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Communal Division and Constitutional Changes in Colonial Fiji, 1959-1970

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COMMUNAL DIVISION AND CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES IN COLONIAL FIJI, 1959-1970

For the degree of Master of Arts

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COMMUNAL DIVISION AND CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES IN COLONIAL FIJI,
1959-1970

A Thesis

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of

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ABSTRACT

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This essay examines the role of communal division in changes to Fiji's constitution during the decade prior to Fiji becoming an independent state. Amicable relations between indigenous Fijians and Indians who migrated under indentured servitude began to crack in 1959 and broke open during political negotiations and the constitutional conference of the 1965. The subsequent election in 1966 solidified the political gains of fledgling parties and entrenched communal divides between the pro-Indian National Federation Party and the Alliance Party, theoretically race neutral, representing the interests of Fijians. By 1969 the political calculus of both the National Federation Party and the Alliance Party shifted in favor of a bid for independence. However, to convince London that Fiji was ready for self-governance, a demonstration of communal harmony had to occur.

INTRODUCTION

Fijian High Chief Lala Sukuna often spoke of colonial Fiji as a three-legged stool where indigenous Fijians contributed land, ethnic Indians contributed labor, and Europeans contributed capital.¹ Each leg of the stool remained isolated from the others while contributing to the stability of the Fijian economy. However, the metaphoric stool was never as stable as Sukuna characterized. In April 1959 an Australian expert, O. H. K. Spate observed in a report to the British Governor of Fiji that “interracial relations are remarkably good; but the equilibrium is unstable.”² His words were prescient. The equilibrium, upon which communal relations were based, rested on a continued communal isolation that became more untenable. As the 1960’s wore on, inter-communal conflict, especially between the Indian and Fijian communal groups, became an enduring legacy of Fijian politics as Fiji transitioned from colonial rule to independence.

Fiji in the 1960’s offers an excellent opportunity to examine how constitutional changes in legislative representation could encourage continued communal division despite overt calls for national unity. The elections that resulted from change in

¹ Lal, Brij V. *In the Eye of the Storm: Jai Ram Reddy and the Politics of Postcolonial Fiji*. (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2010), 41. Throughout this essay ethnic Indians are referred to as Indians. When references are made to citizens of India the difference is clarified in the text.

² O. H. K Spate. *The Fijian People: Economic Problems and Prospects: A Report*. (Suva: Government Press, 1959), 5. When Spate referred to “interracial relations,” he was using the word race as it was used in government documents rather than as a comment on biological differences.

representation stimulated the growth of communally based political parties and charged political negotiations. Political negotiations, especially in the lead up to the 1965 constitutional conference, were couched in terms of communal division by the participants. Likewise, negotiations that led to Fijian independence were viewed through a lens of communal division. This study focuses on Fiji from 1959 through 1970. It was in 1959 that two major reports were completed analyzing the political situation in Fiji. These reports posit that continued communal isolation was problematic and was holding the colony back economically. Independence for Fiji in 1970 is a natural conclusion to the period of study.

This essay analyzes inter-communal struggle in Fiji by examining efforts to consolidate political power through constitutional changes in electoral methods and representation in the Legislative Council in the 1960's. By analyzing electoral procedures and communal representation, I will argue that the British government of Fiji maintained and encouraged manufactured communal identities. I will also argue that for pragmatic reasons, these communal identities became self-reinforcing through the elections of 1963 and 1966 as political parties emerged under the auspices of representing separate communities. The development of communal political parties, supported by electoral results, buoyed party leadership in their efforts to consolidate further political power, both within their respective communities and in the Fijian government. The struggle over electoral methods and legislative representation in Fiji illustrates the impact that constitutional negotiations can have in determining communal identities.

In 1643 Abel Tasman, a Dutch navigator, became the first European to discover the islands that became known as Fiji, located north of New Zealand and East of Australia. However, Fiji would not be charted until 1840 when Charles Wilkes, a United States Navy officer, created the first set of maps that showed the 332 islands.³ European missionaries, specifically Wesleyans, arrived in Fiji and began the work of Christianizing the Fijians in the 1830's.⁴ By 1871 the European population, bolstered by Australian and New Zealand settlers, reached 3,000. Economics, specifically the cotton and coconut trade, overtook religious fervor in attracting European settlers.⁵ On October 10, 1874 *Tui Viti* (King of Fiji) Cakobau and eleven other Fijian chiefs signed the Deed of Cession granting sovereignty to the British Crown.⁶ Britain had resisted the offer of cession on multiple occasions, beginning in 1858, but finally agreed to accept sovereignty over Fiji when the need to protect British settlers overtook financial concerns of taking on another colony.⁷ Europeans engaging in commercial activity collaborated with the Fijian chiefs prior to cessions, however once Britain took control of Fiji the balance of power shifted away from the chiefs to the Europeans.

³ Paris, Sheldon. "Abel Tasman is Credited with the Discovery of Fiji." *Stamps* 252, no. 5 (Jul 29, 1995): 11. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/220949960?accountid=13360>.

Also, "Fiji." Central Intelligence Agency. Accessed November 20, 2015. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/fj.html>.

⁴ Brantlinger, Patrick. "Missionaries and Cannibals in Nineteenth-century Fiji." *History and Anthropology*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2006): 21-38, 27.

⁵ Michael C. Howard, *Fiji Race and Politics in an Island State*. (Vancouver, B.C.: UBC Press, 1991) 21.

⁶ Stephanie Lawson, "The Myth of Cultural Homogeneity and Its Implications for Chiefly Power and Politics in Fiji." *Comp. Stud. Soc. Hist. Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, no. 4 (1990): 795-821, 799. Also W. David McIntyre. *Winding up the British Empire in the Pacific Islands*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 126.

⁷ David Routledge, "The Negotiations Leading to the Cession of Fiji, 1874." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* vol. 2, no. 3 (1974): 278-93, 278-279.

Throughout the colonial period Fijian chiefs relied upon the Deed of Cession to ensure continued “paramountcy” of Fijian interests.⁸ The first British Governor of Fiji, Sir Arthur Gordon (1875-1880), instituted a form of indirect rule in which Fijians could “progress at their own pace in their own traditional surroundings.”⁹ Gordon created two separate administrations to govern Fiji, one for Europeans and another for Fijians.¹⁰ Gordon’s action unified the disparate Fijian tribes under a single bureaucracy, creating a communal group where previously there had not been one. His land policies codified Fijian communal ownership of more than eighty-three percent of Fiji.¹¹ Communal land ownership, along with tax policies that permitted taxes to be in kind instead of cash, made it possible for subsistence farming in the Fijian community to continue into the mid-twentieth century.¹² Gordon intended his policies to last just long enough for Fijians to develop in a way that would bring them into line with Europeans. However, the colonial government he created in Fiji continued his policies and openly encouraged

⁸ *In the Eye of the Storm*, 67. To the Fijian Great Council of Chiefs, paramountcy meant that Fiji was to be for the Fijians and Fijian interests superseded all other interests. This was especially so where Indian interests were at odds with Fijian, but it also applied to European interests in theory.

⁹ “Gordon, Arthur Charles Hamilton, first Baron Stanmore (1829–1912),” Mark Francis in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2011, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33459> (accessed October 1, 2015). Also, Brij V Lal, *Islands of Turmoil: Elections and Politics in Fiji*. (Canberra: Asia Pacific Press, 2006) 2-3.

¹⁰ *Fiji Race and Politics in an Island State*, 24-25.

¹¹ *Islands of Turmoil*, 2-3.

¹² *Ibid.*

isolation of Fijians, even advising tourists during the 1930's, to avoid socializing with Fijians.¹³

When Gordon arrived in Fiji, the islands were suffering economically. The cotton market in Europe suffered a precipitous collapse in 1870 at the beginning of the Franco-Prussian war with the price of cotton in London falling by three fourths as cotton flooded the markets.¹⁴ To help spur the Fijian economy Gordon reoriented commercial agriculture towards the cultivation of sugar. He granted a monopoly to an Australian firm, the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSRC). Along with the monopoly Gordon approved plans to institute indentured servitude to provide laborers on the sugar plantations because he was "reluctant for the Fijians to be used for Western profiteering."¹⁵

Beginning with the arrival of the ship *Leonidas* on March 4, 1879 and ending thirty-seven years later, the CSRC transported 60,965 Indians to Fiji, the majority of whom came from northern provinces although by the end of indenture recruitment shifted to the southern provinces.¹⁶ Under the term of indentured servitude, Indians who served five years were eligible to return to India at their own cost, or for an additional five years the CSRC would cover the cost of the return trip. Despite the offer of return to India, the majority of Indians who went to Fiji opted to remain in Fiji. To many of the Indians who made the journey, Fiji represented a break from the rigid caste system of India, a place

¹³ Robert Norton. "Averting 'Irresponsible Nationalism': Political Origins of Ratu Sukuna's Fijian Administration." *The Journal of Pacific History* 48, no. 4 (2013): 409-428, 412-413.

¹⁴ *Fiji Race and Politics in an Island State*, 22.

¹⁵ Farzana Gounder, *Indentured Identities: Resistance and Accommodation in Plantation-Era Fiji* (Philadelphia, PA, USA: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011.) 21. For further reading on the indentured servitude system within Fiji see Brij V. Lal, *Chalo Jahaji on a Journey through Indenture in Fiji*. (Acton, A.C.T.: ANU E Press, 2012)

¹⁶ *Indentured Identities*, 23.

where people could make it based on their own merit and work ethic.¹⁷ The rapid rise in the Indian population of Fiji threatened the hegemony of the indigenous Fijians.

In 1945 Governor Philip Mitchell (1942-1944) worked with Sukuna to transform the Native Administration into a new system called the Fijian Administration.¹⁸ This new administration was an effort by British administrators to mollify Fijian chiefs.¹⁹ Mitchell feared that Fijians and Indians might begin collaborating together against the European authority in Fiji. Fijian chiefs used the newly minted Fijian Administration to reinforce their position of power within the Fijian community.²⁰ This represented a retrenchment into further isolation for the Fijian community at a time when the pace of decolonization was increasing around the world. Despite official support for the Fijian Administration, the British Governor of Fiji, Ronald Garvey (1952-1958), spoke about the importance of national unity replacing communal divisions.²¹ Regardless of calls for national unity, the colony maintained communal elections and a multiracial constitution. The decision to

¹⁷ *The Fijian People*, 5.

¹⁸ Philip Mitchell served as the Governor of Tanganyika prior to his posting in Fiji. Following his post in Fiji, Mitchell served as the Governor of Kenya. "Mitchell, Sir Philip Euen (1890–1964)," D. W. Throup in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35045> (accessed November 22, 2015).

¹⁹ Robert Norton, "'A Pre-eminent Right to Political Rule': Indigenous Fijian Power and Multi-ethnic Nation Building." *Round Table* 101, no. 6 (December 2012): 521-535, 523.

²⁰ Robert Norton, "Accommodating Indigenous Privilege: Britain's Dilemma in Decolonising Fiji." *The Journal of Pacific History*, 37, no. 2 (2002): 133-56, 135.

²¹ "Accommodating Indigenous Privilege, 135. Also, "Colonial administrators and post-independence leaders in Fiji (1875–2000)," Alex May in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Lawrence Goldman, Oxford: OUP, October 2005; online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2015, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/theme/93236> (accessed November 22, 2015).

maintain a multiracial constitution and communal elections is reminiscent of decisions by the British Colonial Office across the empire as colonies approached independence.

Many scholars have examined multiracial representation in British colonial legislative bodies. This is especially true for African colonies approaching independence. Although Ronald Aminzade's *Race, Nation, and Citizenship in Post-Colonial Africa* is a general history of race and nationalism in Tanzania, he addresses racial based voting in Tanganyika before independence.²² Robert Maxon's *Britain and Kenya's Constitutions, 1950–1960* is an excellent work that demonstrates the unpredictable nature of constitutional changes.²³ Kenya's independence in 1963 brought with it a change to non- racially based voting that Kenyan political leaders lobbied London for throughout the 1950's. The unifying theme in Kenya and Tanganyika, both of which gained independence shortly before Fiji, was a call for changes to their respective constitutions to permit non-communally based voting. While these works address communally based voting schemes, this essay contributes by analyzing changes in the context of a colony consisting of a minority indigenous population with special privileges and a non-indigenous majority population with limited rights. Focusing on Fiji provides opportunity to analyze communally based voting in terms of minority rights instead of strictly settler rights. Additionally, when Kenya and Tanganyika obtained independence, communally based voting was cast aside whereas in Fiji, communally based voting was retained.

²² Ronald Aminzade. *Race, Nation, and Citizenship in Postcolonial Africa: The Case of Tanzania*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

²³ Robert M. Maxon, *Britain and Kenya's Constitutions, 1950-1960*. (Amherst, N.Y.: Cambria Press, 2011).

Traditionally, historians of Fiji have viewed societal ills in terms of “the nature of Fiji’s plural society.”²⁴ However, some scholars have undertaken an effort to more accurately describe group identities.²⁵ Stacey-Ann Wilson argues for examining Fijian communal groups in terms of ethnicity rather than race. She points out that both race and ethnicity are potentially problematic in the case of Fiji since each of the communal groups are composed of multiple sub “ethnocultures.” Indians in Fiji were not monolithic, especially in terms of religion (Hindu, Christian, Muslim, and Sikh). Similarly, Fijians as a communal group were “regionally differentiated.”²⁶ Despite numerous sub-cultural differentiations within each communal group, the Fijian constitution identified representation based on broad categorization. Because of the way in which the communally based Fijian electoral system was designed, self-identity and differentiation within each communal group, while important to each individual, was relegated in favor of political unity within a given communal group for purposes of electoral politics. Certainly, each communal election entailed candidates differentiating themselves from their opponents, but the nature of communal representation reduced the potential impact of internal disputes.

²⁴ Stephanie Lawson. "Constitutional Change in Fiji: The Apparatus of Justification." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. vol. 15, no. 1 (1992): 61-84, 61.

²⁵ Scholars have accomplished much of the scholarly work in racial and ethnic identity. Some examples include: Michael Omi, and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s*. (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986) also David John Howard. *Coloring the Nation: Race and Ethnicity in the Dominican Republic*. (Oxford, U.K.: Signal Books, 2001) and also Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. 2008. “Once More, with Feeling: Reflections on Racial Formation”. *PMLA* 123 (5). Modern Language Association: 1565–72.

²⁶ Stacey Wilson. *Politics of Identity in Small Plural Societies Guyana, the Fiji Islands, and Trinidad and Tobago*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 17, 103.

In recent years, many historians that study Fiji have focused their attention on the military coups of the 1980s. It was only seventeen years after independence that the first coup took place in Fiji. Typically, analysis of the military coups begin with a brief discussion of the Deed of Cession and then skip over to consideration of the lasting impact of the 1970 constitution.²⁷ This essay does not analyze post-colonial communal relations, but it does contribute to that analysis by beginning eleven years prior than what is typical. By beginning analysis of the relationship between Legislative representation and communal division in 1959, this essay shifts traditional analysis and sets that study on a more firm foundation.

The first section of this essay analyzes the two major reports commissioned by the British Governor of Fiji and published as Legislative Council papers along with a classified report Professor Spate submitted to the Colonial Office. These three reports provided a foundation for the political change that occurs throughout the 1960's including the first election after Fijians obtain the franchise in 1963. The second section illustrates how communally based negotiations leading up to and at the constitutional conference of 1965 and the results of the subsequent elections of 1966 reinforced communal identity. In the last section I will demonstrate that communal division between Fijians and Indians could be concealed when the political aims of the political parties

²⁷ Brij Lal, *A Time Bomb Lies Buried Fiji's Road to Independence, 1960-1970*. (Canberra, A.C.T.: ANU E Press, 2008). Also, Deryck Scarr. *Fiji: Politics of Illusion, the Military Coups in Fiji*. (Kensington, NSW, Australia: New South Wales University Press, 1988). Also, Ghai, Yash, and Jill Cottrell. "A Tale of Three Constitutions: Ethnicity and Politics in Fiji." *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 5, no. 639 (2007). Also, Susanna Trnka. *State of Suffering Political Violence and Community Survival in Fiji*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

representing the two communities coincided. Ultimately, I will demonstrate that communal identities and divisions were reinforced through the process of changing the method of selecting legislative representation in Fiji.

CHAPTER 1. COMMUNAL ISOLATION AND THE EXPANSION OF COMMUNAL DIVISION

Sir Kenneth Maddocks, the British Governor of Fiji, commissioned two studies on the situation of Fiji in 1959. O. H. K. Spate, Professor of Geography at the Australian National University, crafted a report on *The Fijian People: Economic Problems and Prospects* on April 9, 1959, published as Council Paper No. 13 of 1959 by the Government Press in Suva.²⁸ Less than a year later the Government Press published the *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Natural Resources and Population Trends of the Colony of Fiji, 1959* in May of 1960.²⁹ Sir Alan Burns, the former British Governor of Nigeria, led this effort, colloquially known as the Burns Commission.³⁰ Combined, these reports demonstrated that the existing political balance along communal lines was increasingly tenuous. Spate's commentary asserted that the social situation in the Fijian community was restraining economic development. The Burns Commission called into question the viability of maintaining a separate administration for Fijians. Both reports focused mostly on indigenous Fijians, however the increasing interactions between Fijians and Indians threatened

²⁸ *The Fijian People*. Spate authored a second report, *The Fijian Political Scene: Some Reflections*. This report, however, was submitted to the Colonial Office and held as confidential until 1989. R. G. Ward and O. H. K. Spate. "Thirty Years Ago: A View of the Fijian Political Scene Confidential Report to the British Colonial Office, September 1959." *The Journal of Pacific History*: 103-24. 103.

²⁹ *Report of the Commission of Enquiry*.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 1.

the precarious balancing act that had kept Fiji relatively balanced throughout the early twentieth century.

Concerns regarding demographics and land ownership illustrated clear differences in opportunity for the people of both the Fijian and Indian communities, but the clearest differences in opportunity were in governmental administration. The make-up of the Legislative Council, the only representational body in the colonial administration that accounted for all people in Fiji, offered opportunity along communally based lines. While the Legislative Council represented all people, the Fijian Administration existed strictly for Fijians, leaving out both Europeans and Indians. Support for the Fijian Administration was strong with Fijian Chiefs, as it bolstered their position within the Fijian community, but the practical result of the Fijian Administration was continued isolation of the Fijian community. Both Spate and the Burns Commission denounced The Fijian Administration for the impact it had in advancing communal division at a time when the British colonial government called for national unity.

Spate relayed that in his opinion, although relations between Fijians, Indians, and Europeans were amicable in daily interactions, the political future of Fiji was “gloomy.”³¹ The gloom that Spate predicted related to the divisions between the communities that were largely predicated on isolation. Each community had its own challenges to overcome for unity to occur. He began by addressing what he termed the “Indian challenge.”³² In the first place, the Indian population exceeded the Fijian and European populaces. Spate called attention to the fact that the Fijians operated

³¹ “Thirty Years Ago,” 104.

³² Ibid, 105.

under a “quasi-autonomous administration” while the numerically smaller European population possessed “political strength out of all proportion to its numbers by virtue of the political arithmetic of 'parity' in Legco.”³³ When the 1959 Annual Report was compiled, Fijians comprised 41.9 percent of the population, while Indians comprised 49.4 percent of the population. Europeans, including Part-Europeans, were just 4.7 percent. This equated to legislative representation of one member per 33,800 Indians, 29,600 Fijians, and 1,280 Europeans.³⁴ Despite political inequity between the racial groups, a concerted effort was made to deny the existence of “racial disharmony.”³⁵

Spate argued for public acknowledgement of communal division and associated problems.

“One can hold back for a long time a numerical majority possessed of little education and economic strength; for a shorter time, and with more difficulty, a minority possessed of these; but a numerical *majority* (emphasis in the original) increasingly strong economically and with educated middle-class leaders cannot permanently be denied equivalent political strength except by sheer force — and even that may be, probably will be, too costly. The only thing to do is to try at least to find some way to exorcise and canalise its demands in advance; but nothing, surely, can be more disastrous than to refuse to admit (in public) the existence of a racial problem, while at the same time exacerbating it by constant pinpricks at the expense of the majority community. Yet such in effect seems to be the 'policy' of the more influential European and Fijian leaders, and that is why the situation, beneath the surface, is so frightening.”³⁶

Spate contended that the growing dissatisfaction in the Indian population would eventually force its way to the surface regardless of attempts to marginalize concerns. The unofficial policy, antagonizing the Indian population while denying the existence of inequity in communal divisions, of what Spate considered “influential European

³³ Ibid. LegCo is a shortened term for the Legislative Council.

³⁴ *Fiji: Report for the Year 1958*, 125.

³⁵ “Thirty Years Ago,” 105.

³⁶ Ibid

and Fijian leaders” was only exacerbating divisions. Regardless of the desires of the European and Fijian leadership the “racial problem” existed, and Spate argued that the best course of action was public admission by leaders in Fiji. The publication of his report to the Governor contributed to public acknowledgement of the divide, though his argument here was for a change in public policies related to the communal divide.

Communal relations were generally split along Fijian and Indian lines with Europeans typically aligning with Fijians in terms of public policy. The effects of policies, such as land purchase restrictions and Fijian Administration, enacted by the colonial government had disparate impacts on different groups. Spate indicated that the European population was able to adapt to cultural issues in Fiji because they were fewer in number and, in general, had the resources needed to adjust.³⁷ If the European population was capable of adapting to cultural transformation because of greater resources and fewer numbers, it stands to reason that the Fijian and Indian populations were viewed as less capable of adjusting to cultural adaptation. Although he viewed communal relations as “extraordinarily good,” Spate cautioned that the reason for those good relations was that the competing Indian and Fijian cultures were operating side by side with little intersection.³⁸ Despite apparently good relations in 1959, communal groups remained isolated in Fiji, and projected increases in populations meant that those cultures would begin to intersect and conflict more often.

³⁷ Ibid, 116.

³⁸ Ibid.

The Indian population increased from 588 in 1881 to 60,634 in 1921 (an increase of 1,031%). While the Indian population expanded quickly through indentured servitude, the Fijian population declined. The Fijian population fell precipitously from 114,748 in 1881 to 84,475 in 1921 (a decrease of 26%).³⁹ The Indian population continued rapid growth, exceeding the growth of the Fijian population. By the conclusion of 1959, Indians in Fiji totaled 191,328, approximately 49 percent of the total population. By comparison, the Fijian population numbered 162,483, approximately 42 percent of the total population. The remaining population was split among European, Part-European, Chinese, and Other Pacific Races.⁴⁰ Fiji boasted both a higher birth rate and a low mortality rate, compared with developed countries. The birthrate per 1,000 for Indians was 47.4 in 1959 compared to the Fijian birthrate of 36.9.⁴¹ These birthrates were typical of the years surrounding 1959.⁴² If the status quo was retained the Indian population was expected to become a dominant majority in Fiji. Even though the Indian community possessed numerical dominance in the population, the Fijian community possessed dominance in the key area of land ownership.

Land ownership and usage was aligned with communal division from the signing of the Deed of Cession. The principles, which guided land use and ownership, were derived Paragraph 4 from the Deed of Cession:

“That the absolute proprietorship of all lands not shown to be alienated so as to have become bona fide the property of Europeans or other foreigners or not

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ *Fiji: Report for the Year 1959*, 9.

⁴¹ *Fiji: Report for the Year 1959*, 126. Also, *Fiji: Report for the Year 1960*, 125.

⁴² *Fiji: Report for the Year 1960*, 125. *Fiji: Report for the Year 1961*, 132. Also, *Fiji: Report for the Year 1958*, 111.

now in the actual use or occupation of some Chief or tribe or not actually required for the probable future support and maintenance of some chief or tribe shall be and is hereby declared to be vested in Her said Majesty her heirs and successors.”⁴³

This limited opportunity to own land for anyone who did not already own land in Fiji after 1874. By the beginning of 1960, land distribution heavily favored the Native Customary Tenure. Thus, Fijians, as a communal group, possessed 83.6% of the total landmass of Fiji. Crown Land consisted of 6.4% of the landmass. Freehold Land, individually titled landowners, consisted of 10%. Despite being a plurality of the population, individual Indian landowners possessed just 1.7%.⁴⁴ The official policies of the colonial government restricting land ownership forced individuals into communal identities. All Fijians, regardless of which island or tribe they were from, owned the land together. Similarly, Indians were frozen out of the land market with very few exceptions. Despite significant internal differentiation within communal groups, land policy recognized only communal identity.

Burns observed that the “Land Problem” rested mostly in the poor usage of agriculturally viable land in Fiji. Freehold land, privately held land sold by Fijians to Europeans before Cession in 1874, was not available to small farmers and some of it was not being used. The British government owned Crown land. Fijians communally owned all land other than freehold land and Crown land. In the estimation of the members of the Burns Commission, Fijians failed to adequately utilize the

⁴³ Joeli Baledrokadroka, “The Fijian Understanding of the Deed of Cession Treaty of 1874”. Appendix A. Conference paper presented at Traditional Lands in the Pacific Region: Indigenous Common Property Resources in Convulsion or Cohesion, Brisbane, Australia (September 7-9 2003)

⁴⁴ *Report of the Commission of Enquiry*, 19.

communally owned land.⁴⁵ Notwithstanding communal ownership of the vast majority of land across the island group, the Fijian lands were actually at a distinct disadvantage compared to Crown land, since much of the land was not agriculturally viable. Of 2,611,548 acres on Viti Levu, the largest island in Fiji, 1,645,500 acres were considered to be useless for agricultural purposes. Only 280,866 acres, approximately eleven percent, were considered arable, cultivatable land.⁴⁶ Vanua Levu, the second largest Fijian island, was only slightly better with thirteen percent considered arable, cultivatable land.⁴⁷ Thus, despite having the advantage of possessing the vast majority of land in Fiji, usable land only represented a small portion of these holdings. Owning land was different than possessing rights to work the land. The Indian population held the majority of leases on arable land.⁴⁸ Individual Indians possessed leases for 350,000 acres across Fiji, with 222,000 acres within the “cane belts,” in 1959.⁴⁹ By obtaining leases, individuals overcame the communal disadvantage of being prohibited from owning land. The right to own land was a significant economic factor, but it was also a significant political issue that split along communal lines. Any attempt to alter government policies related to land tenure and ownership along communal lines would have to start at the Legislative Council.

The Legislative Council consisted of sixteen official members, including the Colonial Secretary, Attorney-General, and Finance Secretary in an *ex officio* capacity. Additionally, there were fifteen “unofficial” members of the Legislative Council; five

⁴⁵ *Report of the Commission of Enquiry*, 5.

⁴⁶ *Annual Report of 1958*, 27.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Report of the Commission of Enquiry*, 19.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Fijians, five Indians, and five Europeans. It was through the “unofficials,” members of the council without a portfolio, that the inhabitants of Fiji were directly represented in the colonial government. Selection to the council was dependent upon communal category. Three Indian and three European “unofficials” were elected every third year with the remaining representatives being nominated. Indians obtained franchise, over the objections to the Fijian Great Council of Chiefs, in 1929, although the first elected Indians boycotted from 1929-1932 in protest for not having equality with the European members.⁵⁰ The Great Council of Chiefs submitted a slate of between seven and ten Fijian “unofficials” to the Governor. The Governor then selected five of the nominated Fijians.⁵¹ Differentiated methods for selecting representatives in the Legislative Council varied based on communal group and illustrated significant distinctions between the communities. Unofficials in the Legislative Council represented whole communal groups regardless of internal differentiation.

The hierarchy and traditions of Fijian culture made it difficult for Fijians to freely interact with their representatives. One Fijian expressed, “These representatives are to deliver in the Legislative Council what the people cannot tell the chiefs who are the present members and who are government officials and according to our Fijian customs it is not easy to discuss things freely with them.”⁵² To address the disparity between the directed representation of Fijians and the direct representation of Indians and Europeans, the Burns Commission recommended that instead of the Great Council of Chiefs nominating all five seats, they should nominate two with the

⁵⁰ Stacey Wilson. *Politics of Identity in Small Plural Societies Guyana, the Fiji Islands, and Trinidad and Tobago*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 105.

⁵¹ *Fiji: Report for the Year 1958*, 94-95.

⁵² *Ibid.*

remaining seats selected through direct elections.⁵³ Removing the responsibility of the Great Council of Chiefs to nominate the full slate of Fijian representation in favor of direct representation was a threat to homogeneity of the Fijian communal group. More significantly, it was a threat to the power of the chiefs. It would mark a significant shift in the Fijian culture.

Whereas the Legislative Council represented the three primary racial categories in Fiji, the Fijian Administration existed solely for the purpose of supporting Fijians. The Fijian Administration was supposed to act as “a local government system,” but the Burns Commission noted, “There is little *local* (emphasis in original) government as the provincial officers are largely controlled from headquarters where there is a ‘Central Fijian Treasury’. Where the population is mixed the administration is entirely racial, and not local, as it deals only with Fijians.”⁵⁴ The commission concluded that “in a colony of this size a double administration is wasteful of man-power and money, and we believe that the well-being of the Fijians could safely be left in the care of the District Officers.”⁵⁵ While the commission concluded that the dual administration should be abolished, they were also careful to articulate that it should be abolished gradually, “pending the introduction of local government.”⁵⁶ The Burns Commission believed that since the Fijian Administration had an isolating effect on the Fijian community, an effort to abolish it immediately might serve to further isolate the community through fear of

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ *Report of the Commission of Enquiry*, 19.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 31.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 32. Local government referred to district government, which was intended to support all residents.

losing cultural identity. Replacing the Fijian Administration with local government would remove the communal aspect of the existing administration by including the Indian community within the responsibility of the local government.

The Fijian communal system represented a significant difficulty in moving the colony to adopt a new form of local government rather than the existing Fijian Administration. The communal system required Fijians to observe multiple traditional obligations that included the “planting and upkeep of food crops.”⁵⁷ Despite the Fijian Administration’s control over communal life, Spate observed “the natural direction of growth is towards individualism; and from many talks with Fijians both in the *koro* and the towns, I feel assured that it is increasingly the direction desired by the people: most notably on Viti Levu, but, even if to a lesser extent, also in the islands.”⁵⁸ The communal responsibilities levied on Fijians contributed to a decreased ability to contribute to individual economic success since an individual may be obligated to perform communal duties at economically pivotal times such as “planting or reaping his crop.”⁵⁹ Communal responsibilities, enforced by the Fijian Administration, reinforced the isolation of the Fijian community.

Early in his report, Spate illustrated the political difficulties implicit with the Fijian Administration. He posited that the existence of a separate administration dedicated to the advancement of Fijians by its very nature, tended to maintain “racial separatism.”⁶⁰ Any efforts undertaken to reduce the policing and regulatory powers of the Administration would likely cause a significant amount of consternation amongst

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ *The Fijian People*, 96.

⁵⁹ *Report of the Commission of Enquiry*, 32.

⁶⁰ “Thirty Years Ago,” 107.

the Fijian population. Specifically, Spate cautioned, a direct assault on the administration from the outside would likely be countered by a rush to defend it.⁶¹ The Spate and Burns Commission reports exposed the fragility of the communal divide in Fiji. Spate's prediction of backlash against calls to dissolve the Fijian Administration proved to be correct.

Both the Burns Commission and Spate reports recommended reducing, and eventually eliminating, the Fijian Administration in 1959, however, F.J. West, a Senior Fellow in Pacific History at Australia National University, recommended against the dissolution of the Fijian Administration. Although West argued for maintaining the Fijian Administration, he conceded that, "Too often the purpose which Sukuna had in mind for the Fijian Administration shades off into another: preservation of the *status quo*."⁶² Even a scholar committed to keeping the Fijian Administration understood that it meant retaining Fijian isolation. Despite the observations of Alan Burns, a Colonial Office veteran and former colonial administrator, that the Fijian Administration exacerbated communal division in Fiji, (Harold) Julian Amery, Parliamentary Undersecretary of State, rejected the negative implications of the administration in November of 1960 saying, "I see no future in the

⁶¹ Ibid, 108.

⁶² Ratu Josefa Lalabalavu Vaanialialia Sukuna was the chief of Lau and held position in the civil service in Fiji in the early twentieth century. He was a proponent of the Fijian Administration and was well known for his advocacy of maintaining Fijian primacy in political affairs. West, Francis James. *Political Advancement in the South Pacific: A Comparative Study of Colonial Practice in Fiji, Tahiti, and American Samoa*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1961, 44. Also "Sukuna, Josefa Lalabalavu Vaanialialia (1888–1958)," I. C. Campbell in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, October 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/53278> (accessed November 5, 2015).

Burns recommendation that the Fijian administration should be wound up as soon as possible.”⁶³ Amery went beyond simply rejecting the eventual abolishment of the Fijian Administration. He stated, “I would personally be inclined to go further and encourage the development of some Indian counterpart to the Fijian administration.”⁶⁴ His purpose in recommending a separate administration was to recognize the separate natures of the Indian and Fijian cultures since, as he saw it, the differences between Indians and Fijians were more dissimilar than those of Jews and Arabs.⁶⁵ He accused the Burns Commission of aggravating tensions between communities with their recommendations.⁶⁶ Amery thought that the dissolution of communal isolation was the key to aggravating tensions, and he was in a position to ensure policies that encouraged isolation were maintained.

Ravuama Vunivalu, a Fijian Legislative Council member, slammed the Burns Commission report as an assault on the “Fijian way of life,” and that the position of Fijians “in the Colony was not as invulnerable as they had hoped it to be.”⁶⁷ Vunivalu expressed concern that Fijian control over the colony might be fading as Indian political power seemed to be rising. The situation in Fiji was summed up in an editorial On March 15, 1960 in the *Times of London*, which stated, “To-day Indians control most of the sugar cane production and form exactly half of the population.

⁶³ “Amery, (Harold) Julian, Baron Amery of Lustleigh (1919–1996),” Patrick Cosgrave in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/63313> (accessed July 30, 2015). Also, *A Time Bomb Lies Buried*, 93.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 91.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Michael C. Howard, *Fiji Race and Politics in an Island State*. (Vancouver, B.C.: UBC Press, 1991) 58.

The Fijians themselves make up only two-fifths of the population. They are generally less advanced, both economically and politically (Indians have the vote, Fijians have their representatives in the Legislative Council chosen for them by the Chiefs), but they own the land which the Indians need.”⁶⁸ The Indian population appeared to have overtaken the Fijian community demographically, economically, and politically.

What remained uniquely Fijian were the land and the Fijian Administration.

Regardless of Amery’s desires, Fiji was no longer capable of remaining communally isolated without relations between communities deteriorating.

The reality of rising tensions between Fijians and Indians could not be ignored in perpetuity. On December 31, 1961, an article titled "Fiji Independence Demand," buried on page ten, concerned the future of Fiji. The increased emphasis on independence for colonies was not lost on Fiji’s political leadership. Fijian Paramount Chief Cakobau, a direct descendent of *Tui Viti* Cakobau, demanded that when independence came to Fiji, the British government ought to return the island group to the Fijian people. Indian leaders in Fiji objected to this demand. The brief article in the *Times* made only a passing reference at the end of the article illustrating the growing tension; “Both the Fijians and Indians have five members of the Legislative Council. There have been some sharp exchanges between them recently.”⁶⁹ The members of the communally selected Legislative Council represented distinct communities. Regardless of political ideology, each representative argued on behalf of communal concern, and those concerns had become sharp.

⁶⁸ "Fiji's Stiff Fight." *The Times*, March 15, 1960, 54720th ed., Editorials sec.

⁶⁹ "Fiji Independence Demand." *Times* [London, England] 14 Dec. 1961: 10. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 29 July 2015. Gale Document Number: CS169173390

The make-up of the Legislative Council was altered in 1963. Whereas prior to elections in early 1963 there were fifteen members split up by communal group, following the elections the size and purpose of the Legislative Council had shifted significantly. The Legislative Council expanded in size to thirty-seven members including nineteen *ex-officio* members, four elected Europeans, two nominated Europeans, four elected Fijians, two nominated Fijians by the Great Council of Chiefs, four elected Indians, and two nominated Indians.⁷⁰ More important than changes in the structure of the Legislative Council was the election itself. While elections remained communal, the April elections denoted the first time that Fijians were given the opportunity to directly vote for their representatives.⁷¹

Turn out significantly increased in the 1963 elections with 59,895 votes cast compared to just 13,356 votes in 1959.⁷² While this increase in voters may have represented a move towards more inclusive representation of Fijians who went to the polls for the first time, the communal nature of voting meant that the representative to represented ratio remained inherently unequal.⁷³ The essential difference in 1963, at least for the Fijian population, was the method of selecting representatives in addition to the expanded number of representatives for each communal group in the Legislative Council. The Fijian franchise was a major shift in the internal Fijian relations with the government. Individual Fijians now had a say in governance outside of the hierarchy of the Great Council of Chiefs.

⁷⁰ I. S. Chauhan, "Fiji Today: Political Process and Race Relations in A Plural Society." *Sociological Bulletin* 14, no. 2 (1965): 72-73.

⁷¹ *Fiji: Report for the Year 1963*, 6.

⁷² *Fiji: Report for the Year 1963*, 6.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 61.

Because the election remained communally based, the candidates running for office were only concerned with attracting the votes of those within their communal group. As a result, the campaign in 1963 illustrated the continued isolation of everyday life for Fijians and Indians. According to Norman Meller and James Anthony, the Indian candidates tended to focus on “such issues as free medical treatment, housing, higher wages, or social security, pensions, and destitute allowances,” whereas these concerns were largely absent from the Fijian campaigns.⁷⁴ Meller and Anthony attributed this to “the distinction between Indian individualized life and Fijian communal living.”⁷⁵ The campaigns showed Indian identity was based on individual merit and success, thus a concern for social welfare emanating from the state rather than from pre-existing communal structures. This was a marked difference from the Fijian community that was still steeped in communal responsibility that came from community rather than from the state.

The campaigns shed light on ongoing inter-communal relations as well. Most of the campaign statements made by Fijian candidates contained explicit pro-Fijian sentiment without explicitly stating an anti-Indian bias. Both Fijian and Indian candidates expressed support for “one-nationism,” although the phrase had significantly different practical meaning depending on who was using the phrase.⁷⁶ To Indians, as the majority population, “one-nationism” meant legal equality with Fijians and likely control over the political system in Fiji. For the Fijian candidates, “one-nationism” was combined with a pro-Fijian sentiment meant to exclude Indians

⁷⁴ Norman Meller and James Anthony. *Fiji Goes to the Polls; the Crucial Legislative Council Elections of 1963*, (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1968) 81.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 82.

from the political and legal system of Fiji. Thus, the campaigns of 1963 demonstrated that nature of the electoral system was continuing to isolate the populations into communal groups. Campaign rhetoric demonstrated that communal division was an important political issue in Fiji even though voters remained isolated within communal voting groups.

The political aftermath of the 1963 elections was most evident in Indian politics. Citizens Federation, a loose collection of local Indian political parties throughout Fiji, performed well in the 1963 elections capturing all three elected, communal Indian seats in the Legislative Council. The Federation Party developed from the Citizens Federation and adopted a formal constitution on June 21, 1964 and became Fiji's first official colony-wide political party.⁷⁷ Siddiq Koya, one of the three elected Indians, drafted the constitution. Upon adoption, A.D. Patel was elected as the first president of the party, and Koya was elected to be the first vice-president.⁷⁸ The Federation succeeded in dominating Indian politics in Fiji although the population it claimed to represent was much more diverse than the party recognized. Despite internecine political struggle, the Federation parlayed election results to ensure that the party's definition of Indian concerns was represented to the governments in Suva and London as the Indian perspective. Thus, the Federation subsumed Indian political identity.

The Federation operated as the sole colony wide political party in Fiji until 1966 when the Alliance Party was created. Similar to the founding of the Federation,

⁷⁷ Brij Lal, *A Vision for Change: AD Patel and the Politics of Fiji*. (National Centre for Development Studies, 1997),188.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 188-89.

the Alliance emerged from a collection of existing local political parties and was officially formed on March 14, 1966 with Ratu Mara as the first party leader. The Alliance billed itself as a multiracial political party despite the generally recognized purpose of representing Fijian interests.⁷⁹ The Fijian Administration and the Great Council of Chiefs encouraged Fijian isolation through cultural and structural methods. The Alliance emerged to confront the growing political threat of the Federation and in doing so it subsumed Fijian political identity.

Professor Spate and the members of the Burns Commission submitted reports that clearly laid out the economic situation in Fiji at the end of the 1950's, but more than just commenting on the economy, the reports illustrated the communal isolation of Fiji, especially in the Indian and Fijian communities. The most controversial aspect of the Burns report, recommendations regarding the eventual dissolution the Fijian Administration, was supported by Spate. The Undersecretary of State, Amery, who supported continued communal isolation in Fiji, rejected this recommendation. Despite continuing policies of communal isolation, the British colonial government gave the Fijian community the franchise in 1963. The elections of 1963 remained communal affairs as voters went to the polls to vote for representatives of their respective communal groups. The campaigns focused on internal political debates, but the results of the election had a significant impact on the communal identity as Fijian and Indian communal politics as political parties emerged from the chaos of the first Fijian election. Elections in 1963 were a turning point for Fiji's isolated communal systems. Direct, communal representation brought Fijians into conflict

⁷⁹ Ibid, 208. Also "Fiji's communal electoral system," 40. Ratu Mara was the high chief of the eastern region of Lau and would become Fiji's Chief Minister.

with Indians. Political negotiations between the communal groups were altered as Fijians had a voice in who represented them. This is especially evident in the negotiations surrounding and at the constitutional conference of 1965 in London.

CHAPTER 2. REINFORCING COMMUNAL DIVISION AND POLITICAL IDENTITY THROUGH CONSTITUTIONAL NEGOTIATIONS

Shortly after the elections of 1963 preparations began for a constitutional conference. According to the *Annual Report* for 1965, “The purpose of the conference was to work out a constitutional framework for Fiji which would preserve a continuing link with Britain and within which further progress could be made in the direction of internal self-government.”⁸⁰ Internal self-government was Great Britain’s eventual goal for Fiji, though not one that came with a timeline.⁸¹ Before the conference opened on July 26, 1965, various issues had to be ironed out.⁸² Some of these issues included discussion about full independence for Fiji, who would be invited, and whether or not representation in the Legislative Council would remain communally based.

The topic of independence from Great Britain, fully supported by Federation representatives and fully rejected by the Fijian and European representatives, was

⁸⁰ *Fiji: Report for the Year 1965*, 5.

⁸¹ The term self-government is a difficult term to define because it has different meanings to each negotiator. It might mean full independence and a total break from Great Britain, but it might also mean open franchise within the Colony with the executive branch being elected in Fiji without interference from London. The issue of what it means to self-govern will continue to show up throughout the negotiations discussed in this essay.

⁸² *Fiji Constitutional Conference 1965*. London: H.M.S.O., 1965, 7.

tabled in advance of the conference.⁸³ The official report out of the conference stipulated a “general agreement had been reached in Fiji that independence was not an issue to be discussed.”⁸⁴ Internal self-governance, distinct from independence, remained a primary purpose for the conference. Fijians viewed self-governance as Fijians controlling Fiji, employing the Deed of Cession to support this view. Apisai Tora, a Fijian politician argued that since it was Fijians, not Indians, who signed the Deed of Cession only Fijians should be invited to the Constitutional Conference in London.⁸⁵ The Colonial Office rejected this argument in favor of including Indians.

The British Governor of Fiji, Sir Derek Jakeway initially recommended that each racial community nominate representatives for the 1965 conference.⁸⁶ The Fijian delegation was not adverse to this recommendation. However, issues arose when the Indian delegation nominated only members of the Federation Party. Jakeway balked at the exclusion of Indians not aligned with the Federation based on the belief that the Federation did not adequately represent all Indians in Fiji.⁸⁷ He proposed a change to the process of selecting representatives where the “unofficial” members of the Legislative Council would select delegates for the conference. Patel strenuously objected to the Legislative Council selecting delegates on the grounds that selection of communally aligned delegates by members of other groups was tantamount to interference in the internal affairs of each group.⁸⁸ This argument was a bit

⁸³ At the time of pre-conference negotiations, the Federation Party remained the only political party in Fiji. Fijian representatives included those in the Legislative Council.

⁸⁴ *Fiji Constitutional Conference 1965*. London: H.M.S.O., 1965, 6.

⁸⁵ *A Vision for Change*, 189.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 188.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*.

disingenuous given the Federation stance of supporting common rolls for electing legislative representatives. The Federation leadership had won the communal seats and was consolidating Indian support within the political party and sole representation on behalf of Indians would further coalesce Indian political identity within the party. Regardless of the motivations behind Patel's objections, Whitehall intervened in the negotiations and forced Jakeway to relent. The Federation's objections resulted in invitations being extended to all of the elected, "unofficials" of the Legislative Council.⁸⁹

Voting method was a key issue for those representatives who would attend the constitutional conference in London. There were two competing methods for selecting representatives in an election. Communal roll voting was the status quo. In a communal roll situation each voter is asked to choose their preferred candidate from a list that only includes members of the same racial, or communal, group. Thus, in Fiji a Fijian voted only for Fijians, and Indians were only permitted to vote for Indians. Communal roll voting also means a guaranteed allocation of elected officials according to racial community. In general, the Fijian leadership supported the continuation of the communal roll voting system. Indian leadership generally backed a common roll scheme for Fiji, although the community was split on whether to support a communal roll voting or common roll voting scheme.⁹⁰ Common roll voting is a method where voters are able to select their preferred candidate from a list regardless of the race of the voter or candidate. Using a straight common roll does not guarantee an allocation of seats according to racial community. In a racially divided

⁸⁹ Ibid, 189.

⁹⁰ "Fiji Today", 75.

Fiji, the Fijian political leaders, such as Apisai Tora and Ratu Mara, believed that a common roll voting system would lead to an Indian dominated Legislative Council.

Maintaining communal roll voting was in the interest of both Fijians and Europeans because of the numerical disparity with the Indian community. By 1965 the Indian population had gone from being a plurality of the total population in Fiji to being the majority with 50.08% of the population. By comparison, the Fijian community was just 41.49% of the population, and Europeans totaled just 2.29%.⁹¹ It is, therefore, not surprising that the Fijian and European communities would encourage the continued use of communal roll voting, thereby increasing their per citizen representation. In 1965, the communal representation system meant that there was one elected representative for 58,835 Indians, 48,750 Fijians, and 2,689 Europeans.⁹² With birthrates projected to remain stable, the imbalance of representation appeared likely to grow.

It is hardly surprising that the Federation leadership supported common roll voting for Legislative Council elections. Granting each adult in Fiji a vote that could be cast on behalf of any candidate would theoretically curtail the over-representation of Fijians and Europeans and would almost certainly favor the Indian community. In Spate's 1959 report, he observed, "The more a common representation is postponed (and in this age it probably cannot be postponed for ever), *the weaker is the Fijian share* (emphasis in original), and the less they can learn of how to use the share they have."⁹³ The concept of common roll voting may have been the most equitable in

⁹¹ *Fiji: Report for the Year 1965*, 8.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ "Thirty Years Ago," 122.

terms of representative to constituent ratios, and in some quarters it was viewed to be inevitable eventually, but it was an untenable solution in 1965.⁹⁴

Adoption of common roll voting in Fiji was an essential part of the Federation platform. A.D. Patel outlined his reasons for adopting common roll voting. He argued that common rolls were a way to create unity in Fiji, had been successful in the African colonies, and would pressure the people into acting along political lines rather than racial lines. Patel decried communal rolls as inevitably dividing people, limiting the ability of representatives to compromise in the best interest of the nation, and exacerbating communal differences.⁹⁵

Despite the passionate advocacy of Patel and the Federation, Fijian and European political leadership in Fiji rejected common roll voting in favor of continued communal roll voting. Even though the Fijian population lacked a unified political party to face off against the Federation, the existing parties that represented Fijian interests acted in a unified way. This would not have been likely under a common roll system. The political fracturing of the various parties would likely have assisted the Federation. If Indian proposals related to common roll were realized, Fijians feared that they would lose the ability to maintain their place in society since the numerically superior Indians would have the majority of the representation in the Legislative Council.⁹⁶ The anti-common roll sentiment was summed up in a Fijian phrase, "*E na vula se na balabala*,": "We will have common roll when the balabala

⁹⁴ "Fiji Today", 75.

⁹⁵ *A Vision for Change*, 192.

⁹⁶ *A Vision for Change*, 193.

flowers.”⁹⁷ A balabala, a tree fern, does not flower.⁹⁸ Patel referred to this notion as exacerbating communal suspicions and anxiety.

In March 1965, Governor Jakeway provided the Federation reason for further suspicion and anxiety when he said, “I thought it was common ground that the Fijian people – the autochthonous people – have a special position in Fiji because they belonged here first, long before anyone else came here. It was inconceivable that Britain would ever permit the Fijian people to be placed politically under the heels of an immigrant community.”⁹⁹ According to the Governor, the British position mirrored that of the Fijian politicians. The Governor’s comments seemed to confirm Federation leaders suspicions that negotiations were useless. On 25 April 1965, the Federation Party voted to withdraw from informal talks in Fiji. The *Fiji Times* was publishing supposedly confidential conversations from the negotiations. The Federation put out a statement accusing the *Fiji Times*, the Public Relations Office, and the Fiji Broadcasting Commission of being anti-Federation.¹⁰⁰

As offensive to the Federation as the comments by Jakeway were, they were tame compared to comments in May 1965 by Apisai Tora, who publically called for a commission to look into the potential of ejecting the Indian population from Fiji. Using Burma and Ceylon as examples, he stated, “If Fiji’s and Fijian interests are to be protected then the quickest possible way should be found to send the Indians to

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Dean Starnes, and Nana Luckham. *Fiji*. 8th ed. (Footscray, Victoria: Lonely Planet, 2009), 63.

⁹⁹ *A Vision for Change*, 196.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 194.

other countries.”¹⁰¹ Beyond the intransigence and offensive nature of this statement, Tora proclaimed his distrust in Indians while proclaiming affinity towards Europeans. He called for the exclusion of Indians in the constitutional conference. He commented, “We know the Europeans and we can get along with them. We also know what they will advocate for in the coming London conference. As for the Indians, we do not know what they want or what they are going to say in London. They are keeping quiet, and we don’t like it.”¹⁰² Despite deep misgivings, and the ongoing boycott of informal talks, discussion continued between the leadership of the Fijian political parties and the Federation. Negotiations leading to the constitutional conference illuminated communal divisions.

The constitutional conference opened in London on July 26, 1965.¹⁰³

Although independence was excluded from consideration, the Fijian and Indian positions on independence could not be fully avoided. After all, one of the essential goals of the conference was to assist Fiji in moving towards internal self-governance. Although mentioned previously, the definition of self-governance depended on the person using it. Patel, representing the Federation, viewed the conference as a vehicle for creating momentum towards Fijian independence. The level of self-governance sought by Patel and the rest of the Indian contingent was clearly articulated by Patel: “The constitution should empower the local government to conclude trade agreements with other countries and provide for further delegations of authority to be made by the

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 197.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ *Fiji Constitutional Conference 1965*, 7, 18.

British government.”¹⁰⁴ The Indian delegation pushed for more authority on faster timelines than the Fijian delegation was prepared to accept.

The Fijian stance on moving towards self-governance was much more muted by comparison. Ratu Mara, representing Fijians, stated, “We have declared that independence is not our goal because we have never found any sound or valid reason to attenuate, let alone abandon, our historical and happy association with the United Kingdom.”¹⁰⁵ For Europeans and Fijians in Fiji, the conference might at best be used for modest movements toward self-governance, but the radical changes advocated by Patel were not desired at the time of the conference. Fijian delegates viewed Indian pressure to move quickly into independence as a way for the Indian community to politically subjugate Fijians.

In a clear message that internal self-governance would be delayed, delegates agreed to a compromise where the Crown would continue to appoint the Governor of Fiji.¹⁰⁶ In practical terms, the agreement rejected the Indian delegates proposals for immediate internal self-governance. The British Governor represented a continuation of external power over Fiji. However, while the Crown retained authority to appoint the Governor, there were other changes that demonstrated shifts in the power structures of Fiji’s government. The new constitution limited the power of the Governor in appointments. The Governor lost all authority to appoint unofficials to

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 199.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 198.

¹⁰⁶ *Fiji Constitutional Conference 1965*, 8.

the Legislative Council.¹⁰⁷ While the make-up of the Legislative council was changed in favor of elected officials, the nature of the communal voting changed as well.

The Legislative Council would be expanded to thirty-six members. Of those, nine would be communally elected Fijians with an additional two Fijians appointed by the Great Council of Chiefs. For the first time, Rotumans and Pacific Islanders other than Fijians would be included in the Fijian communal vote. The Indian communal delegation in the Legislative Council would consist of nine elected members. The European communal delegation would grow to seven members and would include the Chinese and other various communities not aligned with the Fijian community for purposes of franchise. Thus, the communally elected members of the Legislative Council would total twenty-seven. Beyond the communally elected members there would be an additional nine members elected through a compromise method of cross-voting in three constituencies.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the racial make-up of the Legislative Council would be fourteen Fijians, twelve Indians, and ten Europeans.¹⁰⁹ The constitutional conference delegates in London introduced aspects of common roll voting in hopes of politically integrating the entire population of Fiji, but at the same time the communal voting rolls were freshly infused with new aspects of racial division.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 12.

¹⁰⁸ Cross voting is a method of voting where voters select representatives based on geographic constituencies similar to common roll voting except that multiple seats are available in a given constituency with each communal group guaranteed one seat each. This method was the same that was used in Tanganyika in the decade preceding independence.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 11.

The final make-up of the Legislative Council was a compromise between the Indian call for full and immediate implementation of common roll voting and the combined Fijian/European call for continued communal roll voting. Common roll voting might have all but guaranteed an Indian majority in the Legislative Council, so it is no surprise that it was rejected in favor of continued communal roll. The system of cross-voting and communal voting was opposed by the Indian delegation, but what was most upsetting to the delegation was the increased representation of Fijians in the Legislative Council. The first argument utilized by the Fijian and European delegations was that “the additional representation was justified by the special position occupied by the Fijian community in Fiji.”¹¹⁰ The second argument for granting Fijians two more seats than Indians was the inclusion of Rotumans and Pacific Islanders in the Fijian communal representation.¹¹¹ The Indian population viewed this second argument with suspicion. At the end of 1965, the Indians comprised 50.08% of the population while combined the Fijians, Rotumans, and Pacific Islanders comprised just 44.31%.¹¹² The Fijian delegation, with the support of the European delegation managed to increase communal representation in the Legislative Council. With negotiations on representation completed, the conference attendees turned their attention to securing rights for their respective communities.

Delegates at the conference attempted to ensure that those they represented would be protected in a Bill of Rights. Like other proposals at the conference, support for aspects of the Bill of rights fell along communal lines. The Indian delegates

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² *Fiji: Report for the Year 1965*, 137.

objected to exclusions to freedom from discrimination. Freedom from discrimination was accompanied with a policy whereby current laws that dictated discrimination would not be immediately nullified. Instead, freedom from discrimination meant that new discrimination could not be introduced into law, nor could it be reintroduced if the current legal discrimination were reduced or eliminated.¹¹³ The Indian delegation protested that current laws approving discrimination should be voided with the introduction of the constitution, or at the very least a sunset provision should be included that would grant a limited timeframe before the laws were nullified. This sunset provision would not prevent nullification of discriminatory practices if repealed by the government prior to the official sunset. These proposals for immediate end to discrimination were rejected by the Fijian delegation, but the intent to eliminate discriminatory laws was retained and agreed to by the Fijian, Indian, and European delegations.¹¹⁴

During the conference, the Indian contingent attempted to use the process to gain momentum towards independence while the European and Fijian contingents worked to stall that very same momentum. The result appeared to favor the Fijian and European communities since the Fijian community had picked up more seats in the Legislative Council, maintained two positions nominated by the Great Council of Chiefs, and reduced the potential of common roll voting to influence future elections. The process of communal negotiations confirmed communal divisions within Fiji's political structure, but more than that, the conference expanded division by increasing Fijian representation, as a ratio of total representatives in the Legislative Council, and

¹¹³ *Fiji Constitutional Conference 1965*, 10.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

confirming existing discriminatory laws aimed at the Indian population. The new constitution became official on September 23, 1966 in advance of the elections, which would begin just three days later on September 26, 1966.¹¹⁵

Amongst changes that confronted voters were an expanded Legislative Council, a new confusing cross-voting system, and the removal of literacy as a requirement for voting.¹¹⁶ The complexity of electing representatives was not lost on the editors of the *Fiji Times*. Letters to the editor elucidated the voter confusion with the new voting procedures. Lindsay Verrier, an European Alliance candidate in the Northern Eastern Cross Voting constituency, wrote to the *Fiji Times*, “But in the Suva General Constituency there will be three vacancies; so, if there are five candidates here, I will wish to support three of them, and reject the other two. I must therefore be given three General votes in the Suva Constituency where I reside. Similarly, voters in the West Viti Levu General Constituency will have to exercise two votes each.”¹¹⁷ Verrier’s letter illustrated the general confusion regarding voting procedures throughout Fiji in the September 1966 election. On July 8, 1966 the editor of the *Fiji Times* confirmed to the readers that the regulations stipulated that each voter was only permitted to return one vote in constituencies with multiple representatives. This would create a situation where the top three candidates receiving individual votes would be elected. The editor complained this was an unfair method of electing multiple representatives since the likely scenario to play out would be overwhelming

¹¹⁵ "Another Fiji Era Opens." *Fiji Times*, September 14, 1966, 1. Also, "Election Information." *Fiji Times*, September 25, 1966, 14.

¹¹⁶ J. W. Davidson (1966) Constitutional changes in Fiji, *The Journal of Pacific History*, 1:1, 165-168, DOI: 10.1080/00223346608572086, 167.

¹¹⁷ "Voting Procedure." *Fiji Times*, May 17, 1966, 8. Also, “The Alliance Supports the Following Candidates.” *Fiji Times*, August 24, 1966.

support to the most popular candidate and exceptionally underwhelming support to other candidates. High levels of support for the most popular candidate would create an illusion of non-support for qualified candidates who, being elected with very low tallies, were still likely to have significant support in their own rights. The most popular candidate would then have the appearance of more political capital than they actually obtain in the election.¹¹⁸ By July 30 the issue of single votes for multiple representatives had been resolved and voters were to be given the opportunity to vote for all of their representatives, but other issues continued to come to the forefront; specifically, on the boundaries of constituencies for communal and cross-voting purposes.¹¹⁹ Voters, having the opportunity to vote once for each eligible vacancy in their respective constituency, were more likely to vote outside of their own racial category. Candidates in the cross-voting districts had to appeal to all voters along political ideological lines instead of racial lines. Integrating voters was one of the goals of the new constitution and it seemed to be working.

August 12 marked the final day for candidates to register for the Legislative Council election. In all, the Alliance and Federation parties nominated eighty-four candidates to fill thirty-four seats in the Legislative Council. The communal breakdown was twenty-eight Fijian candidates for twelve communal seats; thirty-five Indian candidates for twelve communal seats; and twenty-one candidates for ten General Elector seats.¹²⁰ The Federation and Alliance put forward three female candidates: Irene Narayan (Suva, Indian), Margaret Bain (Suva, General) and Loloma

¹¹⁸ "Voting Change Needed." *Fiji Times*, July 8, 1966, 2.

¹¹⁹ "Election Procedures." *Fiji Times*, July 30, 1966, 2.

¹²⁰ "84 Contestants to Fight for 34 Seats in LegCo." *Fiji Times*, August 13, 1966, 8.

Livingston (Western Cross-Voting, General).¹²¹ Narayan ran as the Federation Party candidate facing off against Andrew Deoki, a veteran politician who was viewed by Federation Party leadership as a significant critic of Patel and the party. By putting up a relatively unknown female candidate against Deoki, Patel reasoned that Deoki might be more vulnerable to electoral defeat. That gamble paid off when Narayan trounced Deoki by a tally of 5,676 to 2,779, which allowed Patel to continue solidifying the Federation's hold on Indian representation in the Legislative Council.¹²²

Leading up to the elections, the *Fiji Times*, the English language newspaper published in the capitol city of Suva, published a variety of articles and editorials intended to educate voters. As such, the newspaper was often accused of being pro-Fijian and British. The Federation Party accused the *Fiji Times* of being anti-Federation.¹²³ Evidence of the pro-Alliance bias was plainly available to any reader of the paper on September 13, when the editors claimed that “the simple situation facing voters at this month’s elections is that only through electing the candidates selected by The Alliance, or those willing to work in close and loyal harmony with The Alliance for the benefit of the whole Colony, can Fiji be assured of such a government because, as Ratu Mara said, no others have offered or even prepared, ‘a programme of government’ for the Colony.”¹²⁴ The claim made by Ratu Mara, leading the Alliance Party, that nobody else had offered alternate solutions was disingenuous since it completely ignored the campaigns of the Federation. A

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² *A Vision for Change*, 220.

¹²³ *A Vision for Change*, 194.

¹²⁴ "Ensuring Good Government." *Fiji Times*, September 13, 1966, 2.

newspaper endorsing the positions of certain candidates and parties is hardly surprising in an editorial section, but the strength of the statement created doubts among members of the Federation in the newspaper's ability to report straight news related to the election.

Despite the noticeable affirmations of pro-Fijian and British attitudes, the *Fiji Times* published candidate biographical sketches with accompanying photographs of each candidate throughout the months leading up to the elections in an ongoing section entitled "Election Who's Who" beginning on August 24.¹²⁵ Alternately, the newspaper published another regular section entitled, "What the Candidates Say" to provide candidates an opportunity to write out their positions and make their pitch directly to voters. Federation Party candidates generally did not put forth statements for inclusion in the *Fiji Times*.¹²⁶ The Federation held a deep distrust in the *Fiji Times* going back to the pre-constitutional conference negotiations. This distrust reduced the available platforms to reach out to voters across the racial divide in the cross-voting constituencies. Even though the Federation did not take advantage of the opportunity afforded by the *Fiji Times*, there were Indian politicians outside of the party that took advantage. Jaswant Singh, and Indian member of the Alliance Party, ran for the West Viti Levu Indian communal seat. In his statement, Singh declared that as a member of the Alliance he would follow the policy statements put forth by the Alliance. He supported the concept of Fiji as a homeland for ethnic Indians, and as such supported more open talks "with the other races." He also broke with Federation Party over the immediate application of common roll voting, supporting a slower approach to

¹²⁵ "Election Who's Who." *Fiji Times*, August 24, 1966, 6.

¹²⁶ "Publicity Refused." *Fiji Times*, September 16, 1966, 2.

bringing about that change.¹²⁷ Singh's position of slowly rolling out common roll voting was tied to the idea that if common roll voting were immediately applied it was likely that the Fijian population would not accept the results if the Legislative Council was dominated by Indians. This would pose more problems for Indians and Fijians than it could possibly solve. Thus, slowly applying the principles of common roll voting would slowly integrate the population rather than rush an integration that could create a backlash into worse racial relations.

Singh illustrated that the Indian community was not completely unified behind the Federation Party. The Alliance was not entirely composed of non-Indians, whereas the Federation was an Indian party. Koya, the Federation candidate, solidly defeated Singh by a tally of 6,318 to 2,221.¹²⁸ Patel was then able to control Indian representation in the Legislative Council and was appointed as "Leader of the Opposition."¹²⁹ The elections of 1966 solidified the Federation as the Indian party. In two high profile constituencies, the Federation overcame challenges to their claim to represent Indian political interests. Ratu Mara became Fiji's Chief Minister because the Alliance picked up a majority of seats in the Legislative Council and filled out the new Cabinet style of government. The two parties solidified their grip on the political identity of their respective communities by demonstrating their electoral appeal. However, while electoral politics strengthened the parties grip on communal politics, external events drove a wedge between the communities.

¹²⁷ "What the Candidates Say." *Fiji Times*, September 1, 1966, 9.

¹²⁸ *A Vision for Change*, 220.

¹²⁹ *Fiji: Report for the Year 1966*, 5.

The United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization (commonly referred to as the Committee of 24), established in 1962 to implement the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, set its sights on colonial Fiji.¹³⁰ The *Fiji Times* ran an editorial on August 16, 1966 responding to the Committee's potential of a fact-finding mission. Ostensibly, the purpose of the visit was to gather information regarding the committee's draft resolution calling for independence and common roll voting in Fiji. The editorial reported incredulously, "The implication seems to be that the poor, downtrodden, people of Fiji are so oppressed by Britain that they are unable to appeal to their saviours — from, of all places, Tanzania, Syria and Bulgaria. People living in Fiji will find it hard to believe that anyone could be so divorced from reality, but such is the fantasy in which this United Nations committee lives."¹³¹ Fijian and European political leaders in Fiji viewed the committee as unfitting to condemn the government of Fiji because of the current and recent experiences of the countries that made up the committee.

India, Tunisia, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Madagascar, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, and Ethiopia sponsored the resolution.¹³² The first country listed as sponsoring the resolution in the UN gave pause to Fijian and European politicians. India was calling for independence and a common roll vote in solidarity with the Indian political party of Fiji. The draft resolution echoed the Federation's platform in many ways. While India had previously been involved in supporting Indians in other colonial contexts

¹³⁰ "The United Nations and Decolonization." UN News Center. Accessed November 27, 2015. <http://www.un.org/en/decolonization/history.shtml>. Also, "Draft Resolution: UN Group is Again Trying to Run Fiji." *Fiji Times*, August 18, 1966, 1.

¹³¹ "United Nations Fantasy." *Fiji Times*, August 16, 1966, 2.

¹³² "Draft Resolution: UN Group is Again Trying to Run Fiji." *Fiji Times*, August 18, 1966, 1.

before, in Fiji the Indian population was in the majority. The Fijian fear of an Indian dominated Fiji now had to contend with the potential for direct external support for Indians within Fiji.

Despite full-throated support of the resolution from India's delegates, it was John Male, the delegate from Tanzania who officially proposed the resolution.¹³³ Once again, the *Fiji Times* called into question where the UN delegates from India were getting their information related to Fiji, especially since the Alliance leadership suspected that it was India's delegates pushing the draft resolution. "It would be useful to be told where the New Delhi spokesman gets his inspiration, though much of the twaddle presented to the committee has an extraordinarily familiar ring to people who have been subjected to the harangues of various local demagogues in Fiji."¹³⁴ The newspaper expressed what Fijian and European leaders suspected. Without an explicit accusation, the author of the editorial accused Indian political leaders of attempting to use the United Nations to achieve what they were unable to accomplish through negotiations at the constitutional conference the year prior.

Ratu Mara, on behalf of the Alliance, accused the Federation of inviting outside interference in Fijian political matters, sowing the seeds of discord and encouraging hatred. In a broadcast speech in Fiji on September 23, 1966, He stated, "But, let me say this clearly, there will be no welcome in Fiji for ignorant and ill-disposed interference in our affairs from outside."¹³⁵ Ratu Mara addressed what he viewed as the potential for UN meddling, but Patel was the intended target. Later in

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ "The Muddled Meddlers." *Fiji Times*, August 18, 1966, 2.

¹³⁵ "No Place in Fiji for Those Who Sow Seeds of Resentment." *Fiji Times*, September 24, 1966, 3.

the same speech, Mara said, “We know, for instance, that British Guiana was a peaceful country till one politician and his followers at a general election told his supporters to vote only for candidates of their own race. The evil seeds of racism were then sown in the policies of that country, bringing misery, fear and death to hundreds of its people and near ruin to its economy.”¹³⁶ Mara’s words, clearly associated with Patel, betrayed the policies that Mara himself had advocated. Just one-year prior, it was Mara and the other Fijian delegates that advocated for retaining communal voting. It was not the Federation that advocated voting based strictly on communal category; it was the Alliance.

The Committee of 24 passed the resolution calling for common roll voting and the establishment of a date for independence, with a final tally of twenty in favor against three opposed. Great Britain, the United States, and Australia opposed the resolution claiming to represent the majority consensus of Fijians.¹³⁷ Frederick Lee, the last Secretary of State for the Colonies, simply said, “We are not in any way bound to honour the committee’s resolutions. We think they lack experience and knowledge, and therefore, because we think they are not doing any particularly good service, we rather believe the thing to do is to go on in the way we are going...”¹³⁸ Despite the vote of the committee, it was manifestly apparent that the British had no intention of complying. The result of the resolution was the retention of the status quo

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ "Rebuff to Meddlers." *Fiji Times*, September 9, 1966, 1.

¹³⁸ “Lee, Frederick, Baron Lee of Newton (1906–1984),” David Howell in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2011, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/65951> (accessed August 12, 2015). Also, "Blind Obstinacy." *Fiji Times*, September 9, 1966, 2.

constitutionally, but debates in the UN and in Fiji regarding the resolution called into sharp contrast communal politics in Suva. The Federation, representing the Indian community, continued its calls for common roll voting and independence, a set of policies that aligned with the Committee of 24. The Alliance, representing Fijian interests, considered the resolution to be a challenge to Fijian control of Fiji. An immediate move to common roll voting and independence would have meant forgoing all of the advantages the Fijian community secured in the constitutional conference.

Following the elections of 1963 political leaders in Fiji's Legislative Council began negotiations for a constitutional conference to be held in London. The contentious negotiations clarified the communal divide in Fiji. After negotiations were concluded in Fiji, the constitutional conference began in London. The agreement forged in the constitutional conference further codified communal division. When voters went to the polls in late 1966 the result was solidified political identities as the communal vote results went straight down party lines. Federation candidates won all of the available communal Indian seats while the Alliance did the same for Fijian seats. While the elections firmed up communal support along party lines in Fiji, activities outside of Fiji also affected political division. The UN Committee of 24 voted for a resolution that supported the Federation's call for common roll voting and a set date for independence. Ratu Mara viewed A.D. Patel with suspicion, accusing him of exciting trouble in Fiji on behalf of the Indian population. Regardless of the suspicions that existed between the two men, the constitution was designed to ensure communal division within the Legislative Council.

CHAPTER 3. CONCEALING COMMUNAL DIVISION TO OBTAIN INDEPENDENCE

The 1966 elections were followed by a period of political calm in Fiji as the leaders of the Alliance and Federation adjusted to their new roles in the newly formed government. The Alliance formed the majority government while the Federation took its place as the Opposition party. By January of 1970 Fiji, both parties focused on the next leap in constitutional change, independence. Both the Alliance and Federation concluded that it was preferable to proceed towards “Dominion Status” rather than to remain in the colonial status that the Fijian political leadership had advocated for just a few years prior.¹³⁹ Despite agreeing to proceed toward Dominion Status with membership in the Commonwealth, the old conflicts of electoral methodology remained along with the paramountcy claims of the Fijian people.¹⁴⁰

Siddiq Koya, the Federation vice-president took over as the leader of the Federation Party in October 1969. Under Koya’s leadership, the Federation renewed

¹³⁹ FIJI: CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES; HL Deb 10 February 1970 vol 307 cc814-6. http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1970/feb/10/fiji-constitutional-changes#S5LV0307P0_19700210_HOL_69. Also, W. David McIntyre, "The Strange Death of Dominion Status." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 27, no. 2 (1999): 193-212, 194-195. The term Dominion evolved over time. Initially the concept of Dominion Status granted subordinate, semi-autonomous governance to colonies. However, by 1931 the term Dominion Status referred to independent states loyal to the British Crown and free association with other Dominion states in the British Commonwealth.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

talks with the Alliance to advance Fijian independence.¹⁴¹ These discussions culminated in a joint statement by Koya and Ratu Mara on January 17, 1970:

“Inter-party discussions have led to the point where it is agreed that Fiji should proceed to Dominion Status. Following on this agreement we have invited Lord Shepherd to visit Fiji as soon as convenient to acquaint himself at first hand with the position. It is our intention that we reach Dominion Status as soon as possible without fresh elections being held beforehand and we will in due course introduce a motion in the Legislative Council to formalise this request.”¹⁴²

The joint statement indicated a desire for a speedy conclusion to British governance over Fiji. To accomplish that, both parties were willing to forgo elections. In effect Koya and Mara announced that they were now prepared to negotiate the future of Fiji without direct influence from London. Lord Shepherd, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, accepted the invitation and arrived in Fiji January 26, departing ten days later on February 3.¹⁴³

The Federation continued advocating for a fully independent Fiji, including an elected President as head of state, but accepted the compromise of remaining within the Commonwealth. Accepting Dominion Status was a compromise though not a significant loss to Indian goals of independence. While the Federation’s position remained relatively unchanged, the Alliance had shifted its platform. Instead of remaining as a colony, the Alliance proposed Dominion Status with the Queen as the head of state.¹⁴⁴ The change in party platform came on the heels of Alliance control of the government for three years, and the party perceived that the time was right to

¹⁴¹ *Report of the Fiji Constitutional Conference 1970*. London: H.M.S.O., 1970, 3.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

move towards self-government while retaining control. Under the current political situation, Fijians would control Fiji for the foreseeable future.

The speed of progress towards independence surprised many observers.¹⁴⁵ Shepherd briefly commented on the issue of paramountcy, a specific concern that had previously caused consternation. Negotiators representing the Federation and Alliance agreed that a reference would be made to the Deed of Cession in the preamble to the constitution.¹⁴⁶ The Fijian claim to paramountcy was largely based on the Deed of Cession. British policy throughout the history of the colony had placed the Fijian community at the forefront, but in referencing the Deed of Cession in the preamble, there was a significant risk of alienating the Indian community. This decision, agreed to by Indian negotiators, effectively entrenched the position of the Indian community as secondary to the Fijian community. Political expediency on behalf of the Indian negotiators might explain why they were willing to accept the situation. Indians remained in the majority and following eventual independence the constitution could be altered to rectify any agreements that were made in advance.

The constitutional conference to set the conditions for independence opened April 20, 1970 and ran through May 5, 1970.¹⁴⁷ The opening speeches of the conference in London illustrated an impressive level of verbal acrobatics from all three of the major leaders. Shepherd extolled the advancement of tolerance in Fiji stating, “The peoples of Fiji have surmounted those problems in remarkable degree. Their racial tolerance and mutual understanding, their ability to live together in

¹⁴⁵ FIJI INDEPENDENCE BILL; HL Deb 21 July 1970 vol 311, p 881.

¹⁴⁶ *Report of the Fiji Constitutional Conference 1970*. 32.

¹⁴⁷ FIJI: PROPOSED INDEPENDENCE CONSTITUTION; HL Deb 07 May 1970 vol 310 cc400-2WA

goodwill, have placed them in high regard among their friends and neighbours in the world.”¹⁴⁸ The idea that tolerance was a reality in Fiji ignored the continued political isolation enshrined by communal roll voting and the continued economic isolation whereby Fijians communally owned the overwhelming majority of land while Indians, unable to own land, possessed the majority of leases. His opening speech was much rosier than the speeches that followed.

Ratu Mara followed Shepherd saying, “It will be a measure of the success of this Conference if the Constitution we finally approve will enable us to create a Fiji where people of different races, opinions and cultures can live and work together for the good of all; can differ without rancour, govern without violence, and accept responsibility as reasonable people intent on serving the best interests of all.”¹⁴⁹ Mara’s comments, aimed at Koya and the opposition party, were at best disingenuous. Mara, just four years prior, accused Patel and the Federation of stirring up trouble that would lead to violence. His comments regard working together for the benefit of all residents of Fiji while steering clear of the topic of unity. Mara’s goals were couched in negative terms. Communal differentiation remained an accepted part of his plans for governance in Fiji, communal groups working together without becoming a unified nationality.

Koya also addressed the issue of race during his opening speech saying that “it behooves therefore all of us to see that the new Constitution is one which will expressly and/or by clear implication guide the people of Fiji to unite rather than divide. It should produce conditions which would be conducive to and consistent with

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 44.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 46.

the making of the country into one nation and one people.”¹⁵⁰ Koya’s speech indicated a desire to create a single nationality in Fiji. Throughout the previous constitutional negotiations, the Federation had argued that the best way to achieve unity in Fiji was through common roll. Of course, the unity that Koya called for would likely have led to a Federation, and therefore by default an Indian, led government in Fiji.

In an address to the House of Lords following the Conference, Shepherd commented on the speed at which Fiji’s communal divisions had been ameliorated. He said that after the contentious nature of the previous constitutional conference in 1965 “it is hard to believe that some five years later we should be considering an Independence 882 Bill for Fiji.”¹⁵¹ According to Shepherd, he was warned that moving Fiji to independence was “premature.” Despite those cautions, he undertook the trip to Fiji to begin negotiating with the Federation and Alliance. He claimed that during his visit he “did not feel any sense of racial tension. I found an Indian Commissioner, or a Commissioner of Indian origin, acting in a totally Fijian district, with no problems at all. It was perhaps as a consequence of that, more than as a consequence of the assurances that I received from the political leaders, that I felt that it was right that Fiji should proceed to independence.”¹⁵² It is not surprising then to see that Shepherd’s visit did not illuminate racial divisions. He was invited to Fiji in a joint effort by the Federation and Alliance to be shown that Fiji was ready for independence. Both parties had reasons for desiring independence and both

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 49.

¹⁵¹ HL Deb 21 July 1970 vol 311, 881-882.

¹⁵² HL Deb 21 July 1970 vol 311, 881-882.

understood that to move in the direction of independence Shepherd had to be convinced of communal harmony. The Federation viewed this trip as an opportunity to move forward with their desire for an independent Fiji, while the Alliance saw independence as a chance to consolidate political power through a Fijian controlled Fijian government without direct British oversight.

As Fiji raced towards Independence on October 10, 1970, the world either appeared to believe racial harmony had been broken out in Fiji, or was willing to suspend disbelief based on the previous decade of political clashes to get to the desired end, regardless of what would come post independence. The *New York Times* commented on the apparent breakout of cordiality in Fiji. An article appeared on March 23, 1970 entitled, "Sudden Racial Harmony on Fiji Speeds Plan for Independence."¹⁵³ The *Fiji Times* noted in an editorial on April 18, 1970, that a "climate of goodwill now prevails throughout Fiji and there are no signs that it will not continue."¹⁵⁴ Fijian and Indian leaders saw communal division as an obstacle to their goals of consolidating power through independence.

Regardless of what was happening with communal divisions below the surface, if Fijians wanted independence they had only to ask for it. A *Fiji Times* editor sought to counter the suggestion by the Soviet delegate to the UN that Fiji's independence had been "clear evidence of the 'incomparable struggle' against colonialism." Rather, according to the editor, Fiji was a unique case in the recent

¹⁵³ Robert Trumbull, "Sudden Racial Harmony on Fiji Speeds Plan for Independence." *New York Times*, March 23, 1970, 7.

¹⁵⁴ "Climate of Goodwill." *Fiji Times*, April 18, 1970, 2.

history of the British Empire in which there was no struggle, only a simple request from Fijians to which Britain acquiesced to without much difficulty.¹⁵⁵

Not everyone was convinced by the show of harmony in Fiji. Australia controlled seventy percent of Fiji's economic interests. As seen in a classified evaluation of Fiji, the government in Canberra remained concerned over racial and ethnic tensions in Fiji.¹⁵⁶ So long as Koya and Mara could maintain their close relationship, racial harmony was expected to continue, though the prospects were not very great. Mara was described as being "moody, proud, and sensitive to criticism." He was also "liable to over-react to anything he could perceive as a personal slight."¹⁵⁷ One key to watch, according to the National Intelligence Committee (NIC), which produced the report, was the willingness of Mara to use violence against Indians.¹⁵⁸ Koya, on the other hand was evaluated as having "strong personality and a political history of excitability and outspokenness."¹⁵⁹ Communal harmony depended on these two men and their ability to continue their commitment to harmony.

The appearance of harmony covered tensions just long enough to rush into independence on the 96th anniversary of the signing of the Deed of Cession. Indeed, the rapidity of the process excluded the potential for fresh elections, or even consideration for how representation in the legislature would be determined. It was in the interest of both major political parties to gain independence, but for different reasons. The Alliance, controlling the government, saw an opportunity to retake Fiji

¹⁵⁵ "Refreshing Words." *Fiji Times*, October 16, 1970, 2.

¹⁵⁶ Lal, Brij V. "Manuscript XXVI." *The Journal of Pacific History* 48, no. 1 (2013): 78-94. doi:10.1080/00223344.2012.755747. 78.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 83-84.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 80.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 84.

for Fijians. Independence therefore was an opportunity to solidify their position going into the future. The Federation had supported independence from the beginning of the party. For it, independence was an opportunity to exploit demographic dominance and reverse the political control of Fijians. Thus, even the constitutional changes leading to independence were driven in large part by communal division despite the opposite public commentary.

CONCLUSION

The Burns and Spate reports created the foundation for a decade of change in Fiji. Critically, their reports recommended the eventual abolition of the Fijian Administration. The practical result of that would have been to reduce communal isolation in Fiji. This threatened the Fijian Council of Chiefs who advocated for strengthened control of Fijians through continued cultural isolation. In 1963, the Great Council of Chiefs suffered a blow to their authority when Fijians obtained the right to vote for three of their representatives on the Legislative Council. Despite losing some control over the Legislative Council representatives, the communal roll aspect of voting in Fiji ensured that Fijians would continue to politically support only Fijians. Similarly, Indians could only vote for Indians and Europeans for Europeans. After the elections, the Indian representatives in the Legislative Council combined disparate, local, Indian political parties to create the first colony-wide political party as a communally based party. The Fijians followed suit a few years later. Isolation between the communal groups began to fade, but political isolation remained the norm as their communal groups identified residents of Fiji politically.

In 1965 London held a constitutional conference to move Fiji towards self-governance. Contentious negotiations marred the lead up to the conference. While, communal roll voting continued, one major change permitted cross voting in some constituencies. This was a compromise with the Indian call for common roll voting.

Both Indian and Fijian negotiators argued for policies that would strengthen their position within the Fijian government. The resulting constitution ensured that Fijians would obtain a majority in the 1966 election cycle. Indeed, when the votes were tallied in 1966, the Alliance created the new government with the Federation as the Opposition. Notably, the Federation retained the position of the political party that represented Indians, defeating all communal challengers. While Indian negotiators failed to obtain their goals of common roll voting and independence, the Committee of 24 echoed their calls through a UN resolution. That the resolution aligned so closely with the Federation's platform only reinforced divisions between the political leaders of Fiji. The constitutional conference codified communal division in the Legislative Council, and the elections solidified communal support for the developing political parties in Fiji.

Communal division was an obstacle in the way of Fijian independence. By the beginning of 1970, the Alliance had been in power for three years. The constitution seemingly ensured continued Fijian dominance of the Legislative Council and so independence with Fijian control of Fiji was a realistic proposal. The Federation's platform still called for immediate independence along with common roll voting. Common roll voting was still farther than the Alliance would accept, but both communal parties now accepted independence as the next step. The only obstacle in the way was British concerns over communal division and strife. To overcome this difficulty, the leaders of the Alliance and Federation joined together in a joint statement and orchestrated a visit for Shepard to demonstrate a harmonious Fiji. The efforts worked well enough to secure independence for Fiji. Communal

divisions were concealed to obtain a common goal, but the reality was that communal division and distrust was still active.

On October 10, 1970 Fiji took its independence with a Fijian controlled legislature. The constitution of 1966 had all but guaranteed that result, and the goal of the Alliance to maintain a Fiji controlled by Fijians appeared to be secure. However, just seven years later during the 1977 elections, the National Federation Party won half of the seats in the House of Representatives. The Indian party did not act quickly enough to set up a government, and so the governor then asked the Alliance to set up a temporary government until new elections could be held. The result of the second election put the Alliance back in control by a firm majority once more returning the government to indigenous Fijian control. By 1987 the political situation had improved for the National Federation Party when it formed a coalition government with the Fiji Labour Party, a class based party.¹⁶⁰ This time Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka initiated a military coup at 10:00 AM, May 14, 1987.¹⁶¹ Three more coups occurred over the next twenty years.¹⁶² The impacts of communal division in Fijian elections lasted into the twenty-first century.

Isolation dominated communal relations in Fiji from the beginning of the colony, but as the 1960's proceeded, isolation gave way to more regular interactions. One place these interactions took place was in the Legislative Council where Fijians, Indians, and Europeans were represented. Communal voting ensured that residents of Fiji were represented, but it also ensured that issues dealt with in the Council were

¹⁶⁰ "A Tale of Three Constitutions: Ethnicity and Politics in Fiji." 647.

¹⁶¹ *Fiji: Politics of Illusion, the Military Coups in Fiji*, 71.

¹⁶² *State of Suffering Political Violence and Community Survival in Fiji*, 2.

considered based on communal advantage. The constitution assured communal isolation by defining the community in which a voter belonged, but it was the elections that defined communal, political identity. The success of the burgeoning political parties made certain that communal identity was more important than political ideology or economic class in determining representation in the Legislative Council. Ultimately, in the political sphere, communal isolation gave way to political identity based on communal division.

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