

## AVANT-PROPOS

This volume begins a series of books on Fijian Tribes and Territories. Each book covers one or more of the 14 provinces of Fiji, telling some stories of the people, giving a few facts and a little background of human geography and history. This might be called social archaeology, since Fiji has such a very limited physical archaeology.

The present volume covers Naitasiri Province, highland home of the warriors who call themselves *na KaiViti dina*, “the *Real* Fijians” who were here before the others. These are the Viti Levu highland warriors, *montagnards* of fearsome nature. These are *different* South Sea islanders who deserve special consideration. Later volumes will cover other provinces of Fiji, where the later-arriving Fijians have settled, each with their own characteristics, peculiarities, recorded history and oral history. Homogeneity is becoming the tendency today as three-quarters of Fijians live in a city, town or suburb. But it is still a vital matter always to know people’s place of origin and relate to them accordingly. Even fruit-salads of mixed race may still cling to vague knowledge of a home village and territory that they have probably never visited. It strengthens their feeling of identity as a Fijians and gives an anchor of emotional stability in a fast-moving modern world.

In early years I read deeply in the library of my father, Harold Gatty, which together with the library of Sir Alport Barker, and Borron Library, forms the core collection at the Fiji National Archives. I learned much from George Barker whom I knew personally, and who wrote several articles for the Fijian Society. The Final Reports of the Native Lands Commission have been a basic source with official and often out-moded lists of clans and names of extended families. Also I have gained access to some of the official tribal histories (*i Tukutuku raraba*) recorded by the N.L.C. Finally, listening to Fijian stories for more than three quarters of a century, I myself become a source for a certain amount of oral history.

It has been a casual diversion to study these people among whom I have lived so long. This work is like a giant jigsaw puzzle, but never finished. Call it a patchwork quilt of notes and jottings. Trivia, much of it, of course. But life is largely composed of trivia. And there is so much more that could have been said. Help has been given by highlanders themselves who, after all, taught me much of what I think I know. Specifically also, Akata V. Takala of the Cartography Section of the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources has helped with the making of maps. Bruce Southwick, *photographe extraordinaire*, has provided help with illustrations. And that master of graphic artistry, Detlef Blümel has designed the layout, composition, and book cover for which I am most grateful. As with my previous book, *Fijian-English Dictionary with notes on Fijian Culture and Natural History*, George Hazelman has given dedicated effort to reading, questioning my text, and joining me on a multitude of interviews that needed a younger set of ears as with advancing age, my hearing has reached a very severe level of deafness.

Following La Fontaine, I might comment: “*Si mon oeuvre n’est pas un assez bon modèle, j’ai du moins ouvert le chemin. D’autres pourront y mettre dernière main*” (*Epilogue*, Livre XI, Fables choisies II). “If my work falls short of any standard, I have at least opened the way. Others can add the finishing touches.”

Have I learned anything of significance that might change my outlook in life? Well, I am reminded of *carpe diem*, living for the day, seizing each day, being happy each day, laughing each day, and laughing often each day. Horace gave us that wisdom in his *Odes* (I, 11, 8) but we tend to forget it. Many Fijians live this way naturally and their behaviour reminds me daily of that precious, child-like wisdom. As in Voltaire's *Candide*, after many life experiences and advancing age, I retire to cultivate my own small garden in this best of all possible worlds.

Ronald Gatty

Wainadoi Gardens, Namosi Province

## CUSTOM & CULTURE OF “REAL” FIJIANS

### Highlander War Cry

Look out for your life!  
We are standing our ground!  
You are about to fall!  
And you will die today!

*Qarauni iko!*  
*Keitou butuka tu!*  
*Sa na qai siri na duamu!*  
*Na mate nikua!*

“**You will die today!**” *Na mate nikua!* The highland warriors’ cry chills the blood even today on the football field where these exact words thundered warning to those who stood to resist them in 1995. Men of Naitasiri North demolished the Suva rugby team with the help of their own fans who surged out of the stands into the playing field. They make their own rules when they have to. They will not be defeated. Again, in 2004, the Naitasiri rugby team resorted to physical fighting and beat up the referee himself when the game was not going their way against Suva. Finally, in 2005, Naitasiri won actually by following the rules.

These are sturdy highland folk, usually quiet spoken, shy but unafraid. These are not the coastal people who dominate far too much of Fiji life. Quite rightfully, the highlanders of Viti Levu — the *kaiColo* — can call themselves “the real Fijians” (*na kaiViti dina*).

There should also be included as “real Fijians” the indigenous westerners of the Nadi area, the *kaiNadi dina* (“True Nadi people”). But they will be described separately, in another book of this series, a book on Ba Province that encompassed much of western Viti Levu Island. Those “True Nadi people” preceded the much later immigrants who refer to their chief as the Tui Nadi though he and his people are not even Nadi people. Such are the contradictions and complications of Fijian society.

To be included in a future book on Ba Province are Fijians of Viseisei village and their so-called First Landing at Vuda on western coast of Viti Levu

Island. They pretend they were here first when they know that is not true. Descendants of these much later immigrants spread out to populate the other islands and now claim importance throughout Fiji. Their legendary leader Lutunasobasoba was actually a Johnny-come-lately arriving late at Fiji. Their descendants boast proudly and wrongly of primacy that is a departure from the truth. Their First Landing might better be called a Last Landing. They pushed their way to dominance but can never properly claim primacy for the date of their arrival.

In early days, true highlanders lived in a world quite separate from these later-arriving Fijians of the lowlands. Highlanders were men of the bush and not of the sea. The lowlanders who arrived later had been heavily influenced from nearby central Polynesia, Samoa, Tonga and Futuna. Language was different, their foods were different, many customs, and the very character of the people. Highlanders were of a very different culture, more Melanesian, and they lived in starkly primitive conditions.

### **Tribes, Clans and Chiefs**

Originally, in very early times, there were no “tribes” (*yavusa*) among Fiji’s Melanesian highlanders. Nor were there among many of the people in western Viti Levu. Eastern highlanders (as in Naitasiri Province) were divided into kin groups (*bure*), though they are now referred to as “clans” (*mataqali*) as a term used throughout Fiji, standardised by colonial administrators. The term *yavusa* (tribe) developed from the Polynesian immigrants who mostly settled around the Nakauvadra mountain range in what is now Ra Province. (A few tribes were formed by Tongans who landed on the southern and somewhat western coasts of Viti Levu.) *Yavusa* formed at a location (*yavu-tu*) as a political group, that would often include several different kin-groups, grouped together, allied for protection under a chieftain. The location of *yavutu* are often remembered and with the help of Sukuna, the American anthropologist Ed Gifford has listed many of them of Nakauvadra origin. The root-word *yavu*, suggesting a foundation, is of ancient proto-Oceanic origin, more proto-Polynesian than Melanesian.

The notion of a high chieftain of tribe and territory (including any great number of villages) had hardly been known to the early Melanesian Fijians who call themselves the “real” Fijians. Again, as they say: *Keitou na kaiViti dina!* “We are the *real* Fijians!”

There were in fact, no chiefly titles, no chiefly aristocracy, and the head of the *bure* was selected more from personal power, violent force, and perhaps from merit, but not from any chosen lineage by blood or marriage. Only later did highlanders adopt the concept of tribes and chiefly lineage in conformity with custom among the more Polynesian Fijians who came to dominate Fiji politically and culturally. In a number of cases it was a Polynesian, accepted as chief, who gave the focus in agglomerating the *bure* (clans) as a composite, political unit that one might call a tribe (*yavusa*).

Tribes did become recognised as Colonial officials standardised the term tribe (*yavusa*) throughout Fiji. But in the main, tribes developed among the highlanders only after 1600, as a plausible guess for the timing.

Even the now most common, traditional chiefly title of central Viti Levu, *Vunivalu*, is a development as recent as the Nakauvadra movements according

to Gifford. That is a notion supported by Lester who is also an authority and I agree with it myself. The early highlanders had no special title for their chiefs. *Taukei ni* (followed by the name of a people or a place) was as close as they came to having a chiefly title. *Momo* might be used in western Viti Levu.

The list of tribes and clans given here is an historical record, now usually simplified by consolidation of social groups, with some of them extinct. The list is useful more as a record of the past than a picture of the present. By the time of the Nakauvadra movements, as large tribes developed, and even some super-tribes, it came about that each clan that composed the tribe might serve a distinctive a rôle or function:- a chiefly rôle (*vakaturaga*), a rôle as spokesmen (*matanivanua*) for the chief, a rôle to select and empower the chief (*sauturaga*), a priestly rôle (*bete*), or rôle as warriors (*bati*), or in coastal areas, fishermen (*gonedau*). But rôles change with time and with the personality and power of the people involved. The chiefly clan of yore has very often been displaced by another, more powerful one. Dominance by violence or threatened violence is the main tradition. The main custom in Fiji has been the use of the club.

### **Totems as Symbols of Fecundity**

When they exist, especially in Viti Levu Island, and when there is some record of them, the totems are named (in *italics*) for each tribe or clan, first the plant totem, then the aquatic totem, and then the animal totem, usually an insect or a bird. There may be only one totem, or two, or none. These names come from three sources. Some were learned by personal interview. Some come from records of the Native Lands Commission, and some from a publication of the Fiji Ministry of Education. Their Government listings are wrong or misleading in so many cases because these officials quite incorrectly assumed that all social groups had totems.

There is another complication, that totems may differ for the various clans within a village, since many tribes (*yavusa*) are composed of disparate groups that have come together from different backgrounds. Their tribal grouping was often for defense, or some convenience, not from a common origin. So what is reported may vary depending on which clan was being interviewed. Also of course, some of this information is highly secret and cannot be discussed openly. In others, the informant may not have certain knowledge. Many Fijians are no longer close to their old traditions and knowledge.

As the term is used here, totems in the highlands are a Melanesian rather than Polynesian cultural feature, and directly symbolise sexual fertility and viability of the genetic stock. In conservative, traditional places a visitor could be in deep trouble merely to mention the name of a local totem. Still in the mid-1900s a man who mentioned the totem could have his clothes ripped off, be sexually abused by angry women who might end by throwing him in a river. In these modern days punishment might be simply consumption of an absolutely huge cup of *yaqona* or have a bucket of water poured over one's head. Locals have often considered that any mention of their totem is an affront, challenging their reproductive ability and prospects of group survival. In recent times an old highlander said that he would remove his clothes and show his genitals if anyone should mention the name of his totem.

There is sometimes confusion between totems and food specialties or plants and animals that are locally important in other ways that are not necessarily totemic. They may be iconic, local symbols with no specific relevance to reproductive power, fertility, and sexuality.

There is no specific word for “totem” in Fijian. Fijians talk of “our fish”, or “our plant”. Such an association with a living thing may have different significance in different areas. It is only among the “real Fijians” that there are true totems that represent their very private fertility and reproductive power, though some of these highlanders have descended to the lowlands and retain the totemic concepts, some weakened now by time. Most Fijian in most places have no totems, though there may be iconic plants or creatures that have local significance as mentioned above. Earlier researchers have usually insisted on asking for totems when none exist. The Native Land Commission has made that mistake through most of their work.

Where possible the people’s movements are traced in this book to find tribal branches that have separated and settled elsewhere. Fijians have always been a very motile people. They move around a lot, travel here and there for whatever reason and they need little reason to travel. Wars and squabbles led to fragmentation of the old tribes and clans. They settled in new places and quickly came to believe they have been there as the earliest of time. They become ferociously possessive of land so recently acquired or claimed, believing it to be their god-given right, and not just vacant land, or land they conquered with blood and brutality. Mostly, the land they claim was never theirs. Their claims are dreams of self-importance and grandeur far beyond any reality. There are a lot of signed and sworn statements to the Native Lands Commission for which Fijians have never been brought to account for veracity. Exaggerated claims have been challenged rarely, only by other Fijians, and only when lease-money is at stake. And no charges of perjury have been made against the elders who dreamed up these claims. Most of the land had never been settled by anyone till after Cession, when there was safety everywhere for living peacefully.

It has been necessary to slide over the degree to which social structure and language vary in minor ways from specific locality to locality. Also, through time, many changes have occurred that have not been noted. Some chieftains named have died and new ones empowered. Customs and knowledge have fallen by the wayside. New “traditions” are invented and often held tenaciously, even aggressively, as if they were ancient.

Some information is traditionally quite private, such as stories of ancestral spirits. And it would be unthinkable rude for a Fijian to question chiefly lineage, though there is indeed much that might be questioned. Some informants share their knowledge freely while others feel that what they reveal will be lost if they release it. Others are avaricious, wanting to be paid for what they tell. And questioning a Fijian on a sensitive matter can be rather like peeling an onion when he wants to avoid controversy, or does not want to reveal his tribal secrets and will not admit it.

In the Fijian language newspaper *Nai Lalakai* I was once referred to as the greatest enemy of the Fijian people. I had been writing frequently in the local

press. From all my questioning I was accused of being a foreign spy with ulterior motives, hiding behind the operation of a modest country garden. The secret service should investigate and take action. The critic (Inoke Sikivou) explained afterwards that my problem was I knew too much. I then faced a deportation order, and have known the force of government suppression, spiteful revenge and violence under the Rabuka government.

Not all Fijians care much about tradition, tribal secrets, or chiefly authority. Certainly most of them know little about their cultural history. Many have other, more pressing concerns, finding a job, paying rent or school fees for their children, paying off a house or a car, feeding their family, contributing endlessly to forceful collections by village, province and church. In their later years a few waken to an interest for their own cultural traditions. In a disturbing world of change they may find emotional security in affirming their cultural identity. Some even invent new “traditions” with imaginative, supposedly oral history affirming an identity that never existed in fact. A fair amount of oral history is farcical nonsense, such as the details, for example, of an African origin or the impending resurrection of the Ciri Twins.

*KaiColo* were not totally isolated. They did develop a relationship with Verata Territory in Verata’s early days, and that brought them into close contact with Tongans. They helped Tongans in the quest for red parrot feathers. They served as mercenaries in the Tongan wars, both in Tonga itself, and in Fiji. Strong of character though, they remained themselves, distinct from lowland, coastal Fijians who adopted Tongan ways far earlier in time. Much of what is now called Fijian culture in the lowlands has been adopted from Polynesia. This includes guitars, ukulele, romantic melodies, the earth oven, gourds for keeping and carrying water, pottery jars for keeping water and for cooking, the wooden bowl (*tanoa*) for serving kava, the concept of aristocracy and hierarchical kava drinking, and the notion of cemeteries, the use of coconuts and all its so many products. Barkcloth (*masi*) and woven Pandanus (*voivoi*) mats were never there in early times. Breadfruit was always a coastal plant, not known in the upper highlands.

The highlanders kept for a time their truly original, Fijian culture, born of Melanesia rather than Polynesia. More recently have they have been succumbing to the ways of Tonga and to superficial aspects of European culture, especially the use of European technology and some social manners like shaking hands and matters of clothing and personal adornment.

Aspects of Christian denominations have been adopted or invented, penetrating deeply with certain values and rituals, building of churches, contributions of money, attendance at church services, singing of hymns and extensive praying, now a profound part of Fijian culture. In Fiji, these tended to become the essentials of Christianity. Several inventive, indigenous Christian sects developed and also the charismatic, evangelical sects have had a field day of conversions and rapid expansion promoted by overseas preachers and modern media. Faith healers have given hope to thousands of Fijian believers.

Some highland tribes have Polynesian founding ancestors and a few have had white men or women as founding spirits who created tribes. A. B. Brewster documented some of their genealogies going back nine or ten generations,

and he said that all the tribal (*yavusa*) founders were of light colour. A few of the founders were white men but more of them were Tongan. In fact, these foreigners introduced the concept of tribes and of chiefly lineages. Prior to that time, highlanders' social organisation was limited to clans that they called *bure* of which there might be several. Each one had its own mens' house (*bure*). Yet even after highlanders accepted a fair-skinned chief who organised a tribe, these black warriors retained their own tough, independent and feisty spirits and their own separate culture.

Physically, the *kaiColo* have been darker than many of the coastal Fijians. They are much more muscular, much less beefy. Highlanders are of tighter build, hardly ever fat or paunchy, and of only medium height. Some have distinctive steatopygia, protruding buttocks. The hair is different, harder, more compact in tight twisted coils, tougher and thicker than the ordinary Fijian's "true hair" (*ulu dina*) that is softer to the touch.

Called "Bigheads" in early days by Europeans, highland men often had a head of hair five feet in circumference. Protestant missionaries insisted on cutting that hair shorter, as a sign of submission and that has become the mode. In the last mid-century many men still had somewhat long, full hair, but now, after the turn of the century, that is extremely rare. Military service, of course, has imposed close-cropped hair to allow for helmets or military hats. Simplicity and convenience, copying western appearance and western clothing, has caused old custom to disappear. The big head of hair that were a man's mark of pride in time gone by has completely disappeared. Gone are the days of yore.

There are remnants nonetheless of the feisty chip on the shoulder and the fierce and independent pride. This book will explain these people and point up what may well have been the best of Fiji. These are people of a different breed, a different culture, a different way of life and livelihood. The other Fijians, the coastal Fijians, Fijians of the smaller islands and other Provinces, will be covered in later volumes of this same series. First we must understand the original, the "real" Fijians, *na kaiViti dina*.

The highlanders are not people primarily of Nakauvadra Mountain origin. They were here much earlier than immigrants who settled around Nakauvadra. Those were a later people, associated with the ancestral god Degei. As reported by archeologist Ed Gifford, Ratu Sukuna's study of official records show that not a single tribe of Naitasiri Province claimed its origin from the Nakauvadra Mountain range of Ra Province, though I find several. There has been close contact, fighting as allies or enemies. Some highland tribes were involved in the Nakauvadra Wars, and some came to Ra later, settling after those wars, as at District Bure-i-Wai.

Before listing and describing the specific highland tribes, their territories and villages, it is well to explain the background of these Fijians who have been so different from their lowland compatriots. It is with some justification they call themselves the "real" Fijians. In a second section of this book there are details of the various Districts, specific tribes and villages.

## A Story to be Told

The highlanders are genuine indigenous settlers of Viti Levu and they are the subject of this book. But the more recent arrivals today dominate in politics and chiefly lineages that have no basis in the early history of Fiji. From Lau, the late Ratu Kamisese Mara Kapaiwai, with the parentage much more Tongan than Fijian, claimed to have noble lineage dating back to Lutunasobasoba. Using a lot of imagination, he counted some fourteen generations. That cannot take us back more than 500 years or so, long after the much earlier immigration by Melanesians who have no memory of their arrival.

Such aristocratic notions as Rati Mara's are Polynesian pretensions, and not at all Fijian. Mara's birth was in fact illegitimate, from a Tongan mother who was a commoner and part-European, not even a recognised concubine of the chiefly father who was himself only part-Fijian. There was nothing much Fijian in his heritage, and it was very clear that he preferred his association with his Tongan background. Privately, he even said so. When he married off a daughter, he arranged a European-style ceremony at a resort hotel and a Tongan ceremony in Lau Province.

The "real" Fijians have been suppressed and ill-treated by a national hierarchy of chiefs that was created by the British for the purposes of central control and easier administration. Indirect rule was a British invention making it possible for a small group of British men to govern a vast and diverse part of the Empire, as in Fiji, and as in India. They worked through a hierarchy of chiefs who were sponsored or even selected by the colonial administration. Similarly, the British invented the Council of Chiefs, with no precedent whatever in early Fijian tradition. Before the British came there never was any assembly of chiefs; they could never trust each other. With a little grandiosity, they have since that time promoted themselves to be known as the Great Council of Chiefs.

Listen to the highlanders when they tell you:

**"It is only the chiefs who are pushing us down."**

*"O ira ga na turaga era tabaki keda sobu tiko."*

Highlanders might be grateful to Commodore Bainimarama who dissolved the Great Council of Chiefs after his military coup in December 2006. Bainimarama had his own route to power and dominance that for a time, by-passed most of the chieftains that might have caused him trouble. Only a few paramount chiefs were retained by Bainimarama for their compliant attitude and cooperation in the new regime. They were given ceremonial roles that served the purpose.

**In days of old, there were no paramount chiefs. Aristocracy never had any role or reality in the highlands of Fiji or among any indigenous Fijians. The concept of paramount chiefs is a foreign concept, imported from Polynesia. Such aristocracy took root in Fiji, probably first in Laucala that built a mini empire about which we know little. But aristocracy and notions of empire were clearly extended from Tonga to Verata, and later to super-tribes Kubuna and A i Sokula. The leading chief of super-tribe Kubuna, the first Roko Tui Bau, was half-Tongan, and the Vunivalu of this tribe was of Tui Kaba lineage, recently returned from many years in**

Tonga. Kaba itself is a Tongan name of an island, Kapa, just as Verata is a Tongan place-name Velata.

Lau and Taveuni were early centres for Tongan penetration, again with aristocratic pretensions. Perhaps even earlier, Tongans were in Macuata, for Labasa shares its name with Lapaha, a chiefly place-name in Tonga. Taveuni itself is a name that stems from the imposition of Tongan influence. Early Europeans knew only the name of Vuna (again a name shared with Tonga), for the southern Territory on Taveuni Island. The title of the Tui Taveuni is really a Tongan overlay of the earlier, proper Fijian title, Vunisa. A variation of the Taveuni name is Tavuni, a fortress village of Tongans established in Nadroga around the middle of the 1700s.

Cakaudrove is headed by the chiefly tribe A i Sokula ("The Flock of Parrots") that reflects their early concern for the gathering of red feathers for their Tongan patrons, back in their early homeland of Ra, and then Verata, from whence they came to Vanua Levu.

Throughout most of very early Fiji, only local territorial chiefs were relevant, though some, not all, were tyrannical and omnipotent within their own very limited domain. Ordinary Fijians have often been treated as nothing more than slaves to their elders and the chiefs. That was indeed custom of the land, just an aspect of life, commonly accepted with no notion whatsoever of any rights of individuals. That has been true in my own life-time, that spans rather more than four fifths of a century. I have seen skulls cracked by an angry chieftain, and local women allocated to give very personal, intimate service of an important visitor. Young men have been put to labour in the food gardens while village elders sit idly by in the shade. One of Fiji's modern problems has been that human rights and democracy, along with the individual responsibility that goes with democracy, are remote notions that have never existed among Fijians. They are new ideas, still far from being established.

In the eyes of the highlanders, the "others" of Fiji, the Fijians of Lau, Cakaudrove, Kadavu, the coast of Nadroga, and Bau itself were all seen as foreigners. They are coastal people, all of them. These other Fijians are not people of the rugged mountains, not "real" Fijians. **'They smell of Tonga', as the highlanders say.** Too many of those Tongans have the face of a frog (*mata boto*) with eyes that bulge out of their heads. And their hair is mushy and soft (*ulu wai*), instead of being real crispy hair, having tougher, tighter coils, which is the way hair really should be. Those Tongan bodies can be tall and beefy, often fat, not compact and muscular like real Fijians.

Highlanders believe that their furious resistance had humbled invasions by the coastal chiefs of Bau and its allies. Highlander heroes were subdued finally only by deception, in Colonial times, and by British-trained troops with modern rifles, led by British officers. And from betrayal within. That is the Fijian way. Not just in the highlands, though betrayal is a specialty of the highlanders.

Final defeat for the highlanders came ultimately through a fake truce devised by Bau. The real Fijians had acted with integrity and honoured the truce, at least this time. Bau, always full of deceit (*vere vakaBau*), then as now, won out with false promises of peace, supported by the guns of the English. Shamelessly, Bauans then enslaved for life some of the highland leaders while

the British did nothing to restrain the gross injustice. All this was done under the guise of Victorian Christianity while Methodist missionaries pretended not to notice.

Cakobau used the British, their missionaries and mercenaries, to win dominance over territories that had never been within his domain. And in turn, the British and the missionaries used Cakobau as a means to govern disparate people spread out over one hundred inhabited islands of their colony.

Too long suppressed, the highlanders of Viti Levu deserve to have their story told. Fiji highlanders are worthwhile to know and understand. Let other Fijians wait to have their story told. First you should understand the "real" Fijians. They are rightfully the topic of the first volume in this series of books on the tribes of the Fijian people. They are the originals.

### **Essential Character of the Highlander**

Naitasiri Province is best known for the hill tribes, the *kaiColo*, the word "*colo*" locally meaning "up", or to climb up, and *Colo* as a place being the interior of Viti Levu. The people's reputation is as tough, independent fighters and workers. Women work alongside their men. There is much less of the sexual differentiation of labour that one finds in Lau and the coastal areas. A wife works next to her husband in the garden or more likely, may do arduous physical work side-by-side with other women. Even in the men's club dance (*meke wau*), a woman will dance with a club among the men. The women will also fight alongside their men. That is virtually unique in Fiji.

Chiefs too, were not greatly differentiated from commoners. They would rarely have any more than eight villages in their domain, and mostly from one to three villages. There are no aristocrats. Chiefs may work in the gardens, as would any man. The reputation extends to all mountain people of Viti Levu. *KaiColo* occupy all of Navosa, and the highland parts of Ra, Tavua, and Ba. One speaks of *Colo-i-Nadroga*, *Colo-i-Ba*, et cetera, to mean the interior, upland parts of those provinces. Some highlanders, such as people of Namosi, Serua, Navosa, Nadroga, and Ba, have long ago forced their way down toward the coast. Ra highlanders moved down from their peaks only after the British brought peace to the Colony.

On Viti Levu Island, most Fijians now on the Tailevu coast had come to their settlements by crossing the highlands of Viti Levu, but this does not make them highlanders. They passed through the highlands only because mountains were safer than lowlands and the coastline. High positions could be defended while coastal areas were exposed to attack. Migrations southward from the Nakauvadra Mountain range are typical examples. Many of the Tailevu people reached their coastal settlements only after arduous travels through the interior mountains and down the rivers such as the Wainibuka. But they are not mountain people for that, except where the Tailevu Province has been extended politically to include a few highland Territories that are not culturally Tailevu at all.

Vanua Levu is Fiji's second largest island but there are virtually no highlanders there. Any Fijians there who live in the hills of Vanua Levu Island do so by the accidents of their political history, not their character formed in mountain life. Just a few tribes of Viti Levu highlanders moved to Vanua

Levu Island and settled there. Viti Levu highlanders are the only real *kaiColo*. A few Colo North highlanders from Territory of Savatu have settled in Vanua Levu after fighting wars as mercenaries. The exact location escapes my memory at the moment. And there are a few others.

Highlanders recognise themselves partly by language. There are some connections among the various highland languages and dialects. And some customs are in common, some that extend over Colo East (only part), Colo West and Colo North. One characteristic that distinguishes the central highlands is the lifetime identification of every person as being either "*tako*" or "*lavo*". (That takes a long "o", with emphasis on the last syllable.) One is supposed to marry a person of the opposite category. And one is always the opposite category from one's father. This dichotomy defines certain aspects of one's role and one's relationships. One may be addressed as *Tako* or *Lavo*, as appropriate. This distinction is fading with time, but still prevails among many highland people. One woman of Colo West, Sereana Saukalou, has said that she uses that distinction as a marker to identify with people of her western highland background. (Some of those western highlanders, the tribe Tio in Ba have actually come down to the coast and dominate that whole area.) One finds the system of *tako/lavo* in parts of Naitasiri, Namosi, Ra, Navosa and Ba. It does not exist among the diluted highlanders who came under Bauan influence along the Waidina River. In the eastern highlands, the custom of *tako/lavo* hardly exists below village Saumakia on the Wainimala River. On the southern coast of Viti Levu Island, Ratu Sakiusa TuiSolia says this moi*t*ie division exists only for his chiefly family at village Togalevu by the Queens Road. That may be due to his close relationship to the Tui Namosi, and all of Namosi retains the moi*t*ie system.

Languages of Colo West and Colo North vary considerably from that of Colo East, but there is much else in common. For our purposes here, it might help to list most of the administrative districts (implicitly the traditional territories) of Colo East because they are today scattered among three different provinces:

Tailevu Province: Nasautoka, Nailega.

Namosi Province: Naqarawai.

Naitasiri Province: Lutu, Waima, Matailobau, Nagonenicolo, Nadaravakawalu, Mua-ira, Noimalu, Nabobuco, Solo-ira, Viria, Rara, Nawaidina.

The word *kaiColo* must be used with a little caution. Coastal Fijians may arrogantly use the term as an insult, implying "country bumpkins", and often remark that as cannibals, the *kaiColo* were dumb enough to eat the shoes of the Reverend Baker, a Methodist missionary who was killed and eaten in the interior in 1865. There is an insult flung at highlanders "*Dou kaicolotaka na i vava nei Tomasi Veika.*" Meaning "You are dumb like a highlander who would eat the shoes of Thomas Baker". For a person to *kaicolotaka* about something is slang, meaning to be dumbly naïve about that. Best it be understood you are joking if you make that remark.

*KaiColo* is a proud term, rather as a Scot can be proud of being a Highlander. Maybe there is sometimes a chip on the shoulder.

Europeans used to call them “Big Heads” because of their long hair, a mass that could be up to five feet or more in circumference. Fijians converted to Christianity were required by missionaries to have their proud hair trimmed, and the highland people were late holdouts against Christianity. They feared quite correctly that Christianity would also imply ultimate domination by Bau. Only the Pax Britannica, backed with firearms, set up and enforced the hegemony of Bau that persists to some degree still today as if it were social tradition. Such “traditions” are really quite modern, political and artificial.

Highland Fijians do consider themselves tough and independent, and usually are. They see themselves as the only true, real Fijians, while coastal Fijians are often of mixed race, lazy, useless “show-off” people, pretentious and boastful but lacking any courage. Coastal Fijians “smell of Tonga”. They are “part” (“*tikitiki*”, or part-Fijian), not “true” Fijian (*kaiViti dina*). There is just enough truth in this to hurt, for the insult to be felt.

People of Lau, Kadavu and Taveuni, are derisively called “islanders” (*kai yanuyanu*) and are said to have swum ashore (*qalo mai*) or just drifted ashore (*ciri mai*) to Viti Levu. These are insults that reply swiftly to *KaiColo* being called country bumpkins. In a confrontation on Viti Levu, the highlander may say: “I’m standing on my own ground” (*Au butuka tu!*), implying that the other islanders should be respectful here. Fijians and Tongans from the smaller islands are thought of as visitors (*vulagi*), strangers (*valagi*), on the mainland, while these outsiders often act as if they owned the place.

Islanders themselves complain that people of the interior are rudely outspoken (*vosalevu*), and talk tough (*gusu kaukauwa*). An even tougher, cruder term is *cai-vosa*, implying a very rough-spoken and very vulgar cheekiness (“*Cai*” means bluntly to fornicate, in the crudest terms.) The *kaiColo* can be proud of their fearlessness and their direct manner in confrontations. But not within their own family.

A highland youngster hardly dares talk to his father, and the father will properly not give orders directly to his son. Communication goes through the mother (*Ra Lei*, or *Lei*). And it used to be unseemly for a couple to have more than two children, three or four at most and that would inevitably make parents the butt of jokes. Ridicule would become unbearable if there were more. That used to be the case. It is changing now.

The “down-side” feature is that highlanders have been much less capable than islanders at modern management and organisation, or entrepreneurial skills. They are only rarely effective bosses or administrators. That is their painful truth. Perhaps their social system inhibits the lines of authority and responsibility that are outside the bounds of kinship, but necessary to modern organisations. Where kinship rules there is a lack of reason and a failure to be responsible outside the kin-group. There is a vulnerability only to shame from the immediate, closely knit kin-group that replaces notions of conscience, integrity, or loyalty to people outside the immediate kin-group. While this is a known characteristic in much of Melanesia, it can extend into areas of Polynesia. Brewster claimed that the notion of conscience existed in the highlands

but he is quite wrong. The examples he cites do not prove the point. Men have felt that there might be physical retribution against them if they committed some wrong to one of their close kin. Ro Vucago believed the loss of his teeth at an advanced age was caused by the fact that he ate his own brother. This is not internally felt guilt that one might call conscience. It is belief in an inflicted retribution, quite a different concept.

Properly, Naitasiri was at first only a modest lowland Territory that ultimately centred itself at village Navuso and extended only as high as Viria village by fairly recent conquest at Bauan instigation, probably in the late 1860s. The early, original Naitasiri Territory was limited to the lowland alluvial valley of the Rewa River, and the hills that lead down in the direction of the swampy shores near Suva. The Territory's hugely enlarged and artificial rôle came only after 1945, when it absorbed the highlanders. The tiny, original Naitasiri Territory was formed by allies of Vueti, probably around the time of his tribe Vusaratu migrating south to village Ovea and to Kubuna at the Tailevu coast. That would be in the mid-1700s at a best guess.

Bau's Ad Interim government (1871-74) had named as first Governor of the original, small Province the Komai Naitasiri, giving him the newly invented title of Tui Naitasiri. Komai itself implies a local territorial chieftain, meaning "He from..." followed by a place-name. But under Fiji's early Government, Tui was to become the more standardized territorial title, suggesting Tongan influence that came by way of Verata (and up the Sigatoka River). The man was Ratu Timoci Vakaruru, who happened also to be only the first or second to bear the local title of Qaranivalu, which dates only from the early 1800s on Viti Levu. That title Qaranivalu in Fiji exists in one other place, the highlands of Seaqaqa, near Labasa. The name Labasa itself is a Tongan name, Lapaha, as already mentioned, and the title Qaranivalu exists in Tonga as Kala-ni'u-valu, and signifies a sort of Prince of Wales, successor-to-be of the Tui Tonga, the traditional highest chief of Tonga. The Tui Tonga was defeated in war by the present lineage of the self-designated King of Tonga who adopted that western form of title on his own initiative, and with a fair amount of pretention. Formerly the name of a man, Kala-ni'u-valu became a title in Tonga around 1885, but it also remains as a name, now as an adopted surname (a custom foreign to traditional Tonga as to traditional Fiji.) Stories heard in Tonga say he was a giant warrior. In Fiji, among super-tribe A i Sokula, also, there is a kin-group known at the Qaranivalu, whose main function is to receive any Tongan nobility that might visit village Somosomo on Taveuni Island. This family is the Kubuabola, best represented by Jone Kubuabola of Fiji Reserve Bank.

Naming Timoci as Qaranivalu was a clever appointment by Bau, for Cakobau's eldest daughter Arieta Kuila had eloped to marry this minor chief whose people had settled a little downriver from village Naitasiri, at village Navuso, just 12 miles from the mouth of the Rewa River (She was running away from an earlier Bauan husband that had been chosen for her). This appointment gave Bau a strong foothold right at the base of the approach to highlands. Naitasiri's earlier loyalties to the Roko Tui Bau (overthrown by the

Vunivalu's Tui Kaba clan) would now be confirmed in support of Bau under the Vunivalu.

After Timoci's death in 1874, Cakobau's son Epeli Nailatikau, was appointed Governor of a united Tailevu-Naitasiri Province with Arieta Kuila, Cakobau's daughter, as his Lieutenant Governor. In effect, Naitasiri Province was thus constrained and kept under tight Bauan control. Ever since, Naitasiri has remained ever more closely bound and inter-linked with the Vunivalu's leadership at Bau and illegitimate offspring of the Vunivalu who had no other useful function.

For highlanders also, their later subjection to Bau has never been questioned openly because there is no freedom to question or criticise. After Cession, throughout Fiji, this new chiefly hierarchy was established as a means of administrative control, the ambition of Bau backed up by the British with the concept of indirect rule.

To this day, the true *kai Colo* do not like being referred to as people of Naitasiri. But so distinctive is their character that they give new meaning to the name of Naitasiri. In contrast, the "real" Naitasiri people are thought to be unrelated. A highlander might say *Keitou sega ni kilai iratou*. ("We do not recognize any relationship at all with them.") They may be heard to say this in private. Children are taught strictly never to speak up. Public opinion is harshly repressed by social custom. Fijians do not readily tolerate opposing opinions. And to add to that problem, political constraints have been repressive since a whole series of military coups that began in 1987. The insurrectionist Rabuka had his "Angels of the Night" to take care of dissidents, and there have been more recent versions of soldiers used as goon squads for the same purpose after the fourth military coup. The media have also been severely censored to ensure their "reliability", being required to report only positively concerning the Bainimarama regime that existed after his military coup of December 2006.

### **The Heart of the Highlanders**

We should admire the heart and feisty spirit of highlanders. For generations they lived close to harsh nature in a hard life of hills and jungles. This takes a will to live that has gone along with the will to kill. Highlanders contested for sheer existence that builds character. Wherever they are, they are surrounded by spirits and ghosts, some from their native culture, some from Christian mythology. For most of them Satan is very much alive and as active as any ghosts of the past and they are ever-present. True, the people are most extremely primitive in background, largely ignorant outside their own environment, and with very few exceptions, unable to achieve much at all in the modern world. A certain cleverness they may have. And they may be short-term master manipulators, charming at times. There may be submission to the will of their kin-group but a feisty independence from others. Quick to laugh and quick to anger and hold resentments that will endure for decades. And still today, there is very little learning and not a trace anywhere of intellect. No art for the sake of art or science for the sake of science. Life is more pragmatic but that is the way most of the world functions anyway. Here there are a few diplomas, specialised vocational training but nothing that can be

called education in a broader sense. Rural schools can do little but teach very basic literacy.

**The American navy commander Charles Wilkes wrote from his visit in 1840-42 in the United States Exploring Expedition:**

**“the natives of Feejee are in many respects, the most barbarous and savage race now existing upon the globe.”**

And as a sailor, he never got to visit the harsher, rougher and tougher people of the highlands. But he did go on to say:

**“War is the constant occupation of the natives, and engrosses all their time and thoughts.”** And that has been quite correct. Sea Captain Dumont d’Urville visiting earlier, 1826-27, says as much:

**“The different Fiji islands are in an almost permanent state of war among themselves.”**

There had been long among the highlanders a pride of independence of small groups. After Cession and imposed peace there came to be a repressed rage of impotence, frustration at feeling useless and powerless in their own country, out-classed by coastal Fijians, and by people of other races who cope better in commerce and in the professions. Even the deeply resented Lauans and other offshore islanders (LomaiViti, and Kadavu Island) out-do the sturdy highlanders in all things except war, and these days, in rugby, which is a sublimation of war. There the highlanders are champions. They would be greater champions if they could maintain longer-term discipline and dedication. They are usually too impatient for quick success.

The highlanders’ character was formed anciently in tribal wars, internecine violence, unrestrained aggression and fairly common cannibalism. Kill or be killed. Trick or be tricked. You can trust no one, they have believed. Listen to the words you might commonly hear: **“I trust no one, especially my best friend or close relative”**. *“Au sega in vakabauta e dua, vakabibi na noqu i tau dredre, se dua na veiwekani vakavoleka.”* Or another version: *“Au sega ni vakabauta e dua, vaka tale ga kina na noqu i tau dredre.”* Such attitudes continue still today. Betrayal comes from within. That is very Fijian, very much a cultural characteristic of many Fijians but a specialty of the highlanders.

There is with all of this a fierce and independent pride carried sometimes to a fault. A few highlanders have had and still have a dignity of straight dealing and straight talk unknown to their coastal cousins. There is heart and strength of character rarely seen among watered down versions of Fijians who populate the lowlands and smaller islands. There is a force of life, a vigour unknown among the softer folk who now live at the beaches and low-lying areas.

**With the possible exception of a few isolated enclaves, we should never speak historically of gentle island folk, or peaceful, loving, people in the South Seas. That was a fiction invented by European romantics.** The myth is now perpetuated by influential islanders themselves who want to believe it. It was Harold Gatty who first suggested in 1936 the idealized notion that Fiji is the way the world should be. He was talking with Sir Harry Luke at the time, and I was present, in Auckland, New Zealand. But romantic, loving and peaceful notions have hardly existed in Fiji except in the minds of foreigners.