality which has been offended in the last few years by the shenanigans at the upper level of politics, allegations of mismanagement and corruption. . . . You have people who are otherwise conservative being persuaded to look at their own allegiances. . . . In fact the church leaders in local villages have been good supporters of the Pro-Democratic Movement, so that although you have 'Akilisi with his very secular lifestyle, he's got the support of the churches. (Hau'ofa 1993a.)

The Pro-Democracy Movement has a lot of support from the senior people in the churches. . . . In the past six years or so we saw the church change its attitude, its way of doing things. Even though the church is still working with the monarchy, at the same time the church turns around and challenges the monarchical system. Why? Simply because . . . they have annual conferences, and every year they elect the leaders. There is a very strong element of democracy in that particular organisation. . . . So the concept of divine right which still exists in government is not accepted in the church. There are two different ideological principles. . . . And this is why the church seems not to support the monarchy. The Catholic Church has come out in the past six years or so, showing support to our movement.<sup>35</sup> And the other religious organisations . . . have given their support in the past two elections. . . . On the whole, . . . we get the support of sixty-five to seventy [percent]. (Pohiva 1993.)

This support is clearly seen in the prominent role some high-level church people have played in the PDM (such as Simote Vea, the new Secretary of the Tonga Council of Churches at the time I was there, editor of the Free Wesleyan newspaper — and chair of the PDM). The trend prompted a government countermove in late 1992 when some ministers approached church leaders with a plan to create a Christian political party:

The prime minister's department thought that they [would] form a Christian Democratic Party, and for church leaders to become members, elected leaders. But the church leaders negated the idea; they said, "Let the people make their own decisions." . . . I didn't support it and I don't think it's a good thing. The church and state should be separate. ('A. Havea 1993.)

I said, "You know, sometimes you people accuse me of meddling in politics, now [you] want us to really meddle in politics. That's not our job. What I have meddled in . . . is to do with justice issues. What you are trying to do is to go into party politics. . . . We can't tell people 'vote for so-and-so'. . . . That's their decision."

They were trying to use the church. [Like] some of the things they do in villages and outer islands. They find that people don't respond to [their officers]. So they're trying now to use the churches to do those things. (Finau 1993a.)

They want to make use of the church for their own interest. The church is not to be used that way. . . . The other mistake they made was that they got up and tried to form a party when there was no party in government. . . . Those [high] up in the hierarchy of the society were the ones who wanted

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<sup>35</sup>Bishop Finau, however, indicated that this was not unqualified support:

The church is for liberty, freedom, all that, [and so tries to] support a system that's going to do that. . . . Does that mean that we follow blindly? Not at all. If the people who are running for the Pro-Democracy [Movement] go wrong the church also has to address [that], so the church is nobody's ally. . . . We support what is right. (Finau 1993a.)

this, because I think they wanted to safeguard their own interest and their own positions as chiefs. . . . And that's wrong. (Taufa 1993.)

The churches have, in Tonga, usurped some of the traditional responsibilities of chiefs:

The church has replaced our Tongan hierarchy in many ways. In the old way you have a village, people feel or have a sense of belonging to that village, they have a chief. Now the power of the chief is either very weak or non-existent in the village. People still feel a belonging in the village, but their new identity is the church. . . . The pastor becomes the new chief. And so . . . if a noble comes into the village and calls the people and tells them "we're going to do this and that", nobody turns up. Pastor calls the people together, and says, "We're going to build a new church," or, "We're going to put on a feast," [and] people will turn up. (K. Moala 1993.)<sup>36</sup>

But in Fiji, the Methodist Church, at least, has reinforced the position of the chiefs, and drawn on them for reinforcement — though at some risk to the standing of each:

You're finding now [that] other churches are coming in, and what's the Methodist Church idea? To ask the chiefs if they can kick them out of the villages. That kind of reaction is what breeds more churches. They already have a split in the Methodist Church. They'll have extra splits. . . . They're doing the same thing the chiefs are doing: not minding their own business. So the people are just going to get [annoyed]. If you're a villager and the chief colludes with the Methodist Church [to] tell you to [leave] the village, you will not like [either] the Methodist Church [or] the chief. (Anonymous A 1993.)

While the churches in Fiji and Tonga obviously have had an enormous influence on tradition (and hence politics) in the past, that role is necessarily less significant today, if only because most of the adjustment to Christianity has already been made. Any move towards a more secular society will, of course, have important implications for both church and state. As for the present, the churches still play a role on both sides — or, as they might prefer to see it, favouring neither side, but acting in terms of higher values. But in terms of church influence on contemporary tradition, I believe it is fair to say that the time of the church's *greatest* influence for change has passed — if only because Christianity has now become the status quo for Fijians and Tongans.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Moala added:

Government knows this, so when they did their celebration [for the King's birthday], all the food and all of that was arranged through the church. They tried to arrange it through their town officers and their district officers; nobody turned up. So government then goes and does it through the pastors, and asks them to ask the people to do this. The pastors then call the people, and sure enough, people do it. (K. Moala 1993.)

<sup>37</sup>But not for every Fijian, at least. I spoke to Francis Waqa Sokonibogi, spokesperson for a fringe political group called *Tagi ni Vanua* (Cry of the Land/People), and self-professed spirit-worshipper. His comments deserve to be recorded in all of their millenarian glory, if only to show that it can take a long time for all traces of an old tradition to vanish:

## The Media

The media form an essential element of democratic political systems. In systems of government (such as Western-style representative democracies) which promote popular input via such avenues as elections and lobbying, the need to keep the public adequately and accurately informed of political and social developments is obvious. While radio, television, and the print media sometimes fail to meet ideal levels of performance in achieving such a goal, few in democratic societies would advance that as an argument for the restriction of vigorous media activity.

In non-democratic societies, however, such restriction is often considered necessary by governing regimes. The public criticism of government and the promotion of alternatives through the media present an unwelcome challenge to many such regimes, and the simplest remedy available to them is usually the curtailment of debate by censoring, commandeering or closing various media organisations. The reason is clear.

In 1989-1990 when I started everybody was laughing at me; they said I was mad. . . . Now it's [they who] are saying [what I've said]; I'm not saying it any more. So my way is getting clear.

I'm a traditional priest; I never [went] to school. [My sister and I] get visits from spirits. . . . It began when our maternal base [land] was being sold. We approached the chiefs and the chiefs said it was legal. We said, "It can't be legal, because you know what the spirits told us." That's where it started. . . . No matter how closed the circle of argument is, coming from the university or anywhere, we can penetrate it, because we're the traditional priests; we are the survivors of our race, and we have learnt from the other races of the world how they disintegrated into nothing, and we are going to keep this. Slowly we are working very hard on the chiefs.

My group is religious — traditional religion. Many of our groups believed in [the spirits of our] ancestors. I did not believe that [at] one time; I believe in it now, because they've actually visited me. My stepping stone to God is still Jesus Christ but I respect the ancestors who have given me this power to do it without any money, without any ceremony. I'm driving through and I'm making money — that means they must exist!

I don't even know when I'm writing, they just tell me to write. It sounds silly, but I put it down, and it becomes actual. And you know that you are not doing it, it is some power.

Maybe it's too late [for Fijians]. But I trust in the ancestor spirits; they keep me going when I give up. You just do your part, no matter how silly it looks. . . . Sometimes I need some food and some money; [the spirits tell me], "Don't worry about that." I get along.

There's a few of us working, and we've got plans for seven years work; if we've failed by that seven years, by the year 2000 —

If we get all these things together in seven years, we [will] be able to [move] over to the other side: the creation of a new system altogether — the original system and not this chiefly system. A Fijian system, not a chiefly system. That is our dream. Do I look like a fanatic? (Sokonibogi 1993.)

For a study of another contemporary movement based upon pre-Christian Fijian religion (the Lami), see Young (1992).

One only questions the status quo if one is given reason to do so. That reason can take the form of an awareness of new circumstances or of circumstances of which one was previously unaware, and without the relevant information that awareness cannot develop.

It is sometimes suggested that a free press promotes democratic systems of government.<sup>38</sup> In the long-term this may be true, although history contains examples of countries with a free press which we would not call democratic in the modern sense (including countries, such as the United Kingdom, which are democratic today but which once were not). What may be more certain is that over time a free press tends to undermine non-democratic systems of government. The fact that many East Germans could receive West German television broadcasts, for example, was surely a major contributing factor to the collapse of the East German state, with images of increasing West German capitalist affluence gradually eroding East Germans' support for socialism.

What was at work in East Germany was not a concerted propaganda campaign by the West of direct attacks upon communist leaders; after all, West German television was aimed at West Germans, who had their own political leaders to worry about. More significant was simply that East Germans were being shown, in full colour, a whole different way of life — one which they came to desire enough to cause them to desert a forty-year-old regime.

This general impact of the media upon people's consciousness is the most significant topic in any discussion of the media and social change in the Third World as well. The effect of day-to-day news stories on popular political opinion is certainly important; but the long-term effects of the presence of the media upon Fijian and Tongan society are the more telling.

### Fiji's Media

The 1987 coup raised fears (both locally and abroad) of a restriction of press freedom in Fiji. One newspaper, the *Fiji Sun*, closed, and the remaining English-language daily, the *Fiji Times*, followed a path of cautious self-censorship (Robie 1995a: 79-80). Fiji has since gained another daily, the *Daily Post*, initially regarded as a mouthpiece for the interim government. Radio has remained predominantly the preserve of government.

By 1993 the situation had, in the opinion of many, improved. I asked those in the media and related areas what their perceptions were of levels of press freedom. Most had seen a marked improvement in recent years, particularly since the 1992 elections:

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<sup>38</sup>As a well-known Pacific-region journalist has noted, 'For more than four decades the International Federation of Journalists has campaigned in the defence of a simple truth — that press freedom is "inextricably linked with democracy"' (Robie 1995a: 79).

Now we've got a very good rapport with the government. They recognise the fact that we've got a role to play. We told them from day one, "Do a good job and we will praise you, but if you do something wrong then don't expect us to praise you." They understand that; and this government's pretty good [about it]. (Delaibatiki 1993.)

[Over] the last year the media's [been] much more free than it was even pre-coup. Lots of people [are] criticising the government, the Prime Minister; the media is much bolder; this is all good. . . . *Daily Post* has been in the forefront. . . . *The Fiji Times* has been much bolder than when Ratu Mara was in power. For example, *Fiji Times* is far more critical now in its editorials of the government than any other newspapers. (Dakuvula 1993.)

The press in Fiji is very free. More free than some other countries in the Pacific, like probably Papua New Guinea and these sorts of big countries. (J. Moala 1993.)

These comments were not always without qualification, however:

We're pretty free now. The papers might treat certain chiefly matters with some delicacy, because it's [an extremely] dangerous area; you cause emotion and it'll go off on you like a fire-bomb if you're not careful. But in fact . . . very few of the people seem like that. There's more and more debate concerning things Fijian, more so than there ever has been before by Fijians. . . . You have to be very flexible. It's more or less always shifting as to what you can and can't write without causing *serious* problems. (Keith-Reid 1993.)

The chiefs themselves, Keith-Reid indicated, were not the main source of such problems:

Most of them are quite approachable. They're quite simple, but they've got a certain sort of rough common-sense. And they've [usually] got a good sense of humour. (Keith-Reid 1993.)

The problems came more from those around the chiefs, their 'retainers',

who have got very old-fashioned ideas about the world: . . . "You've insulted our chief, we'll club you to death." You've got guys like that still, who act those attitudes. Very threatening. (Keith-Reid 1993.)

The editor of the *Fiji Times* had experienced problems from 'a couple of people in government' who 'tend to become very sensitive':

They're not tackling the issue in an objective way; they react very badly to it. They seem to see any attack on the Prime Minister or a prominent member of cabinet . . . as being very personal. They don't recognise the fact that the Prime Minister is a public figure. As such he should be subjected to close scrutiny. (J. Moala 1993.)

He suggested that these attitudes may stem from broader Fijian attitudes towards the notion of open public debate:

People in Fiji, especially Fijians, have not really come to understand the role of the media. They don't want to be scrutinised in what they do. . . . It's a cultural thing. . . . It's very difficult sometimes, like trying to say something about the Council of Chiefs, [where] you're always aware that many people out there wouldn't like what you will say. They see the chiefs

as being above criticism. They don't realise these guys are making decisions that will change their lives forever. (J. Moala 1993.)

The publisher of *The Weekender*, a new weekly paper which was itself one of the hopeful signs of a flourishing press in 1993 Fiji, had personally been pressured after featuring an interview with Rabuka in his first issue:

I was actually picked up from here [by] some men [who said], "Come back to the Ministry." I went down there and they commented on an interview which I had with the Prime Minister. I don't think there was any political directive on that; I think it was something that idiots down the line [took it upon themselves to do], because I actually confronted the Prime Minister on that, and he said, "It's not me." . . . Generally, I think we are relatively free. . . . I don't think anybody's on my back. (Nata 1993.)

But as was commented by the publisher of the *Review* (a monthly news and business magazine which in the year since its first issue of May 1992 had become Fiji's highest-selling magazine), any pressure of this kind came after the event; censorship was not a problem:

Even at the *Times*, [although] there is pressure, . . . there's no censorship from anybody. It's like anywhere; you will get pressure [from] maybe one of the ministers . . . ringing up and saying, "Why don't you guys write something nice." . . . Of course after '87 there were problems, but I'm talking about '89, '90, '91. It's very good. (Gauder 1993.)

One must wonder whether prolonged pressure, even coming after publication rather than before it, might not lead to self-censorship. But Fiji's press has shown a willingness to test its limits — limits which often involve sensitive issues of Fijian tradition. The day I spoke to the editor of the *Daily Post*, he had run a story about proposals before the Council of Chiefs to deregister some Fijians of mixed ancestry from the *Vola ni Kawa Bula* (*Daily Post*, 25 May 1993, p. 2):

This is a very sensitive issue.<sup>39</sup> We were even debating last night whether we should run it or not. First thing this morning we get a call from the Ministry:<sup>40</sup> how did we get the report? Why did we run it? Because . . . they think [this book] is the Fijian bible. . . . We've broken convention by actually [discussing] it in public.

We are trying to test how far we can go. . . . Maybe in five years time [articles such as] this will be just a normal thing, but today it might be so

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<sup>39</sup>The sensitivity of the issue was graphically illustrated by an abusive phone call from a reader which interrupted our interview, with the reader calling Delaibatiki a 'low-down Fijian' for running the article.

<sup>40</sup>Delaibatiki did not specify which ministry, but I assume that it was the Ministry of Fijian Affairs (as the *Vola ni Kawa Bula* comes under its jurisdiction).

sensitive we might be banned; I don't know what's going to happen. There will be a strong protest from the chiefs about that [article].<sup>41</sup>

We are hoping that apart from informing people [about] what's going on, we will educate the public that these things can be discussed publicly; that we should be able to talk about these matters which affect us directly. While preserving the chiefly system, there are issues we should also be able to talk about. (Delaibatiki 1993.)

Perhaps the ultimate test by the press of its limits came the following year, when shortly after the 1994 election *The Review* ran a story about Rabuka's alleged marital infidelities. *The Review* weathered the subsequent storm of controversy, but for *The Weekender*, which actually named the 'other party' (a journalist), the episode compounded a year of financial difficulties; it ceased publication shortly afterwards (its publisher now works for *The Review*). But even this expose does not seem to have prompted the kind of media crackdown some might have expected from post-coup regimes.<sup>42</sup>

Certainly the interim government was not averse to using more direct methods of pressure. When *The Daily Post* published a particular unfavourable article the government ceased advertising in its pages, a ban which continued until the 1992 election; the paper survived, although its staff had to endure a twenty percent pay cut as a result of lost revenue (Delaibatiki 1993). Rabuka's elected government, however, seems aware that visible harsh restrictions of press freedom would undo its careful attempts to construct an image at home and abroad of a legitimate and tolerant regime. That it covets this image is the Fiji media's best guarantee of freedom.<sup>43</sup>

## Tonga's Media

Tonga's 1875 constitution guarantees the freedom of the press, so one might expect that the difficulties which faced Fiji's media post-coup would not apply in Tonga. But a right is not a duty; people legally free to say what they wish may choose to remain silent on certain matters — or feel constrained (in extra-legal ways) to do so. Or, of course, they may feel that there is no reason to comment or criticise. It was probably a

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<sup>41</sup>There was some adverse public reaction of this kind, but the *Post* was not banned. On the *Vola ni Kawa Bula*, see also Tora (1992).

<sup>42</sup>For more detail on this story, see *Review* Editorial Staff (1995), as well *The Review*, April 1994, and *The Weekender*, 15 April 1994. The Minister for Information subsequently threatened *The Review* with suspension, but the resulting public outcry forced him to back down.

<sup>43</sup>On Fiji's press, see also Devi (1992):

The coverage of the dailies during and after the [1992] election . . . is a clear indication of the bias of the dailies. The bias is towards [a] certain ideology. It is the same ideology that is shared by the Council of Chiefs, the military, the SVT, and large segments of the ethnic Fijian population. (*Ibid.*: 28.)



combination of these factors which kept the Tongan government free of close media scrutiny, despite the absence of legal restraints, until the 1980s. But the Tongan media is now remarkably active considering the country's size; indeed, Tonga's small size and slow pace of life may encourage this activity:

The media anywhere in the world holds the day. In Tonga more so because . . . people have got very little to do. They are not all working and busy. . . . They sit around and drink *kava*, or they chat under the trees, and go fish with others or weed the garden in the village; they all talk. Everybody needs some interesting point of conversation, and parliament is always a juicy one, and so the media makes the most out of these people. (Niu 1993.)

'Akilisi Pohiva led the way towards today's diverse range of media of a more vigorous nature with his radio programme of the early 1980s and then *Kele'a*. Pohiva saw *Kele'a* as filling a gap in the Tongan political system:

There are very critical articles in [*Kele'a*]. It's good. Because I believe that there must be an opposition: . . . a watchdog; a safety-valve. (Pohiva 1993.)

Other publications have also arisen, to the point where Tongans have a plethora of print media from which to choose:

There are three private [newspapers], *Times of Tonga*, *Tonga International* and *Ofa ki Tonga*, and there's a monthly [magazine], *Matangi Tonga*. And then there are the two church [papers] and the *Chronicle*, and there's the *Kele'a*. . . . Our literacy rate is nearly a hundred percent; we get a lot of news. (Fakafanua 1993.)

While they may have shown little interest in the past, these days Tongans want to read about Tongan politics, as Kalafi Moala, the editor of *Taimi 'o Tonga* (*The Times of Tonga*), has discovered. On his way back to Tonga in the late 1980s, after a long absence, Moala had asked an old friend — a Tongan journalist living in New Zealand — for advice about establishing a newspaper:

He says, "Forget about politics; Tongans are more interested in what happens in the community. Social stuff." I thought, well, this guy is more in touch with Tonga — maybe he's right. . . . We started the paper, and started writing about nice community stuff. . . . It just didn't take. The paper was selling [okay]; . . . the people were buying it because it was new I guess, and it was an alternative to the *Chronicle*. But then after two, three months, I started running political stories; . . . I started raising issues and questioning things. Boom! Our sales were just [exploding]. I called up my friend, and I said, "You're *wrong*, you're *really* wrong." It's amazing how much political interest there is in Tonga.

When we run political stories, the sales of our newspaper [skyrocket]. . . . Our market really demands that we never have a week's edition without a political story. . . . You don't have to be necessarily critical of government,

just to bring out what goes on, who said what. . . . People rush to stores to buy the paper. (K. Moala 1993.)<sup>44</sup>

*Taimi 'o Tonga* has a reputation for espousing pro-democracy views; government leaders, said Moala, 'think *Taimi 'o Tonga* is a weekly popular extension of the *Kele'a*':

Government is blaming us media people for making people think about these issues. Talk to any of the government leaders and they'll tell you, "People wouldn't have been dissatisfied, or . . . distrusting about government, or wouldn't have questioned them, if the media hadn't raised that issue." (K. Moala 1993.)

While the media might be responsible for the public attention paid to particular issues, as this study has demonstrated there are many other forces for change which have been at work over a much longer period than that of Tonga's recent burst of media activity. Certainly the media can reinforce such trends; but to consider the media their sole cause is narrow-sighted. As others argue, papers such as the *Times* are merely relaying the feelings of the wider community:

I said to Kalafi, the editor, one time, "Are you fair?" And he said, "Well, we chose first twenty people [to be] interviewed, then we sent another to get another ten. And the ten came back, the same thing. But we did try, you know. All the people were saying the same thing for democracy." "Can't you find somebody else who can say something, bit of a mixture?" And he assured me, "We did our best to do that, but this is what they're saying." (Finau 1993a.)

The reaction of some government figures to this is, predictably, unfavourable, but as Uili Fukofuka (Fukofuka 1993) says, apart from reacting after the event by bringing libel cases before the courts, 'there's nothing legal they can do about it; you can't [have] censorship in any way, because it's made clear in the constitution'. The *Kele'a*, says Fukofuka, 'took them by storm'; government's initial response was to change the Official Secrets Act, 'because so much was leaking out of government'. Extra-legal pressure has also been brought to bear:

When the *Kele'a* started I was involved until 1990. Some subtle harassment [went on], like the Minister of Police threatening us through what he said in parliament; being followed by policemen; our homes being watched. I was leaving for Australia with my family in '87; the Minister of Police stopped me. I took him to court. But those are the only things they can do.

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<sup>44</sup>Moala offered examples from recent weeks, during and after the King's birthday celebrations:

Even with the King's birthday [celebrations]: . . . we did the [cover] with the [colour] photographs, and the whole thing. Our sales were all right. Get back to political stories [and sales take off again].

[This week's] paper just started distribution yesterday, late afternoon, and we're out already, we're sold out completely, by this morning, . . . simply because we carried on the front page that seven of the people's representatives on Monday went in to have a vote of no confidence on the Speaker. (K. Moala 1993.)

They're not used to criticism. . . . They don't know what to do. Fusitu'a, the Speaker, is really the only one who has definite ideas of how to fight us. (Fukofuka 1993.)

Fusitu'a actually scored a significant victory when in 1993 he won a libel action against Pohiva — action he saw as necessary to counter the influence of the pro-democracy press on a Tongan people 'not used to the written word':

The only [printed] matter that was written in Tongan, for a whole century, was the Bible and the hymn book. And people then would tend to believe that everything that is printed is as truthful as a Bible. . . . It's only recently that they start to think this is not true. They are beginning to realise that a lot of things in the paper . . . are either not true or half true. . . . The printed word [is] still very powerful. People will have to get used to the idea of digesting whatever they read, and not swallowing the whole lot. (Fusitu'a 1993.)

The pro-democracy press, Fusitu'a said, 'wanted to make people discontented', and 'they did it so often they got away with it'. Government attempts to sue Pohiva for printing supposedly confidential information had failed; in Fusitu'a's opinion, 'The thing for [the government to do] is to make sure that you nail him, and do it, like I did!':

Truth won that case for me. . . . 'Akilisi conducted his own case, I conducted mine. Neither of us was a lawyer, and the judge bent over backwards to help both of us. . . . He judged fairly on the merits of the case, [and] eventually I won. And it's the biggest award ever in Tonga for libel. I was awarded T\$8,000, plus costs, [totalling] perhaps T\$13,000. It was a lot of money for Tonga.

The law of defamation here is such that you cannot defame a noble. And he did. The government prosecuted, and he got away with it; it was a trial by jury. I had no hand in it because I was the complainant; I was only a witness. . . . So I sued him. . . . I was convinced I would win it, otherwise I wouldn't have done it. It would do me more harm and do him more good. (Fusitu'a 1993.)<sup>45</sup>

Besides the courts, the government has significant media resources of its own, such as Radio Tonga,<sup>46</sup> which it has not hesitated to use to its own advantage:

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<sup>45</sup>See also Helu (1994; 1995); Pohiva (1995). One observer has commented:

Pohiva faced five lawsuits during 1993. They were three libel cases involving damages claims totalling 180,000 pa'anga, and two gagging actions seeking to prevent him from publishing information considered to be confidential in his newspaper *Kele'a*, and also to make him reveal his sources. . . . Although by March 1994 Pohiva had lost defamation cases totalling 60,000 pa'anga in damages, he remained defiant. But he believed the Tongan establishment was trying to destroy him by making him bankrupt. (Robie 1995a: 85.)

Penalties for 'the defamation of "Their Majesties"' have recently been raised from T\$400 to T\$2,000 or two years imprisonment in default, with all other defamation conviction fines also being raised (James 1995: 167).

<sup>46</sup>At least 80 percent of the total population listens to Radio Tonga each day at different times' (Fusimalohi 1987: 74).

The convention [on democracy] we had, they refused to [talk about over the radio]. . . . Anything that would be favourable to us, they will try to stop it. And anything that gives us a bad light is broadcast.

For example, there was some news about Tonga on Monday or Tuesday this week; it came over Radio Tonga [rebroadcasted from] Radio Australia, and said in the headlines something about Tonga. . . . When it came on, the rest was broadcast, [but] just before that bit about Tonga [they] cut it off. That's the kind of thing they do. (Fukofuka 1993.)

During elections the partisan nature of Radio Tonga became especially transparent:

They found anybody that had some influence on the people to speak against us. They even had speeches [from] well-known entities who passed away and were very influential, had their speeches read out by some people. They were playing speeches by the late Queen Salote. . . . The Acting Prime Minister, the Minister of Police, spent almost an hour on [the radio] telling us ways to vote. Unprecedented. I think it had the reverse effect. It was overdone. People just got fed up with it. (Fukofuka 1993.)<sup>47</sup>

Other such uses of radio were also proving somewhat counter-productive. An information unit in the Prime Minister's Department set up in 1992 was running a radio programme 'to raise the awareness of the common people of what actually goes on in government', but according to one government employee,

The programme is being viewed amongst people as just like a debate, providing answers to the allegations made by the representatives of the people. . . . It has become a running battle . . . and it puts off most of the people. . . . And the representatives of the people love it, because that's what they want. It will just keep the focus and the attention of all on the representatives. . . . They claim that it's a personal attack on themselves, and it's good for them when they campaign. They say the whole of government has been wasting resources just to try to discredit them. (Anonymous 1993.)<sup>48</sup>

The government-run *Tonga Chronicle* (established in 1964) has been, obviously, another forum for pro-government views; as Bishop Finau said, 'If people write in for the King, they write to the *Chronicle*,' even from overseas (Finau 1993a). The political editor of the *Chronicle* saw the paper's role in a more neutral light, as one of mediation:

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<sup>47</sup>The PDM had 'explored over the last three years the possibility of setting up a radio station' to provide an alternative source of news to Radio Tonga, but were 'still trying' (Fukofuka 1993). For more on government's use of the media during the 1993 election campaign, see Campbell (1994: 89-90); Helu (1993b: 23).

<sup>48</sup>In early 1993 Futa Helu reported that:

Since the [pro-democracy] convention . . . Radio Tonga has been dominated by a Premier's office program which dwells on the "evil" of democracy and the misfortunes of the modern Greeks — descendants of the people who invented the ideology. It pointed out specifically that Greeks of today are condemned to being restaurant workers and related occupations. (Helu 1993c: 43.)

We try and be in the centre, and to make sure that we play our role that has been given to us from day one: that we should be a public forum for the dialogue of the people and the government. (Tu'itahi 1993.)

But Tu'itahi also recognised that some journalists, on both sides, 'have not been able to differentiate [between] our political interests and our journalist's hat; especially towards the election date, the reporting [became] very biased and prejudiced'. At the *Chronicle*, he said,

We're so paranoid [about] authority that we think that it's up there hanging down on us. . . . We mixed up our traditional loyalty with the fact that we should have a professional attitude towards what we do. (Tu'itahi 1993.)

Recent years, however, had seen a relaxation of controls even at the *Chronicle*:

We have more room now to make our final editorial decision than before. There [is] virtually no everyday censoring from the government. There are no phone calls every now and then [saying], "Slant this story like that." (Tu'itahi 1993.)

And Tu'itahi credited much of this liberalisation to the influence of the *Kele'a*:

It has helped not just the *Chronicle* but the rest of the media, all institutions in Tonga. Now we can be more critical and outspoken than before. (Tu'itahi 1993.)<sup>49</sup>

The emergence in the last decade of Tonga's lively print-media scene may have been prompted by deeper forces for change, but by giving expression to voices for change it has become a significant factor for change in its own right, even if not the only (or the most significant) such factor. The very presence of the press is changing tradition:

Tonga has always been, to me, very politically aware, but it's just that most of our tradition and communication has been verbal, oral tradition. Very little

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<sup>49</sup>Unfortunately for the non-Tongan-speaking researcher, much of the liveliest debate conducted in Tonga's press is in Tongan. Even the *Chronicle*, which has published both Tongan and English editions since its inception in 1964 (the print-run of the former averaging 4,500 to 5,000 copies each weekly edition, the latter only 1,500 to 2,000), does not offer the full text of its Tongan version in the English translation:

The political thoughts [of] the people are reflected more in the Tongan edition. We don't have the resources to translate all the letters. But obviously there is more being said in the Tongan edition. (Tu'itahi 1993.)

A similar situation exists with Fiji's weekly Fijian-language papers, *Nai Lalakai* and *Volasiga*:

[The] editorials are tame stuff; often . . . they take an English-[language] editorial from the *Times* or the *Post* [and] then translate it into Fijian. . . . But in correspondence, . . . you get these extreme views — things that if they were published in English would be taken to the law courts before you could blink an eye. Especially when Fijians get vitriolic about Indians, which they frequently do in Fijian newspapers. Things you'd never see in an English-language newspaper. (Geraghty 1993.)

things in print. Anything in print is a permanent record. In the *faikava*, there was always political discussion and ideas being shared quite freely. . . . You can talk [in] the *faikava* and criticise the King or government, and when it's over, go home, go to sleep, and it's over, there's no record. But when you take those criticisms and print them, [they] take on a totally different [meaning]. (K. Moala 1993.)

Once criticisms or opinions are recorded, it is difficult to retract them; they become fixed, and might help to crystallise conflict. But there is perhaps a more positive effect of written records: they can also assist in the resolution of conflict. Written records become points of reference which help to avoid repetition of the same particular aspects of a debate. Issues raised can thereby be more quickly resolved, and the public's attention can turn to other matters.

For some, of course, this may not be an advantage. The matters so investigated might be, in the opinion of those with vested interests, best kept hidden; such resolution may not be in their favour. Those who stand to lose the most, therefore, such as traditional authority figures, are often those most wary of press scrutiny.

Traditional authority figures have other reasons to question the value of the press. News media which promote a more rapid resolution of conflict can, in the process, promote more rapid change (including change in tradition) than might otherwise occur. If the direction of change appears unfavourable to those in power, they will have no wish to follow it more quickly than they absolutely must.

As was noted in Chapter Five, the written word can influence the process of change in tradition in other ways. Written records of traditions at a particular point in time can be used by later generations as evidence of 'how tradition should be', and thus be used to resist change (as the Tongan government used the speeches of Queen Salote before the 1993 election), creating disagreements where otherwise there might have been none. Written records of past traditions may also be contrasted with the different traditions of today as an argument in favour of change; if these traditions have changed, one might argue, why cannot some other particular tradition also be changed? Both points relate to the 'invention of tradition' debates discussed in earlier chapters.

But not only the print media have such a major direct or indirect effect on tradition and politics. The electronic media are also profoundly influential — and not only as sources of local political news.

## Television

Television has come to Fiji and Tonga late — the first stations were established in Tonga in 1985 and Fiji in 1991 — and as a source of local political news its impact in each country has so far been slight (although Fiji television features nightly local news bulletins which do cover politics in some depth). In 1993 Tonga's television stations had 'hardly any news' (Fukofuka 1993), although one relayed American news bulletins via

satellite; television played no campaign role in the 1993 election. (Fakafanua 1993; Liava'a 1993; Pohiva 1993.)

Television's most significant influence lies elsewhere. While television *stations* are new (especially in Fiji), the medium has existed in both countries for some time now, thanks to video cassette recorders.<sup>50</sup> Suva and Nuku'alofa both sport video rental stores filled with Hollywood titles which would be familiar to any Westerner. And of course the medium of film has been familiar to Tongans and Fijians for even longer. The cinemas may lack Dolby Stereo and other niceties, but the basic message gets through, and has done for many years.

It was impossible not to wonder about the impact upon their audiences of the films I would see in Fiji and Tonga, or of the many more I would specifically avoid — the B-grade variety films which go straight to video in a country like Australia.<sup>51</sup> I raised the question of their influence with Bishop Finau, who thought that it would be 'tremendous':

You'd have to talk about it. . . . Even torturing the baddie and so on. I'm sure there's always a lot of good things, [but] karate and things like that, action films; I'm afraid it doesn't help to make us gentle people. Sex films, again, don't help us to be better morally. (Finau 1993a.)<sup>52</sup>

He wondered, though, whether perhaps the changes he had seen in people's behaviour (especially young people's) were simply a result of the temper of the times:

I don't know how you can relate it to the movies or videos. I have a hunch at times, a question, but then you can't scientifically prove that there is a [problem]. . . . Suicides in Tonga in recent years have [increased among young people]. Something like that could have something to do with it.

Also, culturally, [it's] so foreign. . . . Maybe they don't understand it, the text, their diction; it's hard to understand, and it loses a lot of meaning. . . . I think it can play havoc on people. Confuse them. (Finau 1993a.)

It is unlikely that the situation will change with the advent of television broadcasting. In both countries, television screens are dominated by foreign images; as one Tongan said, 'There are not many programmes that have grown out of the soil' ('A.

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<sup>50</sup>As Pamela Thomas has reported, 'In December 1981 there were an estimated 7,000 video sets in Fiji, twelve months later there were an estimated 8,000 in Suva alone and between 14,000 and 15,000 in the entire country, including the outer islands' (P. Thomas 1984: 68). Most sets at that time were bought by Indians from urban areas, but even in the early 1980s there were 'growing numbers of viewers in rural districts' (P. Thomas 1984: 69).

<sup>51</sup>I saw *The Crying Game* while in Nuku'alofa, and wondered what messages it was sending to Tongans, who have their own tradition of tolerance towards transvestite *fakaleiti*. And to see that film I had to first sit through *Ministry of Vengeance*, a breathtakingly Z-grade effort (complete with boom mikes wandering into shot) about a Vietnam veteran turned church minister who followed a terrorist to the Middle East in order to avenge the death of his wife and child — a plot which would sit very oddly indeed with Tongans' deeply Christian values.

<sup>52</sup>See P. Thomas (1984: 73-74).

Havea 1993).<sup>53</sup> Fiji's television was being run in 1993 on a provisional basis by TVNZ,<sup>54</sup> and featured a range of programming which, while mercifully not drawn exclusively from American sources, was typical of that seen in most of the English-speaking world.<sup>55</sup> In each country locally-made advertisements were sometimes screened, and special events were broadcast (the royal feast dances during the King's 1993 birthday celebrations were replayed in their entirety on television over many hours that evening), but the limited resources — both money and skills — available to their television stations dictate that the bulk of programming will come from overseas. Fijians and Tongans are thus exposed to dramas set in hospitals equipped to an extent theirs cannot possibly match, to situation comedies laughing along with the dysfunctional nuclear families of 1990s USA, and to countless other unfamiliar images.

Television has had a profound effect upon Western countries since its introduction around forty years ago, even countries like the United States where the programmes screened are largely its own.<sup>56</sup> How much greater, then, the impact must ultimately be in countries which predominately draw their television programmes from foreign and distinctly different cultures.<sup>57</sup> The effects seen to date upon Fijian and Tongan traditions of education, money, religion, news reportage, and so on, may be as nothing compared to the long-term effect of a medium which can play the roles of educator, reporter, preacher, entertainer, advertiser, sales-assistant, and more besides.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Paul Geraghty wrote in 1984 that 'there are no Fijian-language films, and only two have ever been dubbed in Fijian, one a government health education film, the other a religious film promoted by a Christian organisation' (Geraghty 1984: 61).

<sup>54</sup>Television New Zealand (TVNZ) provided Fiji with a temporary television service from 1991. It later became a 15 percent shareholder in Fiji TV, Fiji's first permanent television station, which began operating from July 1994. Programmes, however, are still largely supplied by TVNZ, although a local staff is being built up under TVNZ guidance. (*Pacific Islands Monthly*, July 1994, p. 39, and Helen Molnar, personal communication.)

<sup>55</sup>The Tongan situation is not much different. Tonga's first television service, TV3, is privately run with some government sponsorship, and relies mostly on overseas material. It has broadcast to Tongatapu since 1985; in 1993 the station was attempting to extend its coverage. Tonga's second station (which started in 1991) is privately run by Oceania Broadcasting (based in Hawaii); it is a 'Christian station' which runs mainly American material. Both stations carry advertising. (Helen Molnar, personal communication.)

<sup>56</sup>Anyone who questions the impact that television has had would do well to consider the implications of this staggering statistic:

In 1991, the majority of American households (60 per cent, the same as in Spain) did not buy one single book. (Hughes 1994: 89.)

<sup>57</sup>On this subject, see Anyanwu (1995); P. Thomas (1984: 74-75; 1987).

<sup>58</sup>Of course, not all see this as a problem:

As we go along, as we have [access to] education and so forth — . . . we're looking at television, we're looking at films and other things which we never enjoyed five or ten years ago — there will be broader terms of expression by young Fijians, and only then can it be



Television, furthermore, has an impact on people's lives beyond that of the programmes it screens. Television demands continuous and total attention from the individual viewer, and thus inhibits interaction between individual viewers while it is on.<sup>59</sup> One need not be Marshall McLuhan to speculate about the effects of this intrusion of the global village into Fijian and Tongan villages (most of which will have a television set somewhere)<sup>60</sup> and individual homes. Tongans and Fijians have seen the effects for themselves:

Before, we had our own way of doing things during night-time, we had *faikava*, we had talking [with] each other. It seems now that some of the people [are] just staying home, doing their own thing, watching television in their home, listening to radio, without knowing their neighbours. It's like they have been isolated in their own homes. . . . That's one thing that's cutting us smaller and smaller. If we still have our tradition . . . we'll know each other. I think that we are closing away from each other. (Fielakepa 1993.)

From there it is but a small step to speculate that the traditional extended-family gathering may be as rare for future generations of Fijians and Tongans as the (fast-disappearing) traditional Sunday roast dinner shared by grandparents, parents, children, aunts, uncles and cousins is for Australians today.<sup>61</sup>

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inculcated amongst the rural people; then we will be able to adapt to the world that we are now facing. As it is we don't seem to be doing that, because we seem to be closing ourselves in. (Matatolu 1993.)

<sup>59</sup>The effects of television are explored by Bill McKibben in his remarkable book, *The Age of Missing Information*. Television, he argues, works to erode cultural differences around the globe — not only through the messages it transmits, but through the time we spend watching it which we once spent in other ways, learning other things:

Television tells us we have everything in common. We don't. And as we lose our particularity we lose prodigious amounts of information. (McKibben 1992: 40-41.)

McKibben explores the problems lurking behind the benefits which television brings. His thesis is that television causes us to lose touch with nature; he also argues that it causes us to lose touch with *place*. No longer is it important to know how to fit into a particular place in order to survive or live comfortably.

McKibben's book intersects with a substantial literature, from the 1960s onwards, on the role of the electronic media in globalisation. Globalisation has received explicit theoretical attention since the late 1980s in the work of Anthony Giddens and others; see Waters et al. (1994).

<sup>60</sup>See P. Thomas (1990: 126): 'With the availability of battery operated video and generators even the most remote [Pacific island] village had a video player and every village trade store rented video cassettes, most of which originated from the United States and many of which were copied illegally.'

<sup>61</sup>Television has already affected the speech patterns, family gathering time, and meal times of the average Fijian family (Plange and Horsfield, cited in Anyanwu 1995: 61). See also P. Thomas (1987), especially her table (*ibid.*: 20) which graphically illustrates 'the impact of television on Western Samoan evening activities, 4-10 p.m. over a one week period': adults spent 45 percent of their time talking, story-telling or singing when they had no TV, compared to 12 percent with TV; 22 percent of their time visiting friends or engaged in community activities without TV, 4 percent with TV; 10 percent playing cards or weaving mats without TV, 0 percent with; and, in total, 70 percent of their evening hours (or 4.2 hours) watching television when it

While this all-absorbing nature of television is not a feature of print or radio, there is one feature that television does share with its fellow media: it is a prodigious source of information. Often — and especially on television dominated by foreign-made programmes — the information being presented is about how other peoples in other countries live in different ways. Some of it is useful, much of it is not; all of it — somehow — affects its audience. Some of the effects of this increased awareness of difference will be explored in the next chapter.

## Chapter Eight

### **An Awareness of Difference: Postmodernity in Fiji and Tonga**

*I was brought up in the village as a boy. [I've never forgotten when] I first realised [that it was not the whole] world. . . . [I was] looking to the horizon and seeing a ship coming from somewhere, and I thought, "Sa!," what was this? When I saw these people coming I said, "Ah! These people [are] coming from another world!" I thought, "Sa, my island is the only world; there's no other world." I saw these people speaking in the foreign language, and that was my first [moment of] realisation. (Tabu 1993.)*

*If we're so insecure that by simply considering other ways of looking at the world we're going to lose our own sense of ourselves, then I would submit that our own sense of ourselves is probably not worth having. (Maybury-Lewis 1992: 279.)*

Turn the dial of the radio in Fiji, and you will hear what sounds like the broadcasts of half a dozen countries. On a Fijian-language station you might hear the deep mellifluous voice of a male DJ followed by the strummed guitars and harmonies of a local Fijian band putting a new twist on a familiar tune by the Beatles. On an Indian station you might encounter sitars, a full orchestra, and a Hindi singer performing her vocal gymnastics with a popular film's theme song. On FM96 you will hear English spoken by Fijians and Indians, and the single by the latest overseas reggae band to pass through Suva; or you will hear the relayed broadcast of the 'US Weekly Top 40' bringing to Fiji ears the techno dancebeat of London, the grunge guitars of Seattle and the pub rock of Melbourne.

A trip through the Suva airwaves reflects much about Fiji society. At one level, it strikingly illustrates its often-noted 'racial divide'. Most Fijian listeners, for example, would not actually tune into an Indian station except in passing; they would most likely settle on a Fijian station, with the English-language stations as the occasional meeting-place of listeners from all groups in Fiji. Any one listener will thus be exposed to a particular set of influences and ideas different from those that many of his or her neighbours receive.

But at a deeper level this example means something more, for the fact that radio reflects these differences within Fiji society is itself influential. The listener skipping around the dial is made aware of the existence of different voices, different outlooks, different ideas — just as is the newspaper reader at a stand full of papers in three different

languages, or the movie-goer when choosing between the B-grade output of Hollywood and the equivalent from New Delhi. Indeed, from the moment that a child in Fiji realises that just down the road there live people of other races, with different ways of looking at the world than his or her own, that awareness is present.

Practically everywhere, people are having to deal, consciously or unconsciously, with this knowledge of difference. *How* to deal with it is one of the central preoccupations of politics. No matter how grave the problem, conflicts within a single cultural group never seem to attract quite as much attention as conflicts between cultural groups. After all, domestic economic policy might regularly make it to the top of the evening news, but it is the Gulf War, Bosnia, and the Los Angeles riots that we remember.

Knowledge of difference is an obvious potential source of problems where differences of race and attendant differences of culture are concerned, and this can most often be seen in countries with culturally alien neighbours or whose borders contain several distinct cultures, geographically separated or otherwise. Colonies and former colonies are clear cases in point: not only do colonists or colonials stand distinct from those colonised, but a colony may have been an arbitrary amalgamation of neighbouring yet distinct cultures in the first place, and may have seen an influx of yet more culturally-distinct people in the form of slaves or indentured labourers. Fiji is a classic case.

Race relations in Fiji have been examined repeatedly in academic studies, and as I have explored elsewhere (Ewins 1992b) were widely scrutinised following the 1987 coup. I have avoided covering that ground again,<sup>1</sup> except where it has been pertinent to matters of Fijian tradition; but the issue is never far from any discussion of Fiji, and I believe that as the main factor in forming an 'awareness of difference' among Fijians it has a profound influence upon matters which on the surface would appear to be purely Fijian concerns. Race, however, is only one factor forming this 'awareness of difference', and it is some of the less obvious factors that I have examined here in more detail — partly to show how many and varied are the forces affecting the worldviews of Fijians. Of course, this is also a study of Tonga, where race is hardly an issue, and so these other factors are important to facilitate a ready comparison of the two countries.

But here I encounter a 'chicken or the egg' question: 'Which came first — the elimination of racial questions in order to compare Fiji and Tonga, or a comparison of Fiji and Tonga to see what in Fiji is not a matter of race?' One reason for my inclusion of Tonga in this study was that being the only country in the Pacific which was never formally colonised it is, as a result, relatively culturally homogeneous. (The qualifying term 'relatively' is clearly necessary.) Comparing Fiji and Tonga helps to draw out the subtler differences — and the knowledge of those differences — within both societies:

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<sup>1</sup>There is a large and readily-accessible literature dealing with issues of race in Fiji; for a recent article offering a new perspective, see Mishra (1993).

the differences other than those which can be attributed to the presence of many races. Specifically, I have been interested in differences among Fijians (and in Tonga, among Tongans) themselves. It is these differences, far more than racial ones, which fuel the tension between, as it is often expressed, 'tradition and modernity'.

There is, as it happens, a burgeoning field of theory in the humanities and the social sciences which is directly concerned with the presence and consequences of an 'awareness of difference': postmodernism. Aspects of postmodernist theory show a way out of some of the difficulties met by the 'politics of tradition' debate and illuminate its wider significance for political and social science. Even some of those I interviewed offered ideas which could be construed as postmodernist. Before I can illustrate these points, however, it is necessary to take a step sideways and explain what is meant by 'postmodernism'.

### What is Postmodernism?

Explaining postmodernism is no easy task. The first hurdles postmodernists must overcome in communicating their ideas to the uninitiated are either ignorance or skepticism, and both are understandable reactions to what can seem an abstruse debate.<sup>2</sup> Postmodernism as a concept first arose in the fields of art and architecture, but has also been taken up by philosophers, sociologists, and literary theorists. Apart from the interest shown by some international relations theorists, it appears to be having a lesser impact on political science.<sup>3</sup> One political theorist, for example, considers the American brand of postmodernism to be 'militantly and arrogantly unworldly, not to say profoundly apolitical or antipolitical' (Ball 1991: 69).

One possible reason for such attitudes is that one of the attractions of political science is its concern with practical matters.<sup>4</sup> Its *raison d'être* is the explanation of past and present political events, which ensures that even its theoretical extremes are grounded in the familiar. Consequently, perhaps, the language of political science is somewhat less impenetrable than the language of some more abstract fields. Certainly political science has its own jargon, as does any academic area, but as that jargon is largely drawn from the field of politics almost any educated reader with an interest in current affairs can expect to have an idea of its meaning (that idea may be wrong, but it is at least a starting point). The same cannot be said for every social science.

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<sup>2</sup>One particularly harsh critic averred that 'this is the kind of philosophy that could give bullshit a bad name' (John Searle, quoted in Ball 1991: 69).

<sup>3</sup>Much has been written about postmodernism's implications for politics, but most of it has not been written by political scientists.

<sup>4</sup>But also recall, importantly, political science's long-standing alignment with the 'relentless march of a truly universal Western modernity', as noted in Chapter Two (Gledhill 1994: 10).

All academics venturing outside their fields must come to terms with different ways of using language; but political scientists encountering, say, sociology are perhaps at a disadvantage compared with sociologists encountering political science. Furthermore, political scientists carry a skepticism (born of an awareness of the Machiavellian machinations of politics that are at work against idealists the world over) which might make them less receptive to the more outlandish ideas of another field — particularly when those ideas are expressed in what might charitably be labelled 'difficult' language.

Postmodernists by and large write in the most difficult language of all. Partly this stems from the practice of their particular academic fields; partly it is probably because many of postmodernism's seminal thinkers have written in French and their works are known to non-French-speakers only through translations (which can rarely match the clarity of the original). Whatever the reason, postmodernism is a field ripe for parody, as in this piece by professed postmodernist Stephen Katz:

Let's imagine you want to say something like, "We should listen to the views of people outside of Western society in order to learn about the cultural biases that affect us". This is honest but dull. Take the word "views". Postmodernspeak would change that to "voices", or better, "vocalities", or even better, "multivocalities"... The final statement should say, "We should listen to the intertextual, multivocalities of postcolonial others outside of Western culture in order to learn about the phallogocentric biases that mediate our identities". Now you're talking postmodern! (Katz n.d.)<sup>5</sup>

Even those writing in a more serious vein about postmodernism recognise the difficulty, which extends to the very meaning of the word:

Any reference to the term 'postmodernism' immediately exposes one to the risk of being accused of jumping on a bandwagon, of perpetuating a rather shallow and meaningless intellectual fad... The term is at once fashionable yet irritatingly elusive to define. (Featherstone 1988: 195.)

Part of postmodernism's reputation for 'shallowness' no doubt results from the experience of skeptical readers who have managed to disentangle a particular writer's knots of polysyllabic buzzwords only to be left with a rather ordinary string of ideas. But this criticism cannot be justly levelled at everyone who writes on postmodernism. There are some powerful ideas at its core; the problem is determining what they are, and reaching some kind of consensus about them. Perhaps more difficult is then protecting those ideas from misinterpretation. By way of introducing those ideas here, I can do no better than to offer my own initial misinterpretations.

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<sup>5</sup>Even closer to the bone is this subsequent instruction in the same article to budding postmodernist writers: 'Now, go to column C and grab a few names whose work everyone will agree is important and hardly anyone has had the time or the inclination to read. Continental European theorists are best when in doubt.'

My initial understanding of postmodernism, reached after various reading-group discussions early on as a postgraduate, was that postmodernists were saying 'there is no truth, so we should give up looking for it'; that is, let the world become a breeding ground for alternative interpretations of all things. As someone then grappling with human rights theory (in search of justifications for the universality of human rights), the thought that there are no universal truths — along with an aversion to the writing style of most postmodernists — was enough to put me off. The postmodern road, I believed, led to cultural relativism and the blithe acceptance of any number of atrocities in other countries as simply the inevitable result of 'different systems of belief'. If there is no truth for us to find, one would think, then the same should hold for morality. Take that to its extremes and one can take no action against wrong behaviour, because one can never know what is right or wrong:

Truth, [the realist] says, is the regulative principle which saves us from theoretical (and ultimately moral) chaos. Without its constraints 'anything goes', and theory collapses into gibberish. (Tomlinson 1989: 51.)

I was certainly not the first to experience such difficulties; and with such misgivings, I temporarily abandoned postmodernism. It took that rarest and most valuable of books, a lucid and witty overview, to bring me back to it: the colourfully-titled *Reality Isn't What It Used to Be: Theatrical Politics, Ready-to-Wear Religion, Global Myths, Primitive Chic, and Other Wonders of the Postmodern World* by Walter Truett Anderson (1990). Since then, of course, I have discovered others, and it is the central themes of my personal favourites which I will outline here.

It may seem insufferably subjective to offer 'my personal favourites' out of a wide range of writers as the definitive voices on postmodernism. There is still, however, much disagreement about what the term means, and to address every interpretation would take a dissertation in itself. In the arts, for example, postmodernism has been associated with

the effacement of the boundary between art and everyday life; the collapse of the hierarchical distinction between high and mass/popular culture; a stylistic promiscuity favouring eclecticism and the mixing of codes; parody, pastiche, irony, playfulness and the celebration of the surface 'depthlessness' of culture (Featherstone 1988: 203)

— little of which would seem (without deeper explanation and exploration) to have much to do with politics. One could further add (in a postmodernist vein) that a subjective approach is merely a recognition that true objectivity is impossible in any case. More to the point, I am not offering a definitive account of postmodernism (were such a thing possible). I am merely attempting to explain those ideas within postmodernist writing which I have found useful in this study, in the hope that others might find them similarly useful. I begin with Anderson.

Anderson's book is, as its title implies, wide-ranging; but at its heart is a neat distinction between the postmodern, the modern, and the premodern which clarifies much postmodernist debate. As I have said, there is no general agreement about what the term 'postmodern' means, and critics argue that what meaning it has is easily encompassed by the concept of modernism, making 'postmodernism' therefore redundant. But there is a change occurring in people's thinking, argues Anderson, as significant as the change that occurred at the transition from (as some have called it) 'tradition to modernity'. That change has everything to do with people's 'worldview' — their particular personal perceptions of how the world is — and more specifically, with their awareness (or lack of awareness) of what Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann called 'the social construction of reality' (Berger and Luckmann 1967).

To talk of 'the social construction of reality' is simply to state that everything I 'know' is affected by the society (and the time and the place) in which I live. My (society-derived) 'truth' is not *the* Truth, and therefore my 'reality' bears little resemblance to actual Reality. One may object that the trees and the grass seem real enough (and be led off on a philosophical tangent in arguing about the reality of the physical world), but that is to miss the point that the way we look at them is affected by our personal backgrounds. A 19th century Japanese woodcut depicts trees in a far different way than a contemporary English landscape painting. It also overlooks the more pertinent point that much of our 'reality' is grounded in social convention — that is, in tradition — rather than the physical world. We wear the clothes we wear and eat the food we eat because of how things are done in our society. To go against such traditions is to oppose that 'reality', and usually meets with overt or subtle opposition from others in return (one need only think of the raised eyebrows encountered in Western society by a professed nudist or vegetarian). A postmodern worldview, says Anderson, entails an awareness of this social construction of reality (for which, I would add, an 'awareness of difference' is the precursor).

One might object here that unarguably modern peoples, such as Victorian-era Britons, were aware that other peoples did things differently, so why not consider them postmodern? The answer is that while they were aware of differences between societies' versions of reality they basically believed that their version was the correct one: Victorian society had constructed Reality, and everyone else had got it wrong.<sup>6</sup> This is a simplistic depiction of a complex situation, to be sure, but one need only read older works of, say,

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<sup>6</sup>As Immanuel Wallerstein has written,

*Pax Britannica* ensured the intellectual triumph of the belief in universals — universals that could be circumscribed and tested, theorems that were defined as laws, realities that became imperatives. Just as British power and capitalist enterprise came to pervade the furthest corners of the world, so did the presumptions about universal truths come to pervade and define our consciousnesses, our cosmologies, our moralities, our scientific efforts. (Wallerstein 1978: 1-2.)



anthropology to find example after example of contrasts being made between the 'normal', the 'modern', the 'civilised' (namely, the anthropologists' societies) and the 'abnormal', the 'primitive', and the 'uncivilised' (the societies being studied).

The Victorians — and here I am speaking broadly — did not appreciate that theirs was as much a social construction of reality as any other society's, and therefore no more 'right' or 'wrong'. Late 20th century Western society, however, could be said to be reaching that awareness, though by no means completely or in every member of our society.

Anderson uses these different levels of awareness to delineate the differences between premodern, modern, and postmodern worldviews. The premodern individual is one with no awareness that there are different ways of doing things, different conceptions of reality, than his or her own. One might picture this individual as the stereotypical denizen of the Amazon Jungle who has 'never heard of white men'. It is unlikely that there are many, if any, premodern people left in the world today (at least above the age of five).

Once that awareness of difference is reached, the individual has taken an irreversible step; 'even to learn that [money] exists is to transform your consciousness, to take a step toward modernism that you can never reverse' (Anderson 1990: 23). For the West, then, the modern age could be dated to around the times of Marco Polo or Columbus — to our first contact with the non-European world. And for people in the Pacific, modernism arrived not with cars and television but in the form of Tasman, Cook, and other explorers who first brought the news of the existence of entirely different peoples to the islands.

But even if one accepts difference — and even embraces some different ways of doing things — one is not yet necessarily postmodern, as the example of the Victorians shows. The modernist worldview, such as that of the Victorians, entails a belief in the correctness, the 'rightness', of one's own ways or own agenda. That agenda need not be intended to subvert all who oppose it: indeed, the attraction of modernist agendas is that they can be 'narratives of emancipation' which

point forwards to a future state, unlike the backward-looking narratives (the myths and religions) which legitimize traditional societies. And the future state — the Idea to be realized (freedom, enlightenment, socialism, prosperity or whatever) — has "legitimizing value" because it is universal. The narratives of modernity are cosmopolitan, in the Kantian sense: they are promises made to all mankind. (Scruton 1992: 3.)

But as none of us can hope to be the final arbiter of the truth, of right and wrong, those promises have turned sour. They 'can no longer perform their legitimizing function', observes Scruton, who adds, 'thank God for that', for the modernist worldview has given us Nazism, Fascism and Communism, and even the relatively 'benign' (at least for those not on the receiving end of a gunboat) British Imperialism.

What, then, is postmodernism? To continue with Anderson's typology, it is the worldview which acknowledges difference and the social construction of reality, and accepts that one construction — one's own, or anyone else's — cannot be exalted over another on the grounds that it is 'right' or 'true'.

This can be unsettling to consider. But the point many postmodernists are trying to make is that this unsettling moment of realisation holds limitless possibilities. One of those possibilities is that having acknowledged that our own reality is a social construction, we might choose to keep it:

A social construction of reality does not have to be discarded the moment one has recognized that that is what it is. . . . The belief, tradition, value, religion, norm, or Constitution that stands revealed as nothing more than a social construct may still be a very useful item. (Anderson 1990: 259.)

The point is that we are now consciously *choosing* where before we were not. Anderson sums this up perfectly:

We are in a world of many cultures, and in such a world any identity — including that of "natural" peoples [i.e. distinct groups such as Basques, Tamils, Japanese] — involves choice and creation. Many choices can be made, but they are all choices. And — this may be the hardest lesson of all for protectors of "indigenous peoples" to learn — you do not choose to be natural. You do not choose to be premodern. If you choose, you are at least modern. If you know you are choosing, you are postmodern. (*Ibid.*: 112-133.)

Again, I must stress that this is only one way of looking at postmodernism. It contrasts significantly with the following statements by seminal postmodernist Jean-François Lyotard:

Modernity, in whatever age it appears, cannot exist without a shattering of belief and without discovery of the "lack of reality" of reality, together with the invention of other realities (Lyotard 1984: 77).

What, then, is the postmodern? . . . It is undoubtedly a part of the modern. . . . A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant. (*Ibid.*: 79.)

Others also speak of postmodernism as a 'modern project'; some therefore suggest that it is as redundant an '-ism' as the other '-isms' it seeks to overthrow. Neither that conception nor Lyotard's 'nascent state of modernism' seems particularly useful to me. By conflating modernism and postmodernism one conflates choice (between social constructions of reality) with *conscious* choice, and awareness of difference with *acceptance* of difference. In doing so, one loses a most useful distinction and a valuable tool for analysis and explanation, and heads towards the ghetto of 'meaninglessness' previously noted. A preferable conception is that of sociologist Zygmunt Bauman:

Postmodernity may be conceived of as modernity conscious of its true nature — *modernity for itself*. The most conspicuous features of the postmodern

condition: institutionalized pluralism, variety, contingency and ambivalence — have all been turned out by modern society in ever increasing volumes; yet they were seen as signs of failure rather than success, as evidence of the insufficiency of efforts so far, at a time when the institutions of modernity, faithfully replicated by the modern mentality, struggled for *universality, homogeneity, monotony* and *clarity*. (Bauman 1992: 187-188.)

Anderson's typology is my preferred doorway into the postmodern debate. Having opened the door, I will continue through it in the company of some other writers to explore some of the deeper implications of postmodernism.

### Truth, truth, and 'truth'

Hilary Lawson also recognises that the term 'postmodernism' is 'in danger of becoming a vacuous epithet'; but, she says,

At its philosophical core post-modernism is an attack on truth. It is an attack that originates not so much in an awareness of alternative perspectives as in a critique of the very possibility of objectivity. From a post-modern perspective the central characteristic of modernism, in a philosophical sense, is not that truth is assumed to have been attained, but that objective truth is assumed to be in principle attainable. (H. Lawson 1989: xi.)

Lawson compares postmodernism, which has largely been 'associated with concerns about language and the relationships between language, text, meaning and reality', with the relativist tradition of the social sciences:

While relativism can be described as the view that truth is paradigm-dependent, post-modernism might be described as the view that meaning is undecidable and therefore truth unattainable. (*Ibid.*: xii.)

The apparent similarity between the two positions has caused much confusion in many pragmatic social scientists (and I include my past self here) who reject the former and therefore think they must reject the latter.<sup>7</sup> Postmodernist theory's concern with language and meaning, however, offers social scientists the opportunity to reinterpret relativism. One might say that relativism is popularly conceived as the argument that truth is culturally defined. Extrapolating from this, the critic might attack its implication that anyone's version of the truth is as good as anyone else's. That is nonsense, one might say: you cannot have two contradictory versions of the truth which are both valid. Maybe we do not know the truth yet, but there is only one truth.<sup>8</sup>

The postmodern response to this is to examine the language being used and identify the difficulties of meaning involved. One can perfectly well argue that 'truth' is culturally

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<sup>7</sup>See Stephanie Lawson (1993d: note 12), who says that 'a surrender to relativism means that nothing can be said at all', and notes postmodernism's 'relativistic implications'.

<sup>8</sup>For an example of such an argument, see Charlesworth (1987: 181.)

defined (or paradigm-dependent), but one cannot say the same for Truth. The use of quotation marks and capitalisation may seem like an affectation, but it is when they are dropped that confusion arises: 'truth' is determined by our social construction of reality; Truth is the undefined and undefinable universal which only God or Nature can know (if it can ever be truly known).

This is roughly the response of Richard Rorty, a prominent pragmatist philosopher,<sup>9</sup> to critics who accuse him of relativism. As he argues,

We cannot, I think, imagine a moment at which the human race could settle back and say, 'Well, now that we've finally arrived at the Truth we can relax.' (Rorty 1989b: 14.)

Therefore we should give up the hope that we can ever know the Truth. We should accept that we will never have the 'final word':

We should think of 'true' as a word which applies to those beliefs upon which we are able to agree, as roughly synonymous with 'justified'. To say that beliefs can be agreed upon without being true is . . . merely to say that somebody might come up with a better idea. (*Ibid.*)

I have not yet addressed all the objections one might have to what still seems a relativist position. But before moving on I wish to digress for a while to further discuss the question of truth and its relation to constructed reality, and to hint at the extent to which these are questions facing *everyone* (not merely postmodernist theorists) today; in other words, to offer some evidence that we really are moving from a modern worldview to a postmodern one.

When first absorbing the ideas which writers on postmodernism were attempting to impart, I realised that I had encountered them before. My first unconscious encounters with postmodernist concepts occurred while reading science fiction (or SF). All SF is postmodern, in that it requires a suspension of disbelief on the reader's part; by presenting alternative 'truths' about fictional futures it helps to erode the idea that there is only one Truth for us to know. One critical theorist has labelled SF 'postmodernism's noncanonized or "low art" double' (McHale, quoted in Anderson 1990: 101).

But while I would class all SF as postmodern, only some is postmodernist (whether self-consciously or not). In the 1960s a 'new wave' of writers departed from the familiar SF territory of robots and spaceships to explore what one might call 'humanities-based' areas such as psychology and politics. Writers exploring how it would feel to be telepathic, the effects of mind-altering drugs or psychotherapy on

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<sup>9</sup>Rorty equivocates about applying the description 'postmodernist' to himself, but others have identified him as such, and his ideas are clearly part of the picture of postmodernism I am painting.

perception, and the more extreme implications of time travel, all directly or indirectly addressed the question 'What is truth?'<sup>10</sup>

The example of SF illustrates some of the central ideas of postmodernism — and the growing influence of those ideas in Western (and through that, the world's) culture through media far more influential than the academic book or journal article. I could as easily point to any number of postmodern influences we might encounter (surrealist art, for example, or the surrealist humour of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*), which is one of the points postmodernists are making: references to the eclecticism of Western culture, the prevalence of pastiche and parody, the surfeit of images and ideas, are a hallmark of writing on postmodernism.

Certain themes of SF illuminate some concerns of postmodernity particularly well. Stories about time-travel have long been a favourite with SF readers and authors. From them has arisen the 'alternative universe' sub-genre, where worlds are described that differ substantially from our own because of alternative outcomes at crucial turning-points in history (for example, the Axis powers winning World War II). In suspending one's disbelief for the duration of the tale, the reader embraces the idea that our entire world as it exists today is contingent on a vast number of random outcomes and choices made throughout history. Had one of those outcomes or choices been different, 'reality' might have been completely different, and with it perhaps even what we think of as 'truth'. This is, of course, something one may find oneself thinking about one's own life and how it might have been different; but rarely do we consider that a difference in our personal history could affect humankind's ideas about truth. But why not? If other people have shaped history and the development of ideas, why not ourselves, given some alternative turn of events? And what if a particular person, such as a Newton, an Einstein, a Hitler, had not turned out to be as influential as they were? Would someone else have filled their place? Probably not precisely; maybe not at all. It is sobering to consider how different history might have been had some particular idea never been popularised. Reality, after all, is not the same for us as it was for those who lived before

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<sup>10</sup>For example, perhaps the most daring (and postmodernist) of all such writers was Philip K. Dick (1928-1982) (on whose work and life, see Sutin (1991)). Dick's writing creates in the reader an unsettling lack of certainty about what 'truth' applies in the world being described. In his stories, human heroes turn out to be androids, events turn out to be drug-induced fantasies, time runs backwards or randomly. In one novel, *A Scanner Darkly* (1977), a narcotics agent gradually realises he has been spying on himself. In another, *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), people living in a world in which the Axis powers won the Second World War secretly pass around a novel describing a world in which the Allies won — which they gradually realise is the truth. As Dick's reputation grew before and after his death, his work inspired a new generation of writers who sought to describe the implications of computer technology for our concepts of reality; their fictional creations of 'cyberspace' and 'virtual reality' have in turn been partially realised by computer scientists. Dick's work also inspired two landmark SF films of the 1980s, Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) and Paul Verhoeven's *Total Recall* (1990), both of which kept the viewer guessing about the 'truth' throughout.

communism or the atomic bomb; each has helped shape the way we all view the world.<sup>11</sup> It is quite possible, therefore, that without the presence of some crucial element of our culture's knowledge our concept of 'truth' would have taken a radically different turn. The human race might have carried on through history never 'knowing' what it now 'knows'; some other 'truth' would have been found.

Consider another favourite trapping of SF, that of telepathy. Being able to read another person's thoughts would profoundly change one's outlook, and hence one's entire worldview. Perhaps the thought of telepathy might seem far-fetched, but would differences in outlook not be similarly profound between the sighted and the blind, the hearing and the deaf? And from there, might one not begin to ponder the differences in outlook between any two human beings?

When we turn from fiction to the world around us, we can see everywhere differences in outlook as profound as any of these. Hundreds of millions of people in India believe in reincarnation. The thought that one's soul lives again and again would have a powerful influence on one's behaviour; indeed, it may make one do things which from a Christian viewpoint would seem inexplicable. For Hindus, reincarnation is the 'truth'.

'There is nothing to be said about truth,' says Rorty, 'save that each of us will commend as true those beliefs which he or she finds good to believe' (Rorty 1989b: 11). That is, 'truth' is simply what we believe; and beliefs can and do change — both an individual's beliefs, and a culture's. James Lovelock, formulator of the Gaia hypothesis that the Earth is a living organism (itself an idea bound to upset beliefs), gave the Moon landing of 21 July 1969 as one such cause of profound change:

For our Irish neighbors on the Beara Peninsula, it was a mindquake that shook the foundations of their belief. . . . To many . . . Heaven was still simply up there in the sky and Hell beneath their feet. Their faith was not perturbed by the news of the men walking on the Moon, but their religious belief seemed to be undergoing an internal reorganization. (Lovelock 1990: 183-184.)

Another science writer has pointed to an even more profound change in our ideas which is still underway:

I believe that, without recognizing it, we have already stepped over the threshold: . . . that we are at the end of nature. . . . When I say 'nature', I

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<sup>11</sup>One chilling anecdote of contingency concerns the atomic bombing of Japan in August 1945. Hiroshima was not at the top of the original short-list of cities deemed suitable for bombing; the primary target was the old capital of Kyoto. Kyoto was removed from consideration only when Secretary of War Henry Stimson, who happened to have visited the city before the war, learned of its inclusion and rejected it. Thus one of the most beautiful cities of the world was spared, and Hiroshima and Nagasaki were doomed. (Thomas and Morgan-Witts 1978: 215.)

mean a certain set of human ideas about the world and our place in it. . . . More and more frequently [changes in the reality around us] will clash with our perceptions, until, finally, our mistaken sense of nature as eternal and separate will be washed away and we will see all too clearly what we have done. (McKibben 1990: 7.)

If the age-old 'truth' that our familiar natural surroundings are eternal is under threat, then what truth is safe?

The truth as we know it is not a jigsaw puzzle which we are gradually piecing together in order to see the whole. It is not even an infinite jigsaw puzzle which we are forever extending at its edges. 'Truth' is a collage which we are constantly in the process of creating, pasting new snippets over old, gradually changing the picture from one to another. The general form remains familiar, perhaps, while the details change; but only while we are happy with that form. At various times we might be seized with an impulse to whitewash over parts of our previous work and start afresh.

Who is the 'we' I am talking about? At one level, 'we' is all of us: the human race. At another, it is 'we, the people' of whichever society. But at the most basic level, it is 'we' as individuals. Our personal concept of 'truth' changes throughout our lives in this very way.

Just because our 'truth' changes does not necessarily mean that *the* Truth changes. One might imagine the Truth as the completed jigsaw puzzle we are trying to make our 'truth' collage resemble. Many of us take comfort in the belief that there is such a Truth too enormous for us to know, and perhaps we take further comfort in believing that somewhere there exists someone (such as God) who does know it. Even if we are not religious, we might hope that every now and then, if we are lucky, we can gain some small insight into some small part of the Truth.

Pragmatists such as Rorty do not say that there is no such Truth. What they argue is that as we cannot know if there is (and even if there is, we cannot know what it is), we may as well not worry about it and just go about our business:

We pragmatists drop the idea that enquiry is destined to converge to a single point — that Truth is 'out there' waiting for human beings to arrive at it (Rorty 1989b: 13).

One may wish to protest at that prescription, but in attempting to find the words to do so one becomes caught in the very net of language which postmodernists say holds us trapped without hope of escape. There *is* a Truth, I may think. But how can I truly know that there is an unknowable Truth? I cannot; but I *believe* that there is a Truth — or rather, at this moment (for by now I feel the ground slipping from under my feet), I *hope* that there is — and surely discovering it is the noblest goal of enquiry?

But that goal is only noble if we have any hope of discovering the Truth, and pragmatists recognise that we do not. We can only construct 'truth'. We would be fooling ourselves to think that 'truth' is or can be Truth. Even if we were able to know some minute part of the whole Truth, wouldn't that be as useless as knowing only a few

random notes of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony when it comes to envisaging the whole? Better, surely, to invent a tune of our own.

### **'But What About Hitler?'**

What of critics who charge that postmodernism is little better than relativism? If we abandon the search for Truth, are we not abandoning any hope of finding the intellectual weapons for fighting the Hitlers and Pol Pots of the world? Here is Rorty's response:

We are told that we have defined 'true' as 'satisfies the standards of our community'. But we pragmatists do not hold this relativist view. We do not infer from 'There is no way to step outside communities to a neutral standpoint' to 'There is no rational way to justify liberal communities over totalitarian communities'. For that inference involves just the notion of 'rationality' as a set of ahistorical principles which pragmatists abjure. What we in fact infer is that there is no way to beat totalitarians in argument by appealing to shared common premises, and no point in pretending that a common human nature makes the totalitarians unconsciously hold such premises. (Rorty 1989b: 18.)

Elsewhere Rorty argues that there is no 'neutral ground on which to stand and argue that either torture or kindness are preferable to the other' (Rorty 1989a: 173). This may seem an abhorrent position, but all it really means is that we are unlikely to convince a torturer to stop torturing by arguing that it is cruel and wrong. He already knows it is cruel; he may even believe it is wrong. To get him to stop we must go further. We might try arguments other than those based on our beliefs about what is 'true'; we might try to make him bow to the weight of public opinion; we might have to resort to force. They are less attractive options, but they certainly sound much more like the way our world works.

If the search for Truth is not our goal of enquiry, then what is? 'In any sphere of culture', says Rorty, it is

the attainment of an appropriate mixture of unforced agreement with tolerant disagreement (where what counts as appropriate is determined, within that sphere, by trial and error). (Rorty 1989b: 17.)

Again, not as inspiring as the search for Truth, but at least a goal towards which we can realistically hope to make some progress.

Essentially, Rorty's is an argument for the continuation of debate by people who have come to recognise that the debate will not — cannot — have an end. This has led at least one critic to set Rorty apart from postmodernists, arguing against him that

the aim is not the urbane continuation of cultural conversation, but the exhilarating and dangerous task of post-modernity, the telling of new stories, the invention of new worlds (Tomlinson 1989: 56).



This radical and creative agenda espoused by some postmodernists is, it seems to me, essential if we are to avoid the stagnation that might result from an awareness that Truth is unattainable. 'If Truth is unknowable,' we might reason, 'then what is there that is worth knowing? We may as well give up looking.' But all that would achieve is the preservation of the status quo — the preservation of everything built up over the ages by now-discredited reasoning. To refuse to exercise reason to change that status quo because we know that any reasoning will inevitably be found to be somehow flawed seems, to put it bluntly, pathetic. Or, as Hilary Lawson more charitably puts it, 'ironic':

The irony is that while at times relativist or post-modern attacks on truth are challenged for threatening to undermine all existing institutions, they are at other times criticized for being essentially conservative. . . . The two apparently contradictory tendencies towards anarchy and towards conservatism are found in both relativism and post-modernism. They threaten anarchy by removing the stability of reality and truth, but they endorse conservatism by appealing to the only thing that is left, namely, what we already have. . . . Without goals, without direction, is it not easiest to stay where we are? (H. Lawson 1989: xxvi.)

The answer to this last rhetorical question is of course 'yes' (or 'maybe' — for other forces may make 'where we are' an increasingly uncomfortable place to be); but then, who said enquiry (or life) would be easy? To be sure, the way ahead shown by postmodernity is 'deeply unclear', and as a result 'some will argue that the position is simply untenable and the only alternative is a retreat to realism' (*ibid.*: xxviii). Those people will, it can safely be said, always find allies; there will always be realists, if only because new people are always being born and it takes time for an individual to reach a postmodern state of awareness (just as it takes time for cultures to do so). But those who reach that awareness and turn back to realism could be said to be making the most lamentable 'conscious choice' of all.

To restate this discussion of postmodernism before discussing its relevance to the subject of tradition in Fiji and Tonga: I believe that postmodernism is a useful way of explaining this particular moment in history, a moment which is being seen by many as marking the end of one way of thinking and the beginning of another. We are beginning to recognise (on a scale we previously did not) that any one person's or group's conception of the truth is simply that, a conception, and that even if there is some cosmic Truth 'out there' we can never know it simply because of the limitations of being who we are. We will never know what it is like to be a tree, or a squirrel, or a rock, or the sun. And I will never know what it is like to be Irish, or black, or a woman, or a ten-year-old heroin addict.<sup>12</sup> If we extend that recognition of our personal limitations to a world-wide

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<sup>12</sup>For an argument against such relativistic points as this, see Bloch (1977: 283).

scale we end up with postmodernity; and, if we follow it through, we end our attempts to convince everyone possible to think in only one way — 'our' way (whoever 'we' are).

This can be disturbing at first when we are wondering what to do next. But I believe the task before us is a clear one, and on-going, never-ending. It is that having recognised our differences we stop trying to erase them and to replace everyone else's 'reality' with our own, and instead search for what we have in common at each level of family, neighbourhood, nation, and human race, trying to determine what would reasonably constitute our common interests and values at each level. Most importantly of all, we must be more accepting if we find less in common between us than we had expected or wished — because what we do find will provide far more solid foundations for a peaceful and harmonious life than the matters we are forever arguing about.

So while I am a postmodernist — an ex-realist — who has given up the search for the Truth, I have not given up the search for the 'truth'. The recognition that one can only ever achieve a version of 'truth' rather than the Truth does not mean one should abandon that search. All those personal quests taken together might reveal patterns and points of consistent agreement which tell everyone something about the 'truth' as human beings see it — which, while it will be nothing like the Truth, might at least be useful to human beings, and might give us some indication of how we should behave.<sup>13</sup>

We have already been doing this in many important areas where different cultures come into contact. Since World War II, the countries of the world have slowly but surely been reaching some sort of agreement about what constitutes a reasonable canon of 'universal' human rights. The question of whether they can truly be called 'universal' — one which held my attention for some time — is, seen through pragmatic postmodernist eyes, beside the point. The point is not whether we agree that they are universal, but whether we agree to observe and respect them — and we can do that even if we are convinced they are *not* universal. 'Rights' are as much an invention as any other 'truth'. But that still makes them in some way — and in an important way — true.

## Tradition, Postmodernity, and Postmodern Traditionalists

Having wandered like Theseus around this particular labyrinth, I now follow my trailed string back to the entrance. How does postmodernism relate to the questions

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<sup>13</sup>Something of the flavour of this imperative is captured in Douglas Kellner's critique of Lyotard:

Lyotard is . . . inconsistent in calling for a plurality and heterogeneity of language games, and then excluding from his kingdom of discourse those grand narratives which he suggests have illicitly monopolized the discussion and proffered illegitimate claims in favour of their privilege. One is tempted to counter Lyotard's move here with an injunction to 'let a thousand narratives bloom' — though one would need to sort out some differences between those narratives, and perhaps . . . distinguish between better and worse narratives. (Kellner 1988: 254.)

about tradition discussed in previous chapters, and to the people of Fiji and Tonga? Its implications should already have been intimated, if not made clear.

The most important of these is that the familiar description of the situation in Fiji, Tonga, and other Pacific countries as one of 'tradition versus modernity' is not only apt to cause confusion about the meaning of the word 'tradition' (as was discussed in Chapter Two) but is liable to lead to false perceptions about Pacific peoples themselves. Fijians and Tongans are modernists and postmodernists. The modernists, by and large, are the traditionalists, and the postmodernists, or 'modernists-going-on-postmodernists' (for they have not yet learned to describe themselves as postmodernists), are largely those who are educated and more cosmopolitan in outlook.<sup>14</sup>

But, one might object, if traditionalists seek to preserve a premodern past, doesn't that make them premodernists? Previous chapters should have demonstrated just how impossible such a task is, and how few (if any) could be said to desire it. But in any case, a desire for the premodern does not necessarily make one premodern. The difference is, says Anderson, 'the difference between merely living in a tradition and *trying* to live in a tradition' (Anderson 1990: 113):

The contemporary traditionalist may resemble in some outward ways the premodern individual, but the actual lived experiences of the two are utterly dissimilar. Today . . . we have to make choices from a range of different stories — stories about what the universe is like, about who the good guys and the bad guys are, about who *we* are — and also have to make choices about how to make choices. The only thing we lack is the option of not having any choices — although many of us try hard, and with some success, to conceal that from ourselves. (*Ibid.*: 8.)

Fijian tradition, Tongan tradition: these are social constructions of reality. Some Fijians and Tongans think of them as the Truth. They are aware that other peoples do things differently, but their way is to them the only 'right' way. These traditionalists are, in fact, modernists — as modernist as the Victorians were and a large number of Westerners still are.

But just as some of their opponents may, if they *unquestioningly* promote Western practices and beliefs over local alternatives, also be regarded as modernists, not all traditionalists can be considered modernists. The person with perhaps the most postmodern views I encountered in my interviews is also one of the Tongan monarchy's loudest supporters. She objected to suggestions that she could not maintain her Tongan values while adopting various Western ways:

Just because I've gone to university, I'm therefore expected [by Westerners] to be different. I can only be Western or backward Tongan; I'm not allowed

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<sup>14</sup>Nor are Fiji and Tonga unique in this respect where the Pacific is concerned. Keesing and Jolly have given a fine account (1992) of their anthropological encounters with the Solomons and Vanuatu which is filled with postmodern implications. For an extended immersion in the currents and contradictions of contemporary Pacific life as seen by a well-known and idiosyncratic travel-writer, see Theroux (1992).

to be both. I don't think Western society will ever grow out of that kind of misconception. ('E. Fusitu'a 1993.)<sup>15</sup>

And, she insisted, she is not alone in thinking and living this way:

A lot of us are bi-cultural. . . . We have some *palangi* concepts, we have some Tongan concepts. Some of us are honest to say we are both; some of us insist that we want the *palangi* way, and we go by the *palangi* way. That would be a fallacy coming from any of us, because for mere survival in Tonga you cannot go by the *palangi* way only. ('E. Fusitu'a 1993.)

Respect for tradition need not prohibit a postmodern worldview. As Anderson says, one can mentally 'step out' of tradition and choose to step right back in:

When you step out of [a social construction of reality], identify it as such and perhaps even perceive its limitations, you may very likely step back in again. . . . You can recognize that it is merely a tradition and deliberately take it on anyway . . . and do so quite seriously. . . . The stepping in involves both choice and creativity. . . . Every decision to reinhabit a tradition has a bit of the quality of the Scotsmen getting back into their kilts<sup>16</sup> — we have made up something new, even if we don't want to admit it to ourselves or to others. This seems to be a way that people create reality without taking on the stress of consciously doing so. (Anderson 1990: 259-260.)

To tie this to my earlier discussions of the thought-processes underlying tradition, one follows tradition as a rational alternative to having to discover everything for oneself. It is quite possible that in the process one may be following traditions which are not the 'best option'. But it is also possible that when one is, for whatever reason, made to consider the rationale behind a particular tradition, one may conclude that it *is* the best option.

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<sup>15</sup>While some Westerners would undoubtedly object to 'Eseta Fusitu'a's criticism, even some postmodernist writers have demonstrated that they possess just such blinkered views where non-Western cultures are concerned. Certain key postmodernist writers stand charged with 'introversion, imperial conceit, or smug indifference to others' circumstances' (Ashley and Walker, quoted in Krishna 1993: 404):

Many postmodernist writings commence from a remarkably self-contained and self-referential view of the West and are oblivious to the intimate dialogue between "Western" and "non-Western" economies, societies, and philosophies that underwrite the disenchantment with modernity that characterizes the present epoch. (Krishna 1993: 388.)

Consider Baudrillard, says Sankaran Krishna, with his

facile equation of "traditional" with "primitive" in his discussion of the Third World. . . . Similarly the "Third World" is a largely forgotten area in the writings of a Lyotard [who distinguishes] between Orient and Occident in terms of "the most highly developed societies" versus the primitive societies. (*Ibid.*: 404.)

This is certainly a problem I have every wish to avoid; and I hope that my use of postmodernist theory in the context of discussing Fijian and Tongan tradition will help to redress it.

<sup>16</sup>Here Anderson is specifically referring to Hugh Trevor-Roper's account of this 'invention of tradition' (described in Chapter Two).

Fijians and Tongans are 'aware of difference' for all the reasons noted previously in this chapter — indeed, throughout this study. They have been so since their first encounters with European explorers and missionaries, and the seafaring nature of many Pacific peoples made them aware long before that. One Fijian, in explaining how Fijians today come to examine their traditions, echoed the concept of an 'awareness of difference':

The appreciation of one's tradition and customs comes about when one goes through the process of acculturation with another race or other races, and sees things which may be permissible under [one's own] customs and traditions [but not another's]. . . . Automatically a comparison is made, and a person then says, "This is good that we have this, and we should always maintain this practice, or this tradition." I see that with Fijians, although much of the Fijian way of life is changing. (Cokaunoto 1993.)

Comparisons by Fijians and Tongans of their own ways with others' are prompted by the same kinds of forces with which this dissertation has been concerned: education, the media, personal experience of other countries and cultures, and the simple presence of others, be they residents of other races, tourists, or visiting researchers asking questions about Fijian and Tongan tradition.<sup>17</sup> Anthropologists have acted as catalysts for an awareness of difference within both their own cultures and the cultures they study:

The anthropologists probably deserve much of the credit — or the blame — for bringing out into clear view the remarkable range of realities that exist in a world that, one would have thought, had but a single reality. The early anthropologists were the true pioneers of the twentieth century, going out in search of culture shock. (Anderson 1990: 37.)<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>I was reminded of my own part in this by the comments of one interviewee:

There are people [e.g., overseas academics] who go around and try to make things change, and never bother themselves if there is trouble after[wards]. . . . [They] come out and [do an] interview [on] radio . . . and it keeps fighting [going] in our newspapers for the rest of the year.

You probably have interviewed quite a lot of people. You have an experience of what they have said. I also have experience . . . I assumed that I knew what you were going to say about that, and the attitude of the people like you, especially [with] white skin — you people who come and try and interview us in the Pacific.

When you get the number of people who come out to the Pacific [with a] special interest, like you are — it amounts to [a] good number of people. A lot of people here . . . question . . . why these people come out, and what's happening on the other side, what's wrong with us. . . . I feel it needs a better dialogue. (Fifita 1993.)

<sup>18</sup>The late Roger Keesing noted how anthropology remains dedicated to the 'pursuit of the exotic Other', causing cultures to be subjected to 'analytical slight of hand':

Anthropological characterizations of Melanesia . . . persistently edit out Christianity, trade stores, labour migration, contemporary politics and cash economy, exoticizing and essentializing 'traditional culture' as it ostensibly survives in hinterland villages. (Keesing 1990: 53.)

Anthropologists step out of their cultures to study other cultures,<sup>19</sup> and the people they study step out by describing their culture to anthropologists. . . . To live in a pluralistic world, and to think about how to live in it, is to be continually required to step out. (Anderson 1990: 256.)

But, as has also been noted, 'awareness of difference' is not the same as acceptance of difference:

Wherever you do find . . . a group of people united by a belief system and a conviction that it is reality itself . . . you will find individuals within that group who have built their lives and fortunes on the belief system and who are going to be deeply interested in maintaining it. The collapse of old ways of belief and the coming into being of a new worldview threaten all existing constructions of reality and all power structures attached to them. . . . It is one of the most psychologically and politically threatening events in all of human history. (*Ibid.*: 26-27.)

Despite the presence of the occasional postmodernist supporter of traditional regimes, the traditionalism seen in Fiji and Tonga has been largely a *modernist* response to *postmodern* pressures. The chiefs in Fiji and the nobles and the royal family in Tonga are precisely those who stand to lose the most if they accept the plurality of ideas and ways of life that typifies postmodern societies. The fact that some people would continue to support and believe in them is little comfort, for that does not constitute the absolute authority they once enjoyed. Thus they must attempt to bring *everyone* back into line by promoting traditionalism. The provocative conclusion one must draw is that they are doomed to fail, because they are no longer dealing with modern societies, let alone premodern ones: Fiji and Tonga are becoming as postmodern as the rest of the world. And now that Fijians and Tongans know that they have choices, some will inevitably choose other than the 'traditionalist line'.

The forces producing postmodern individuals in Fiji and Tonga, and therefore making them 'postmodern societies', are essentially the same forces which are affecting tradition; but they do so in a subtly different way. While tradition often changes (as a result of these forces) in an evolutionary, undirected, and subconscious way, rather than as a result of public deliberation and decision-making, a postmodern outlook requires conscious deliberation. It requires a self-conscious questioning of one's own 'reality'. What promotes postmodernism in an individual (and thereby in society) is an *awareness* of the implications of such forces as education, money, the media — that is, of globalisation — for one's own practices and beliefs.

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<sup>19</sup>Anthropologists have, perhaps consequently, been quicker to embrace postmodernism than political scientists (see, for example, Friedman (1992)), as has been discussed by Keesing (1990: 46-48) and Linnekin (1992: 251-251, 256-257). In this context, Keesing offered a weary reflection on a decade of debate about tradition:

I confess to having become rather tired of the debates about *kastom*, authenticity and cultural nationalist discourses in the Pacific. Our disciplinary inclinations toward liberal angst and fuzzily romantic relativism have been compounded with the rhetoric of postmodernism to the point of self-mystification and auto-paralysis. (Keesing 1993: 587.)

From this one can conclude that the public questioning of tradition and the challenges to it which we see in contemporary Fiji and Tonga constitute the major forces for postmodernism in the two countries — and, no doubt, in many more like them. The realisation that one's tradition is the result of a process of change, and *not* age-old and set in stone, can lead to the realisation that one's reality is socially constructed. An awareness of the invention of tradition can lead to a postmodern awareness.<sup>20</sup>

The study of tradition therefore finds new purpose when tied to a study of postmodernity, and vice versa. Postmodernism, as a field of study, is part of academia's attempts to explain our interconnected global society and how it differs from the collections of unconnected or loosely-connected societies which previously constituted the world. For the study of tradition to become part of those attempts lifts it out of the realms of the inconsequential to which some would see it consigned. At the same time, a study of tradition — the way it works, the thought-processes which underly it, and the forces which affect it — has a concrete connection to the study of human lives and societies which postmodernism, with its abstruse language and nihilistic overtones, may sometimes appear to lack. The study of the forces for change in any human society forms a foundation for discussions of the implications of an awareness of those forces and changes.

No further explanation should be necessary for the incorporation of postmodernism into this discussion of tradition. In the next and final chapter, I will tie that discussion together and draw some conclusions about the place of tradition in the politics of Fiji and Tonga — two countries (out of many) that are simultaneously resisting and embracing the postmodern world of which they are a part.

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<sup>20</sup>Anderson has quoted Trevor-Roper's discussion of Scottish highland traditions (Trevor-Roper 1983) for just this reason (Anderson 1990: 108, 260). Malcolm Waters also notes that 'the search for tradition can contribute to [the] postmodern ambience by mixing the symbolic contents of the past into the present as everyday life becomes an historical and ethnic Disneyland' (Waters et al. 1994: 230). (Unfortunately, Waters falls into a trap similar to the 'tradition versus modernity' dichotomy which ensnared his sociological predecessors when he says:

Tradition is ethnic fundamentalism, an attempt to rediscover the untainted origins of an ethnic group in its history. Tradition involves a search for the certainties of the past in a postmodern world. (*Ibid.*: 230.)

That is not tradition; that is a certain kind of traditionalism, and one which, as this study will have shown, is not as pervasive as is implied by the statement that it *is* 'ethnic fundamentalism'.)





## Chapter Nine

### **Conclusion: Politics as the Negotiation of Change in Tradition**

*You can't stop the tide from coming in and going out. What you have got to do is find a way to maybe slow it down a little. (Havea 1993.)*

*To work against change would be to swim against the tide. (Nayacakalou 1975: 126.)*

Like many doctoral studies, mine has required a peeling away of layer upon layer to expose the heart of the matter requiring investigation.<sup>1</sup> In such a process much is lost: I have been unable to include much here about the day-to-day political events in Fiji and Tonga during the past decade. From the outset, however, it was clear to me that such a record of events was not the most pressing need. Necessary, rather, were a comprehensive sample of local contemporary opinions about the 'politics of tradition', and a plausible theory of how tradition works (from which conclusions about tradition's role in politics could be drawn). In this study I have offered both; and in this chapter I will discuss some of the wider implications of tradition in politics for Fiji, Tonga, and political science.

#### **Changes That People Want But Don't Want**

In Chapters Two and Three I proposed that tradition is a system of group knowledge and beliefs about what works, and that it evolves, under external pressure, through a process of selection for that which works — selection in the first instance by individuals, though occasionally by the group.<sup>2</sup> People change their behaviour when their old ways no longer work for them in their new environment. Although cases where the group debates the future of particular traditions may be more publicly visible and therefore more easily studied, the effect of individual decisions is, I believe, the more

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<sup>1</sup>As Paul van der Grijp has said (1993: 10), 'Studying Tongan society is like handling a globe artichoke. First one has to go through the leaflike scales to arrive at the thalamus of the flowering head.'

<sup>2</sup>I would not distinguish too strongly between group selection of traditions and individual selection: ultimately, group decisions are aggregates of the decisions of individuals. Of course, individuals make allowances for the needs of others when making decisions as part of a group, but one could argue that, as social beings, people do that all the time anyway. (The question becomes one of personal autonomy and how fully it may be realised, an important philosophical question too large to explore here.)

profound. The core empirical chapters of this study have underlined this; the greatest impact on Fijian and Tongan tradition is coming from people making individual choices about whether to educate their children in Western or local ways, whether to move to the city and seek paid employment or remain in the village and work the soil, and whether to watch television or talk around the kava bowl.

Consequently, many may find their tradition changing in ways they might not expect or even desire. Why, they might wonder, do people abandon old traditions when they know of them and even value them? The reason is that the transmission of tradition is ultimately based upon practice. Knowledge of a practice does not necessarily require one to act on that knowledge, but the practice and the knowledge associated with it must remain in use for it to remain a living tradition. Consider a practice used by one generation. The next generation learns this practice, but then from another source learns an alternative which fulfils the same purpose but is for whatever reason considered preferable. They know of both practices but begin to use only the new. The succeeding generation sees only the new practice in use, and so learns only that. The new has replaced the old. If the practices are considered traditional, what was once the alternative has become the tradition; the other is, if it is still remembered, the old tradition.

Even people who think of an old way as *the* tradition can help to undermine its traditional status by acting in new ways, as Langi Kaviliku described:

You'll find that lots of people say that they're very proud to be Tongan, but . . . when you visit his home he'll prefer to sit in a chair. He'd prefer to drink a beer rather than kava; prefer to watch videos rather than sit around and chat and drink with his peers or his elders. You also find parents talking about tradition and [how] they're proud of [it], and then, against the tenets of the traditional system, you see their young girl going out to parties by herself. (Kavaliku 1993.)

Where tradition is concerned, words are outweighed by deeds. A Fijian might proudly profess to support the chiefly system, but might also, by acting in a manner which undermines it, contribute to its demise. It does the chief no good if his people say (and even like to think) that they respect his traditional authority if they do not do what he asks; and if the situation persists, his traditional authority disappears.

The possibility always exists that society can bypass the effects of individual decisions by openly discussing its needs as a whole; but even in this case, the resolution of conflict hinges on the support of sufficient numbers of individuals. In any case, society's deliberations are not always directed towards the most important problems it faces. Kavaliku spoke of the need for deliberation at a national level throughout the Pacific about where these island societies were heading, and how such deliberation was scarce:

There will come a stage where you have to decide "this is where I stop", or "this is the Tongan path, and this is the Western path". . . . And I don't think we pay enough attention to it. . . . With our resources limited as they are, one cannot aspire to being . . . fully Western, in terms of material

things. You have to come up with a lifestyle that is comfortable, meets your needs, and you can still be proud of. And that will also be a cultural decision. Many of the Pacific islands, in my view, will have to look at that. While we say that aid is to help us become more self-reliant, thinking that over a period of time we will become independent, in [an economic] sense I'm not too sure whether that's really the picture. There is more and more aid being pushed in towards the Pacific islands. At the same time there are needs elsewhere that have priority over the needs of those in the Pacific. So even that source of material for development will at some time be cut off. So sooner rather than later I think the governments of the Pacific islands, and Tonga in particular, will have to decide just [what] lifestyle we [want]. And that of course will affect greatly one's view of tradition. But I'm afraid that in many ways it's a cry in the wilderness. Not many people believe that our resources are limited, that what we have now will be that same thing that [people] four generations from now will depend on. . . . One of the difficulties is that the majority will say, "Look where you are; why are you now telling us that we can't afford, because of the resources we have, to have cars, refrigerators, videos, et cetera?" (Kavaliku 1993.)

That is indeed one of the difficulties. Change creates difficulties: it is an obvious fact, one which drives many people, as this study has shown, to resist if not all change then at least those specific changes which seem particularly fraught with difficulty (especially for themselves). Yet this can ignore what is often so equally obvious: that not changing can also create difficulties. What is appropriate behaviour today might be entirely inappropriate tomorrow. One cannot hope to isolate certain aspects of social behaviour from every other: while a particular tradition might remain unchanged for centuries, if it begins to change as a result of other uncontrollable forces there might be little that can stop that change. Attempts to do so will bring new difficulties and new costs. And, if those traditions are related to politics, the very realm in which change is negotiated, the difficulties associated with resisting change could be as great as or worse than the difficulties associated with change. In the former case, a loss of popular support and therefore legitimacy for traditional authority figures who resist change could potentially lead to widespread rebellion; in the latter, while change might involve some reduction in legal and political power for traditional authority figures, the possibility of significant unrest or violence might thereby be avoided.

Fijians and Tongans are faced with a choice: to resist the challenges to existing traditional authority, and face the problems created by that resistance (which will themselves contribute to change); or to cease resisting, and face the problems created by change. The only option not available, in the face of the powerful social forces at work, is a lack of problems. So-stated, the options may appear equally bleak. But I believe there is a basic difference between the two sides of this struggle which suggests that the pro-change position is, although not unproblematic, perhaps less problematic. I will outline it here.

## Challenges to Existing Traditional Authority

Ultimate political authority in Fiji and Tonga still rests with leading figures within their traditional hierarchies. To call these countries' political systems 'traditional', however, would be somewhat misleading, even if fairly accurate in its implications of venerability where Tonga is concerned (Fiji, of course, has undergone major upheaval in its political system in the past decade). It would be misleading because it implies that the particular values of these systems are as they are *because* they are traditional. But the UK, the USA, and countless other countries have political systems which are equally traditional (even if all one means by that is 'venerable', which is not really what it means) and yet embrace different values.

The label 'traditional' merely gives us various hints about the public's perception of a particular practice, value, or belief: a tradition is likely to be old rather than new (though not necessarily), and likely to be identified as such against alternatives which may or may not be new; it is generally accepted by the society (though not necessarily universally); it is part of the status quo. The label says little about content, apart from assumptions which people might make about the likelihood that, being older, it is perhaps an old-fashioned, less-sophisticated practice or belief — assumptions which are often unreliable.

To defend Tonga's monarchy or Fiji's Council of Chiefs simply because the people involved are traditional figures of authority therefore misses the point. The debate should be about whether the institutions containing these figures are appropriate for governing these countries today, given the challenges they face. To their credit, some supporters of these institutions do argue along these lines (or at least did so to me) rather than relying on the mantra of 'tradition'. But the mantra is present in much public rhetoric, a presence which serves in both countries to obscure the more important points of the debate.

What are those important points? I began my study with a series of questions about the apparent paradoxes of tradition and of the politics of tradition in the Pacific. Some countries (such as Tonga) appeared to be moving away from traditional political authority, while some (such as Fiji) seemed to be reinforcing it. Chapter Four, followed by Chapters Five to Seven, showed that these paradoxes appear only on the surface: underlying the events of both countries are increasing challenges to traditional authority figures, fuelled by such social forces as education, business, and the media. I have devoted much attention to these social forces in an attempt to help shift the focus in the 'politics of tradition' debate away from history — that is, from descriptions of past political traditions and how they differ from those seen today — and towards the study of what is changing traditions today. This is not because I regard history as unimportant, but because it has been (and is being) well-studied; and not because these contemporary social forces are unrecognised, but because I believe they are not being paid sufficient

attention.<sup>3</sup> The point here is the *emphasis* placed on these forces. Too many theoretical discussions of the 'politics of tradition' seem to treat them as incidental, or perhaps as being too 'obviously important' to be worth dwelling upon. But as my interviewees demonstrated through the relative emphasis *they* placed upon them, these forces should be at the *heart* of any consideration of tradition and politics. Only by examining them in detail does one make the paradoxes of tradition disappear.

Observers today are well aware of the challenges to traditional authority mounting throughout the Pacific. And they know that they are no longer alone in recognising this:

Such comments used to be dismissed as the uninformed and insensitive ravings of unsympathetic outsiders. Now, Fijian leaders and intellectuals themselves are airing doubts about the efficacy of traditional institutions and practices in the modern arena. (Lal 1994: 35.)

But as the recognition of these challenges to tradition becomes widespread, the question then becomes why we see challenges to these particular political traditions of Tonga and Fiji. Why *these* challenges to chiefly rule; why now? The question becomes especially pointed when one considers that the UK's Westminster system of government (as traditional a political system as any) has not been facing such fundamental challenges over the same period, despite the presence of similar social forces.

The answer lies in the nature of these countries' respective political traditions. The traditions of Westminster government have become, over centuries, democratic; figures of political authority in Britain, such as ministers, today draw their authority from democracy. Tongan and Fijian traditional authority figures, however, draw their authority from hierarchy.

The positions of high-ranking members of a hierarchy are sometimes maintained directly or indirectly by force or the threat of force. But, importantly, their positions can also be maintained by their greater access to and control of valuable *information*. The family hierarchy of parents over children occurs not simply because of the threat of violence, which is not always present, but because parents know more than their children about the world and how to operate in it, and children naturally look to the experienced people closest to them — that is, their parents — for guidelines about how to behave. Similarly, in Tonga, the nobility and the monarchy have been identified as 'keepers of tradition' — sources of useful knowledge about how to behave — and gain in status as a result.<sup>4</sup> (As the family is so effective at transmitting traditions, one would therefore expect hereditary hierarchies to be self-reinforcing.)

Some Fijian and Tongan traditions, however, as Chapters Five and Six (in particular) demonstrated, are no longer seen by many as an adequate response to

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<sup>3</sup>But see Robillard (1992b) and Schoeffel (1994).

<sup>4</sup>On traditional knowledge as power, see also Lindstrom (1982; 1990); Meleisea (1980). On Tonga, see S. Lawson (1994: 18-19).

contemporary conditions — conditions created, basically, by the global economy. To that extent, the chiefs' traditions are seen as being irrelevant to their people's lives. The sources of information which *do* equip people for modern conditions are clearly believed to be Western and Western-style education and media, as discussed in Chapters Five and Seven. Authority is therefore shifting from the keepers of old information — the chiefs — to the keepers of the new — the educated (and presumably, once television becomes more widespread, to virtually everybody).<sup>5</sup> Traditional authority figures can attempt to resist that trend by resorting to other bases of authority — that is, the force of law or arms — but such actions entail considerable risks. They can also resist the trend, however, by mastering the new information themselves — which explains the attempts by many chiefs and nobles to educate their children and gain business expertise.<sup>6</sup>

Democratic systems of government, conversely, are able to draw on the knowledge and expertise of potentially any member of society as necessary. The greatest strength of democracy, I believe, is not simply its inherent means of ensuring the everyday accountability of government to the people through regular elections, nor universal suffrage, nor its generally positive implications for the protection of individuals' rights, though all of these are important. Rather, it is that when democracy works properly in these and other respects it obliges the government of the day to keep pace with the changing views and needs of society (and allows it to be replaced if it does not). That does not mean that no other system of government can ever hope to keep pace with change — simply that democracy appears to be the best system which has been found for achieving this. And it says little about what a democratic society's views will be at any one time; they could change radically from one decade to the next. But however society changes, government must be able to accommodate that change if it hopes to minimise conflict.

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<sup>5</sup>As Pamela Thomas has argued,

In most . . . Pacific island societies, knowledge and information and the way they are passed on are closely controlled and linked to power and authority. In all Pacific island societies there are very clear rules that govern communication and the topics that can be discussed between men and women, or between generations. Television provides a situation where all the rules governing activities, communication and access to information are ignored. (P. Thomas 1987: 19.)

Unfortunately, these developments may also have negative implications, at least in the short-term, for women, who today also 'tend to be seen as the keepers of traditional culture in the Pacific Islands' (Schoeffel 1994: 369).

<sup>6</sup>This discussion of challenges to hierarchy also helps to explain why other Fijian and Tongan traditions — in the fields of dance and craft, for example — remain widely popular, even when the chiefly system is being questioned. The bases for these traditions are different. What might present a challenge to particular traditions at a certain time may be no threat to certain other traditions.

Postmodernism, discussed in Chapter Eight, suggests another feature of Fijians' and Tongans' traditions of political authority which creates problems for today's chiefs and nobles. Ultimately they draw their authority from older systems whose structures inhibited public conflicts of opinion. But today Fijians and Tongans live in many different ways. Many have moved away from the old worldviews, including the worldviews which underpin traditional authority in Fiji and Tonga. They cannot turn their minds back to how they were; they cannot unthink their thoughts. Their views are now, for them, the 'correct' ones. That is not to say that the old views are incorrect; they are correct in the eyes of those who hold them. But given the evidence presented here, those who still hold to the old ideas of 'truth', of what is 'the Fijian' or 'the Tongan' way, should no longer assume that all or even most Fijians or Tongans think as they do.

A political system based on only one worldview in cases where many views coexist within society invites dissent and disruption. And the Tongan monarchy, for example, is now one such case. The proposed alternative — a form of representative democracy — is *not* a system necessarily beholden to one worldview. Ideally, it allows government to adapt to, and to balance, society's interests. It would, importantly, by no means spell the end of all influence by people who have been traditionally favoured. But that influence would diminish — as, indeed, it already has in society at large. Government would simply reflect its society more closely.

Why should the Tongan government give up a large share of its power to the people? It can choose not to, but to do so guarantees that dissent will remain. Either way, it cannot choose for dissent to magically disappear. It has a range of options, from the tyrannical to the placatory, to deal with dissent, but while government is its focus it certainly cannot expect dissent to vanish by ignoring it.

Why should the Fiji government stop electorally marginalising urban Fijians and Indians? If it is willing to weather their grumblings of complaint and the disapproval of the outside world, and happy being limited in its actions by the provincialism of the rural electorate and the need to seek the approval of the Council of Chiefs on every matter of importance, then it has no need to change its ways. There is no *need* to take one action over any other, as long as one is prepared to endure the consequences. But the consequences of maintaining the status quo can sometimes be more objectionable than the consequences of change, and to rule out all chances of the latter when the evidence suggests that the former is impractical seems rather shortsighted. It seems particularly shortsighted to keep a political system — a system intended, as far as is possible, to resolve conflict, to negotiate change — geared in such a way that it cannot properly resolve particular types of conflict or negotiate particular changes.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>This brief sketch may appear to some to offer simplistic solutions to complex problems. As I mentioned at the outset, these are problems for the people of Fiji and Tonga to solve, not Western onlookers. I freely admit that during any period of change in tradition, that which is lost may often be something valuable. (The questions must be asked, however, 'Valuable to whom?')

## Why Political Scientists Should Study Tradition

This study has been concerned with more than Fiji and Tonga alone. In many chapters I have explicitly or implicitly tied its discussion of tradition to basic concerns of political science: conflict; change; identity; indigenous rights. The concept of tradition suggests alternative perspectives for a number of difficult political problems (such as determining the strength of systems of hierarchical rule in the contemporary world, as indicated above).

An understanding of tradition offers potential insights into studies of 'evolutionary' versus 'revolutionary' change. While the latter often captures political scientists' attention (as did the 1987 Fiji coup), explaining the former is equally important, particularly in countries (such as Australia) which have experienced little 'revolutionary' change. Tradition offers a foundation for such explanations.<sup>8</sup>

It is also essential to an understanding of nationalism, particularly the brand of ethnic nationalism seen most obviously in Eastern Europe since 1989:

Genealogy and presumed ties, popular mobilization, vernacular languages, customs and traditions: these are the elements of an . . . ethnic conception of the nation, one that mirrored the . . . route of 'nation-formation' travelled by

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And why?') I can well-recognise the irony in a situation where Fijians and Tongans are being drawn into Western-style economic activity partly in order to meet the demands of their traditions. But all that means is that a constant process of feedback occurs between existing tradition and innovation, with each driving the other. I do not believe that process can be stopped — or if it can, then only with great difficulty. As O. H. K. Spate has said (quoted in Lal 1992a: 332), 'You can hold back the hands of the clock but it does not do the clock any good.'

<sup>8</sup>I am grateful to Rod Ewins for bringing to my attention the following passage, one which few political scientists or Pacific scholars are likely to have encountered, and which accords with the themes developed in this study:

Every society to one extent or another is living in a . . . state of tension, in which the inertia of habit based on old, well-established principles is under attack from the free play of speculative thought, which is constantly formulating new, potentially rival general principles, or else from unexpected technical, commercial or military developments that demand new forms of thinking in response. Thought can never work through new principles in sufficient detail to put them at once into operation throughout a whole society. People stick with the known, without reference to its intellectual validity, because they value the detailed prescriptions for daily interaction that long years of effort have elaborated. If this is an acceptable inference, it would mean that a traditional notion of reform going back to the Enlightenment in the West is profoundly misconceived.

Enlightenment reformers . . . viewed society as fully receptive to instantaneous change on the basis of rational principles. It was simply a question of getting people to recognise the persuasive power of the new idea; practice would follow automatically. . . . This same notion . . . still informs most of our political life today, from demonstrations against racial prejudice . . . to . . . reforming legislation. But it may be that people resist reform for reasons that have nothing to do with its intellectual merit, and . . . their commitment to [tradition] arises from no deep conservatism. . . . People may simply balk at the vacuum that results when a thousand familiar practices are abolished and replaced with abstractions. (Reddy 1986: 281.)



many communities in Eastern Europe and Asia. . . . It reflects the profound dualism at the heart of every nationalism. (Smith 1991: 11-12.)<sup>9</sup>

The *rationality* of looking to one's nearest neighbours in order to determine how to behave, which can lead one to identify with them, helps explain what might sometimes appear (from the outsider's viewpoint) to be the irrational, counter-productive, or even destructive behaviour conducted in a nation's name. This process of 'looking to the group' is at the core of tradition.

Considering the concept of tradition and how it works could also lead to a deeper understanding of the significance and continuing value of concepts such as international justice and human rights, at a time when postmodernism's demolition of universal certainties leaves their value in doubt for some. These concepts are evolving traditions, I would argue, coming to be shared by the society of all humankind.<sup>10</sup>

And to give a final example, considering tradition offers insights into the social and political problems arising from global environmental change. At every turn, environmentalists seeking to change people's behaviour (including their own) towards something more 'environmentally friendly' are confronted by tradition: Western traditions, often, which have spread worldwide, such as overconsumption of resources, disposability rather than recyclability, and the use of fossil fuels. Traditions are most likely to change when they are no longer working as well as required, the unfortunate implication being that we will change our environmentally-unfriendly ways only when they become unworkable: only when the personal costs to individuals force them to explore alternatives, either themselves or via government. At the same time, we will suffer because of a loss of traditions. The globalising forces of the modern world, such as television, trade, and modern agricultural methods, have essentially cut many of the world's people loose from their landscape. And this, in turn, creates significant hurdles for those attempting to address environmental problems, attempts which require us to pay close attention to *where* we live, as well as how we live.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Smith contrasts these 'ethnic' elements of nationalism with the 'civic' elements underlying many Western nations, such as the United States, which were created out of many cultural groups but bound into a single political-legal community.

<sup>10</sup>Ewins (1992a) gave my earlier thoughts on constructing a natural-evolution-based framework, rather than an evolutionary one, for human rights.

<sup>11</sup>An illustration is the problem of 'food miles'. Much of the food Westerners eat has been transported huge distances before it reaches our shelves, and most of that transport uses fossil fuel (thereby contributing substantially to global warming). One newspaper commentator recommended that, when shopping, consumers 'bear in mind that the more out-of-season an item of food is, the further it is likely to have travelled' (Cherry Ripe, 'How green is your salad?', *The Weekend Australian*, 6-7 May 1995, Review p. 4). But how many Western urban consumers know the season for bananas? Carrots? Lettuce? Potatoes? When the only food available was locally-grown, the availability of tomatoes would automatically tell us when they were in season. Even without that guide, we could learn by growing a few vegetables ourselves in the back garden. Now that knowledge no longer comes to many Westerners automatically; we must go out of our way to unearth it, which few would be willing to do.

## The Spirit of Burke and the Spirit of Paine

In a number of fields, then, the study of tradition offers political scientists new avenues of inquiry which are well worth exploring. But there is some sense in which if political science pays attention to matters of tradition — as I believe it should — it would simply be rediscovering the arguments of the past.

Two centuries ago Edmund Burke published a lengthy pamphlet entitled *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Burke [1790] 1987). It was a reaction to both the radical trends of political thought of his day and the radical events of 1789 which they had inspired; and it was aimed at the English, so that they might not follow the same path. It was enormously influential, and today is remembered as a landmark work of conservative thinking, though a conservatism which would barely be recognisable to modern Western champions of market deregulation and other such radical 'conservative' proposals.

Burke argued against the Enlightenment creed that political and social life should be directed by reason alone; he opposed revolutions driven by theories. No theory, he believed, could hope to solve every problem of the complex human world, and to obey reason blindly would cause the destruction of much that was essential to social life (Parkin 1969: 120-22).<sup>12</sup> People need not only reason but also tradition, our feelings for which Burke called 'prejudices':

In this enlightened age . . . we are generally men of untaught feelings; . . . instead of casting away all our old prejudices, we cherish them to a very considerable degree, . . . and the longer they have lasted and the more generally they have prevailed, the more we cherish them. We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason, because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations and of ages. (Burke [1790] 1987: 76.)

Burke's understanding of tradition as a slowly-evolved wisdom of ages echoes my discussion in earlier chapters; Burke, too, recognised that it can be rational to follow tradition. But before it be charged that all I have done here is reinvent and apply Burke's work, I must stress the essential difference in his position: Burke was writing as a *defender of a tradition* — English tradition — and he was writing at the end of a long period of stability in certain fundamental aspects of that tradition — England was still

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<sup>12</sup>Burke's complaint was echoed in 1948 by T. S. Eliot, who said that modern political theory was

less concerned [than that of ancient Greece] with human nature, which it is inclined to treat as something which can always be re-fashioned to fit whatever political form is regarded as most desirable. . . . It too often inculcates a belief in a future inflexibly determined and at the same time in a future which we are wholly free to shape as we like. . . . Culture itself is regarded either as a negligible by-product which can be left to itself, or as a department of life to be organised in accordance with the particular scheme we favour. (Eliot 1948: 88-89.)

predominantly agrarian, for example. In opposing radical revolutionary change he stressed that there was rationality and wisdom inherent in not changing. That was certainly a valuable point to be made, especially in light of later events in eighteenth century France. But in making it he downplayed both the rationality which can also be inherent in change and how this can promote substantial change in tradition itself.

One could say that Tonga today is rehearsing the arguments of Burke (the conservative proponent of tradition) on the one hand, and his contemporary Thomas Paine (the radical proponent of democracy, reason, and the Rights of Man) on the other. Fiji, too, has been through these ideological struggles, although the coup proved at least a temporary setback for the ideological descendents of Paine. But does this neat comparison offer any clues about eventual outcomes for Fiji and Tonga?

In a late-twentieth-century Western world of universal suffrage and human rights it is easy to forget that *Burke* was essentially the winner, at the time, of that particular debate. There was no revolution in England; there was no substantial reform of its parliament until the franchise was partially extended in 1832 and 1867 (although men had to wait for universal adult suffrage until 1918, and women until 1928). Burke's argument for gradual and cautious political change struck a chord with the English, who even today will speak with pride of the long and continuous tradition of the Westminster system of government. Thomas Paine, meanwhile, was hounded out of England for his provocative writings and died, out of favour, in America (Foot and Kramnick 1987: 18-19).

On the one hand, then, Burke won. On the other, he did not. While there was no political revolution in England, there was the Industrial Revolution, which launched the most rapid period of change in human history, let alone English society, and made the nineteenth century the British century — the Victorian age. In the process, it caused profound political changes — Marxism was born, representative democracy took hold, party politics became dominant — all of which affected the British system of government. That system may have changed gradually, but it still changed. And into what? A democratic system of universal suffrage which acknowledges the importance of human rights. Burke's conservative and traditional political system evolved, as a result of social and political pressures, into a near embodiment of Paine's then-radical vision.

I have no doubt that similar changes will take place in Fiji and Tonga. The unpredictability is only in the particular form of those changes, the sequence of events, and the time they will take. It is not necessary (or even necessarily desirable) to predict details while attempting to predict general outcomes: all that is necessary is to give a plausible justification for those general predictions. That justification is the forces for change described in previous chapters — forces not previously seen in Fiji and Tonga in the same form or to the same extent. These forces are changing and will continue to change tradition, just as in the West. As they are mostly *the same forces* — Western-style education, business demands, and media reports, and entertainment from the West

itself — it is reasonable to predict that they will produce similar results. Not identical results, certainly; but broadly similar ones.<sup>13</sup>

This does not, I hope, cast me as 'anti-tradition': if there has been one overarching theme behind this study, it has been that tradition and change are not polar opposites. Like any Fijian or Tongan, I like some of my society's traditions and dislike others. Now that I believe I know something about how tradition works, I can see its usefulness in everyone's lives. And as I stressed in Chapter One, the study of tradition speaks to us all, not to 'traditional societies' alone.

Some traditions create conflict; others offer resolution. Tradition is a store of shared knowledge about how to live in a particular place and as part of a particular group, evolved over centuries and constantly evolving. Some of that knowledge can become inappropriate for its changing surroundings and thus problematic. Some of it can serve as an essential reminder of what practices work in a certain natural and social environment at a time when people's attention is elsewhere — although that knowledge can, if neglected for long enough, vanish.

But even when tradition appears to be an obstacle there is cause for hope, because tradition changes, even while particular traditions might remain in place for a long time. No tradition is immune from change (although a tradition may be artificially reinforced — by written constitutions, for example — thus delaying change in what was once truly adaptable). Reason can be the saviour of tradition, whether applied at the individual level or at that of society. The spirit of Paine invigorates the spirit of Burke.

The long-term view gives cause for optimism: just as today we see Paine as a voice of 'Common Sense' where many of his contemporaries saw him as a dangerous radical, so today's radicals will create many of tomorrow's traditions. But we live today, not tomorrow, and in the short term the process of change in tradition creates problems and conflict. It often entails considerable personal difficulties for those who seek change, as well as those who oppose it. In this process there will always be a need for politics, the art of negotiating change. The problems posed by tradition are political problems — and, conversely, much of politics is concerned with problems raised by tradition. This is the valuable lesson of Fiji and Tonga, and many places like them, for those who have forgotten that tradition is everywhere.

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<sup>13</sup>Making predictions carries the risk of being contradicted by unforeseen events or overlooked details, but for what they are worth here are mine: the biggest problem facing Fiji is the looming renewal or non-renewal of ALTA leases, which will place great strains upon not only Fijian-Indian relations but also Fijians' relations with their chiefs; and Tongans will probably have to wait for their next king before their political system is changed. In a more general vein, I believe that the rise in each country of well-educated commoners as challengers to (and usurpers of) existing traditional authority will prove to be a transitional phase: once television becomes widespread, giving everyone access to profuse amounts of information, the well-educated will lose some of their prestige, and both Fijian and Tongan society will become increasingly egalitarian.

## Appendix One

### How Interviews were Used in this Study

Since interview material forms the basis of this study (and is central to Chapters Three through Seven), some comment is necessary on my methods of conducting interviews and selecting and presenting material from them.<sup>1</sup>

Each interview lasted around forty-five minutes to one hour (some being longer, some shorter). All were tape-recorded, with one exception where notes were taken instead.<sup>2</sup> On my return from Fiji and Tonga I made complete transcriptions of those tapes, as accurately as possible. I then edited those transcripts for general readability and to remove irrelevant material. Quotations from primary sources in this dissertation were selected from these edited transcripts.

One should keep several points in mind here. First, with over three hundred thousand words of transcripts, it is possible that an occasional mistake has crept in. When dealing with variable sound quality and various accents, the possibility of mishearing a word is always present. My practice when in doubt about a particular word was to avoid the passage concerned when quoting. The broader context of the interview, however, usually revealed a particular passage's correct meaning.

Second, quotations as they appear here are not always identical to the original in the verbatim transcript. I have edited out the false starts, searches for the correct word, repetition, and pauses for thought which make up much of any interview. A further problem was how to treat interviewees' occasional grammatical errors when quoting them. I have chosen to correct most such mistakes on their behalf; were I in a similar situation I would not wish my intended meaning to be compromised by my imperfect grammar. Where a particular grammatical construction or turn of phrase is merely unusual, though, I have kept it intact (unless it makes the speaker's meaning difficult to follow).

This leads to a third point, which is the manner in which changes to the original have been indicated in quotations. Were I to mark every alteration of a letter or more the text would become an impenetrable mass of square brackets and ellipses. I have tried to keep intrusions of square brackets to a minimum, using them to show the reader where significant substitutions, transpositions, or insertions have been made rather than each and every letter that has been altered. Similarly, where I have omitted a substantial

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<sup>1</sup>My rationale when selecting people to interview is discussed in Chapter One.

<sup>2</sup>The exception was an interview with Dr Filimoni Wainiqolo, Secretary-General of the SVT. This was done at his request.

portion of a quotation, I have indicated this with ellipses,<sup>3</sup> but where the omission is an inconsequential 'so', 'well', 'you know', or 'I think', I usually have not. Steps such as these are simply part of transforming fluid speech into the written word; almost any interview needs substantial editing to render it readable.

The use of interviews inevitably raises problems of confidentiality. I believe that the way I conducted the interviews addressed most potential problems. I made clear to interviewees that these interviews were part of my Ph.D. research and that I intended to quote from them in my dissertation; I always asked permission before recording the interview and placed the tape-recorder in a clearly-visible position.

Only one interviewee requested complete anonymity; his name does not appear in this dissertation, although I do quote him (and cite him as 'Anonymous A', with some general details in the Bibliography). I believe, however, that my careful choice of quotations has left few cases where anonymity would be required. If provocative statements were occasionally made by people who had already said such things as a matter of public record, I considered it reasonable to quote them. Furthermore, this is a general study rather than a specific one; while some made revealing asides about political events, it has rarely seemed appropriate here to digress into discussing those asides.

In a few cases, however, I have judged it prudent not to reveal the source of a quotation, even if I have quoted the person by name on other matters. In these cases I cite them as 'Anonymous 1993', and note their general occupation where relevant; no specific date for the interview is given, so that they cannot be readily identified by cross-referencing to the Bibliography. I consider this minimal loss of information to be a reasonable price to pay for the protection of these interviewees from possible adverse reactions.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>A paragraph break within an indented quotation from one interview also indicates that words were omitted. This usually indicates that a considerable amount of other discussion (or a lengthy question from me) occurred between the two passages in the interview.

<sup>4</sup>On these points, see Marcus (1979: 147-148). I was mindful of the fact that Tongans, in particular, often avoid referring to prominent people directly by name, but will instead speak of 'the number one people's representative' (or some even less-specific label). Adopting a similar approach here would have been unsatisfactory for the academic purposes of this study. Neither descriptions such as these nor pseudonyms would be particularly helpful in providing prominent interviewees with anonymity, as Marcus points out:

Pseudonyms may effectively make elites anonymous to the ethnographer's readers beyond the former's regions or societies, but usually not within them. (Marcus 1979: 147.)

One need only consider the redundancy of referring to 'Ratu X, a prominent former prime minister of Fiji' to see the limited value of such an approach. Instead, I have had to rely on my careful judgement in the manner outlined above, and can only hope that I have given no great offence to anyone by quoting them here.

To supplement my primary source material I have referred to both academic and journalistic secondary sources in the dissertation. A note should be made on the latter. While magazines such as *Pacific Islands Monthly*, *Islands Business Pacific*, *The Review* (of Fiji) and *Matangi Tonga* are all readily available to an overseas researcher, newspapers — a far more valuable way of keeping in touch with popular opinion in the two countries — are not. In Canberra, access to up-to-date issues of the *Tonga Chronicle* (or its competitors), the *Daily Post*, and even the *Fiji Times*, is sporadic at best (and keeping up with Fiji dailies and Tongan weeklies from the vantage-point of another country would be no easy task even if they were readily available). This is unfortunate, as their editorials, letters pages, and lesser stories all give one a feel for these places which might not come across from monthly or quarterly magazines alone. To capture something of that feel, I bought every local (English-language) periodical I could in my time there, gathering examples of these less widely-circulated stories. Although I have not quoted from them extensively here, they informed much of my study.





## Selected Bibliography and Reference List

Some preliminary notes on the organisation and contents of this selected bibliography and reference list are in order, as some of the background material gathered for this study is not listed. I have excluded a large number of the following: magazine articles drawn from *Pacific Islands Monthly* and *Islands Business Pacific* (1987 onwards), *Matangi Tonga* (1992 onwards), and *The Review (Fiji Business Review)* from its inception in May 1992 onwards; newspaper articles drawn from *The Weekender* over its entire run (April 1993 to April 1994), as well as from *The Fiji Times* and *The Daily Post* from 10 May to 1 July 1993 (and occasional issues before and after that period — see Appendix One), *The Tonga Chronicle* from July to August 1993, some issues of *Kele'a*, and various Australian newspapers; journal articles from the late 1980s dealing with the events surrounding the Fiji coup (see comments in Chapter One); unpublished conference papers in my possession (many of which also deal with the 1987 Fiji coup); book reviews carried by various Pacific-related academic journals; and the short country-by-country year-in-review articles carried by *The Contemporary Pacific* since its inception.

A few references to specific articles of these kinds are listed here; but most press articles are, where necessary, detailed in the text of the dissertation (as are seminars, broadcasts, and personal communication). I have also had access since mid-1994 to Reuters Newsbriefs, an Internet-based service which provides occasional news articles on Fiji, Tonga, and other Pacific countries (among other topics), a few of which are cited in the text according to their original source along with the relevant Newsbriefs reference number.

Otherwise, all references are listed here. Also listed are some books and articles sighted but not cited — those which provided valuable background reading and which I considered sufficiently relevant to this study to be worth noting for the benefit of other researchers. The material is arranged into two sections: the first lists interviewees, with some biographical notes; the second lists secondary sources. I have made no attempt to sort the second section by country or otherwise, as many sources deal with several countries or themes.

## Interviews

*All interviews were tape-recorded (except \*notes taken). Tapes, full transcripts and edited transcripts remain in the author's possession.*

Afeaki, Viliami, 1993. Ex-Ha'apai No. 1 People's Representative. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 29 July.

Anonymous A, 1993. Prominent ex-civil-servant. Interview with the author, Suva, 24 August.

Baba, Tupeni, 1993. Reader in Education, USP, and ex-minister. Interview with the author, Suva, 22 June.

Butadroka, Sakeasi, 1993. Member of the House of Representatives and Leader of the Fijian Nationalist United Front. Interview with the author, Naboro, Fiji, 3 June.

Chaudhry, Mahendra, 1993. Member of the House of Representatives and Leader of the Fiji Labour Party. Interview with the author, Suva, 24 June.

Cokaunoto, Ratu Tu'uakitau (Tuki), 1993. President of the Senate of Fiji. Interview with the author, Suva, 23 June.

Dakuvula, Jone, 1993. Press Secretary to the Prime Minister, Prime Minister's Office. Interview with the author, Lami, Fiji, 22 May.

Delaibatiki, Nemani, 1993. Editor of *The Daily Post*. Interview with the author, Valelevu, Fiji, 25 May.

Durutalo, Simione, 1993a. Lecturer in Sociology, School of Social and Economic Development, USP. Interview with the author, Suva, 24 May.

Fakafanua, Tutoatasi, 1993. Minister of Labour, Kingdom of Tonga. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 16 July.

Fielakepa, 1993. Tongatapu No. 1 Nobles' Representative. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 2 August.

Fifita, Laitia, 1993. Ex-General Secretary, Tonga National Council of Churches. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 4 August.

Finau, Patelesio, 1993. Bishop of the Catholic Church of Tonga. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 30 July.

Fonua, Pesi, 1993. Editor of *Matangi Tonga*. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 5 August.

Fukofuka, Uili, 1993. Tongatapu No. 2 People's Representative. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 22 July.

Fusitu'a, 1993. Niua Nobles' Representative and Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Tonga. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 23 July.

Fusitu'a, 'Eseta, 1993. Deputy Secretary to Cabinet, Kingdom of Tonga. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 21 July.

Gaunder, Yashwant, 1993. Publisher of *The Review*. Interview with the author, Suva, 26 May.

- Geraghty, Paul, 1993. Director of the Institute of Fijian Language and Culture. Interview with the author, Suva, 11 June.
- Hau'ofa, Epeli, 1993a. Professor in Sociology, School of Social and Economic Development, USP. Interview with the author, Suva, 3 June.
- Havea, 1993. Son of Lasike (Tongatapu No. 2 Nobles' Representative). Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 19 August.
- Havea, 'Amanaki, 1993. Ex-President of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 2 August.
- Helu, Futa, 1993a. Head of 'Atenisi Institute and University. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 27 July.
- Kalou, Joeli, 1993. Minister of State for Environment, Government of Fiji. Interview with the author, Suva, 4 June.
- Kavaliku, Langi, 1993. Minister of Education, Kingdom of Tonga. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 14 July.
- Keith-Reid, Robert, 1993. Publisher of *Islands Business Pacific*. Interview with the author, Suva, 26 May.
- Ketui'ionetoa, 'Ofa, 1993. Private Secretary to the King, Palace Office, Kingdom of Tonga. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 20 August.
- Kubuabola, Ratu Inoke, 1993. Minister for Youth, Employment Opportunities and Sport, Government of Fiji. Interview with the author, Suva, 29 June.
- Lasaro, Reverend Manaso, 1993. President of the Methodist Church of Fiji. Interview with the author, Suva, 23 June.
- Liava'a, Uhila, 1993. Tongatapu No. 3 People's Representative. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 18 August.
- Madraiwiwi, Ratu Jone, 1993. Permanent Arbitrator, Department of Labour and Industrial Relations. Interview with the author, Suva, 29 June.
- Mara, Ratu Sir Kamisese, 1993. Vice-President of the Republic of Fiji. Interview with the author, Suva, 18 June.
- Mataitoga, Isikeli, 1993. Director of Public Prosecutions, Government of Fiji. Interview with the author, Suva, 3 June.
- Matatolu, Koresi, 1993. Minister for Labour and Industrial Relations, Government of Fiji. Interview with the author, Suva, 30 June.
- Moala, Jale, 1993. Editor of *The Fiji Times*. Interview with the author, Suva, 7 June.
- Moala, Kalafi, 1993. Editor of *Taimi 'O Tonga*. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 28 July.
- Momoivalu, Mere, 1993. Editor of *The Review*. Interview with the author, Suva, 26 May.
- Nata, Jo, 1993. Publisher of *The Weekender*. Interview with the author, Suva, 7 June.

- Niu, Laki, 1993. Ex-Tongatapu No. 3 People's Representative. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 13 August.
- Pohiva, 'Akilisi, 1993. Tongatapu No. 1 People's Representative. Interview with the author, Sopo, Tonga, 20 July.
- Qarase, Laisenia, 1993. General Manager of the Fiji Development Bank. Interview with the author, Suva, 29 June.
- Reddy, Jai Ram, 1993. Member of the House of Representatives and Leader of the Opposition and the National Federation Party. Interview with the author, Suva, 24 June.
- Siu'ilikutapu, Princess Mele, 1993. Daughter of Tu'ipelehake (Ex-Prime Minister), Kingdom of Tonga. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 20 August.
- Sokonibogi, Francis Waqa, 1993. Spokesperson for *Tagi ni Vanua*. Interview with the author, Suva, 23 June.
- Tabakaucoro, Adi Finau, 1993. Senator. Interview with the author, Suva, 9 June.
- Tabu, Taniela, 1993. General Secretary of the Viti Civil Servants Association. Interview with the author, Suva, 16 June.
- Takai, Maliu, 1993. Assistant Secretary to the Minister of Works, Kingdom of Tonga. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 5 August.
- Tapa, Sione, 1993. Minister of Health, Kingdom of Tonga. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 22 July.
- Taufa, Reverend Lopeti, 1993. President of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 12 August.
- Taufe'ulungaki, 'Ana, 1993. Senior Education Officer, Kingdom of Tonga. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 6 August.
- Tonawai, Dale, 1993. Editor of *Nai Lalakai*. Interview with the author, Suva, 4 June.
- Tu'itahi, Sione, 1993. Assistant Editor of *The Tonga Chronicle*. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 20 August.
- Tupou, Samuela, 1993. Minister of Lands, Kingdom of Tonga. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 13 July.
- Tupou, Tevita, 1993. Minister of Justice, Kingdom of Tonga. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 15 July.
- Uata, 'Uli, 1993. Ha'apai No. 2 People's Representative. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 2 August.
- Usher, Sir Leonard, 1993. Ex-minister and ex-newspaper-editor. Interview with the author, Suva, 26 May.
- Vakatale, Taufu, 1993. Minister of Education, Government of Fiji. Interview with the author, Suva, 23 June.
- Ve, Penisimani, 1993. Managing Director of the Tongan Development Bank. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 13 August.

- Ve'a, Simote, 1993. Chair of the Pro-Democracy Movement and General Secretary of the Tonga National Council of Churches. Interview with the author, Nuku'alofa, 4 August.
- Volavola, Mosese, 1993. General Manager of the Native Land Trust Board. Interview with the author, Suva, 1 July.
- \*Wainiqolo, Filimoni, 1993. Secretary-General of the *Soqosoqo Vakavulewa ni Taukei*. Interview with the author, Suva, 25 June.

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