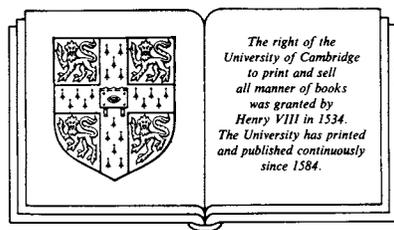


# ISLANDS, ISLANDERS AND THE WORLD

*The colonial and post-colonial experience  
of eastern Fiji*

TIM BAYLISS-SMITH  
RICHARD BEDFORD  
HAROLD BROOKFIELD  
MARC LATHAM

with contributions from Muriel Brookfield



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

*Cambridge*

*New York New Rochelle Melbourne Sydney*

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP  
32 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022, USA  
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1988

First published 1988

*British Library cataloguing in publication data*

Islands, islanders and the world: the  
colonial and post-colonial experience of  
eastern Fiji. – (Cambridge human geography)  
1. Eastern Fiji. Economic development, 1840–1987  
I. Bayliss-Smith, Timothy P.  
330.996'11

*Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data*

Islands, islanders, and the world: the  
post-colonial experience of eastern Fiji /  
Tim Bayliss-Smith . . . [et al.].  
p. cm. – (Cambridge human geography)  
Bibliography.  
Includes index.  
ISBN 0 521 26877 X  
1. Fiji – History. 2. Fiji – Economic conditions.  
I. Bayliss-Smith, Tim. II. Series.  
DU600.I75 1988  
996'.11 – dc19 88-1372

ISBN 0 521 26877 X

Transferred to digital printing 2003

# Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	page vii
<i>List of tables</i>	ix
<b>Foreword: the MAB Programme and the Eastern Fiji Project,</b> by G. Glaser	xi
<b>Editorial note</b>	xv
<b>1 On the study of islands, people and events</b>	1
Prologue	1
The eastern islands	3
A question to ourselves	6
Conclusion	10
<b>2 The island landscape</b>	12
Reconstructing prehistoric geography	12
Island populations: stasis or crisis?	14
Three thousand years of prehistoric geography	16
A stable ecosystem?	22
The changing coastline	25
The retreating forests	31
The accumulating swamps	38
The political economy of degraded landscapes	41
<b>3 Capitalism and colonialism in the periphery</b>	44
Capitalism in Fiji: origins	46
The uneven spatial impact	51
Production and reproduction in the early colonial period	55
Redefining the rules, 1900–12	60
Establishment of a peasantry	63
A precarious continuity, 1930–60	67
The late colonial period: freeing the land	74
<b>4 Physical and economic externalities and their impact</b>	82
External physical forces	82
External forces of economic origin	101

<b>5</b>	<b>Vulnerability in a changing society</b>	<b>111</b>
	Towards a non-Marxist political economy of vulnerability	111
	The evolution of vulnerability: the case of Taveuni	113
	Which groups are most vulnerable?	121
	Conclusion	128
<b>6</b>	<b>Pampered periphery?</b>	<b>131</b>
	Manipulating consciousness: the contribution of planning rhetoric	132
	Response to disaster	138
	Depopulation and repopulation	148
	Conclusion	165
<b>7</b>	<b>Villages of adaptation: Batiki and Kabara</b>	<b>166</b>
	Villages on five islands	170
	Batiki	176
	Kabara	184
	Conclusion	193
<b>8</b>	<b>Adaptation or stagnation? The case of Koro</b>	<b>195</b>
	Koro: island of perpetual promise	195
	The village economy: Nacamaki	198
	The regulation of marketing	209
	Conclusion	215
<b>9</b>	<b>Villages of change: Taveuni and Lakeba</b>	<b>216</b>
	Taveuni	217
	Lakeba	226
	Conclusion: Towards kulaks and proletarians?	243
<b>10</b>	<b>Regional development for an island periphery</b>	<b>245</b>
	Issues and contradictions	245
	Eastern Fiji and the free market	247
	The boundary conditions of planning	251
	Initiatives for change	256
	Questions about export-based development	263
	Easing the transport stranglehold	271
	Wider implications of the argument	275
<b>11</b>	<b>Island studies and geography</b>	<b>280</b>
	Islands in geography	281
	The time geography of islanders	286
	The rational management of islands	288
	<b>Appendix: publications of the UNESCO/UNFPA Eastern Fiji Project</b>	<b>293</b>
	<b>References</b>	<b>297</b>
	<b>Index</b>	<b>319</b>

# Illustrations

## PLATES

1	The <i>talasiga</i> landscape of Lakeba (TBS photograph, 1975)	37
2	Ma'afu, the most powerful chief in eastern Fiji, with his Tongan retinue (about 1876)	52
3	Levuka in 1879, soon after its role as capital of Fiji had been transferred to Suva	56
4	Hurricane damage on Kabara (RBD photograph, 1983)	86
5	Captain Sewell's cotton plantation on Lomaloma Island, northern Lau group, in 1876 or 1877	116
6	Hurricane-proof housing (right) in Naikeleyaga village, Kabara (RBD photograph, 1983)	145
7	Village of Naigani, Batiki (TBS photograph, 1974)	175
8	Making copra in Tubou, before the establishment of the Lakeba Copra Mill (TBS photograph, 1974)	237

## FIGURES

2.1	The last million years BP (Before Present) in eastern Fiji	18
2.2	Lakeba island, showing coastal landforms and valley alluviation	25
2.3	Coastal types on Lakeba	27
2.4	The limestone coast of Kabara	28
2.5	Landforms and soils on Lakeba	36
2.6	Swamp cores on Lakeba	38
3.1	The major chiefdoms of the Fiji islands at the time of initial European settlement, c. 1840	49
3.2	Fijian population structure, Fiji compared to eastern islands, 1946-66	73
4.1	Storm tracks, and areas affected by winds of hurricane force, 1970-83	84
4.2	(A-C) An outline of the major regional controls of Fiji climate in the June-September and December-March periods in normal years (A, B) and in December-March, 1982-3, at the time of a major 'El Niño/Southern Oscillation' episode (C)	91
4.3	Incidence of drought sufficient to deplete soil moisture to 10 per cent or less at five stations, 1951-83	94
4.4	Copra production at 14 places 1977-82, and the area of incidence of storm winds or stronger during the same period	100

4.5	Copra prices at Suva and Lakeba, in Fiji dollars per tonne, 1971–82; actual prices and prices reduced by inflation following Ellis (personal communication)	102
4.6	Changes in the copra and general cargo freight rates, 1972–81	108
4.7	Variations in retail prices, Suva compared to the periphery, 1983	109
5.1	A Principal elements of land tenure in Taveuni, around 1900	
	B Principal elements of land tenure in Taveuni, 1975 partly updated to 1983	114
6.1	Fijian and Indo-Fijian populations, crude birth and death rates, 1960–82	151
6.2	Mean live births per Fijian woman, by age group, 1976	155
6.3	Enumerated and natal populations, eastern Fiji 1976, by province	160
7.1	The 1976 village population in different regions of Fiji	167
7.2	Aggregate population of selected villages on Taveuni, Koro, Batiki, Lakeba and Kabara: change, 1975–83	170
7.3	Age and sex distribution of stayers, emigrants and immigrants in the aggregate village population, 1975–83	171
7.4	Migration status of the <i>de jure</i> Batiki population in 1973–5	172
7.5	Income sources of households on Batiki, mid-1970s	176
7.6	Lorenz curves showing income distribution between households, Nacamaki village, Koro, compared to villages on Batiki	179
7.7	Allocation of working time on Batiki between different activities in September 1975; the activities shown occupied 38.8 and 44.9 hours per week for men and women, respectively	183
7.8	Population change on Kabara and Batiki, 1946–83	186
7.9	Household incomes (excluding remittances), showing proportion from copra and handicrafts, Naikeleyaga, Kabara, 1972–83	188
8.1	Sources of household income on Koro, 1958–82	197
8.2	Energy flow model for Nacamaki village, 1974–5 (GJ per annum)	199
8.3	Input/output model of the Nacamaki economy: work, food and income, 1974–5	200
9.1	Population change on Taveuni, 1911–76	219
9.2	Land tenure at Qeleni	220
9.3	Changes in the population of Qeleni village, 1975–83	222
9.4	Sources of village income at Qeleni in 1982, by comparison with village and settlement incomes in 1975	226
9.5	Sources of village income at Yadrana, 1974–5 compared to 1982–3	229
9.6	Lorenz curve showing distribution of cash income between households in four populations	230

## Tables

2.1	Evidence for the age and development of coastal sand flats	30
3.1	Fijian population trends, 1874-1911	59
3.2	Population change in the eastern islands, 1921-46	66
3.3	Population change in eastern Fiji, 1946-66	70
3.4	Internal migration of Fijians, 1956	78
3.5	Internal migration of Fijians aged 15 years and over, 1966	80
4.1	Copra production in Fiji, 1970-82	98
4.2	Selected economic indicators for Fiji, real indices, 1970 = 100	106
6.1	Per capita allocation of proposed public investment in development, 1980 and 1985	136
6.2	Population change in Fiji, 1966-76	137
6.3	Expenditure of the Prime Minister's relief fund, 1972-82	147
6.4	Estimates of fertility, mortality, and international migration, 1962-76	150
6.5	Natural increase, net emigration and population growth, 1976-82	153
6.6	Crude birth rates in eastern Fiji, 1972-4	154
6.7	Birth rates and family planning, 1983	156
6.8	Fijian population of eastern Fiji, 1966-86	157
6.9	Net migration losses between 1976 and 1986: estimates for Kadavu, Lau and Lomaiviti	158
6.10	Fijian net migration gains and losses in Lau and Lomaiviti provinces, 1956-86	159
7.1	The Fijian population living in villages, 1976	168
7.2	Summary statistics on the status of villages on five islands in eastern Fiji	174
7.3	Household incomes in the mid-1970s: data for villages in eastern Fiji	178
7.4	Indicators of migration from Kabara, 1966-83	187
7.5	Exports of copra by Naikeleyaga and Tokalau Cooperative Societies, 1973-82	189
7.6	Deposits, withdrawals and money orders transfers, Kabara Post Office, 1979-82	190
8.1	Input/output analysis of the Nacamaki economy for 1973-4	202
8.2	Prices and costs at Nacamaki, 1958-83	204
8.3	Perceived energy output per hour of work, Nacamaki, 1958-83	205
8.4	Total income in energy terms, Nacamaki, 1958-83 (villagers excluding salary-earning teachers)	207
8.5	<i>Yaqona</i> prices, Koro compared to Suva	213

*List of tables*

9.1	Male occupations in Levuka	235
9.2	Energy output per hour of work, Lakeba	240
9.3	Cash earnings of 21 households in Yadrana, July 1982–June 1983	242

# I

## *On the study of islands, people and events*

### Prologue

In May 1987 the apparent calm of the Pacific island country of Fiji was suddenly shattered by a military *coup d'état*. In a general election held in April the long-ruling Alliance Party, which had controlled Fiji since Independence in 1970, and even for some years before that under self-government, was toppled from power and its place taken by a coalition formed between the Indo-Fijian-dominated National Federation Party and a multi-racial Labour Party formed less than two years earlier. The election was followed by a month of disquiet fomented by indigenous-Fijian nationalists, who saw dangers to Fijian hegemony from a new Government in which more than half the ministers were Indo-Fijian, even though the Prime Minister and all ministers concerned with mainly Fijian matters were indigenous Fijians. The new Government proposed an inquiry into the festering land problems of Fiji, and threatened also to expose corruption and cronyism under the Alliance. The third-ranking officer of the small Fijian army then led a coup which seized the whole government and – within a day – restored most of the former Alliance Party ministers to office in a *de facto* Council of Government. The press was stifled, the radio and telecommunications were censored, and arrests were made. Assertion of executive authority by the Governor-General, at first ignored, achieved the release of the deposed government but not its re-instatement. The Great Council of [Fijian] Chiefs, the supreme advisory body on Fijian affairs, then became a *de facto* parliament to resolve conflicting views among the ethnic Fijians. It confirmed the Governor-General in executive power, and later became judge of what sort of new constitution Fiji should have to ensure not only Fijian hegemony, but also the hegemony of traditional authority over the Fijians. The Pacific nations, and the Commonwealth, accepted these changes with minimal demur. Fiji thus joined that group of nations in which full democratic rights are denied to a large ethnically defined part of the population, and in which political opposition even among the indigenous people is stifled.

The strains which this event exposed go very deeply into the history and political economy of Fiji. When Fiji became a British colony in 1874 the islands had already endured more than half a century of warfare among a group of 'sea-states' around the shores of Koro Sea in the east of Fiji, and some twenty years of rapacious land alienation at the hands of planters who came mainly from Australia. The new colonial government sought to 'conserve' rather than 'dissolve': it first regularised the land situation, then set up a system of administration which effectively separated the Fijian people from the economic currents of the world around them. The Great Council of Chiefs was part of it. These actions deprived the planters of labour, so from 1880 to 1916 large numbers of Indian workers were recruited to grow sugar cane and other crops. By the end of the Second World War the Indo-Fijian descendants of these immigrants slightly outnumbered the indigenous Fijians, which they still do though by a declining margin. Yet over four-fifths of the land still remains under Fijian ownership, registered in the main by descent groups (*mataqali*) rather than individually.

As we show below, not all indigenous Fijians remained on the land and since early in this century they have moved in growing numbers into towns and into rural employment away from home. A high proportion of Indo-Fijians remained on the land as tenant farmers, but many are in the towns and they include a strong professional and business component. The Indo-Fijian share of the commercial economy has increased significantly since 1980, when Australian companies which once controlled most of the large-scale businesses began a significant withdrawal, shifting their interests elsewhere. Many of the wealthier Indo-Fijians have worked closely with the Alliance party, which is itself dominated by an aristocratic class of chiefly Fijians though it drew its main support from the mass of rural Fijians and, until 1987, also from middle-class and working-class Fijians in the towns. Under the Independence constitution most of Parliament has been elected on communal rolls, but with a small proportion of members elected by cross-voting. It was a shift of allegiance by considerable numbers of ethnic Fijians who felt that their interests had been neglected under the Alliance Government, as well as of an important part of the intelligentsia, which gave the new Labour Party strong support and determined the outcome of the April 1987 election.

By their control over land, by the constitution, and by a policy begun by the British and continued after Independence of recruiting the armed forces mainly from among indigenous Fijians, the Fijian people had their interests well protected. None the less, the Indo-Fijian domination of business and the professions had disquieted them, and increasingly so in recent years as Indo-Fijian enterprise had replaced European business enterprise in an increasing range of economic sectors. A sense of vulner-

ability has been enhanced by the failure of the Kanaks of New Caledonia to make headway against the immigrant French – ‘les Caldoches’. A French visitor to Fiji in 1986 perceptively remarked that the ‘Caldoches’ of Fiji are all brown-skinned. Vocal discontent among the minority Maori of New Zealand and the Aborigines of Australia has also made ethnic Fijians fear, however unrealistically, a similar loss of control in their own country.

The coup therefore had considerable support among indigenous Fijians, both among supporters of the Alliance and among a heterogeneous but powerful racially nationalist movement that sprang up shortly after the election and, on the later statement of one of its leaders (*Fiji Sun*, 19 July 1987: 1), had plans for arson and murder against Indo-Fijians, plans that were pre-empted by the coup. This *Taukei* (sons of the soil) movement has both chiefly and commoner leadership, and after the coup it came out with simplistic demands for wholly Fijian rule and even expulsion of the Indo-Fijians and other foreigners. Faced with this very popular new force that had been unleashed the Governor-General and his advisers first called on the (indigenous) Fijian Provincial Councils for their views then hastily re-convened the Great Council of Chiefs in July to present an authoritative view on new constitutional arrangements. Predictably the Council proposed a new constitution which would give Fijians certain control of the legislature, but by Fijian members who would not be elected by vote, but nominated.

With the economy in disarray there were moves toward reconciliation and restoration of civilian rule. However, a compromise reached in September between the Alliance and Labour leaders was at once overturned by a second coup, after which the army shared power with the then-strong *Taukei* movement. A Republic was declared. Then in December the coup leader, promoted Brigadier-General in command of the enlarged army, ousted the *Taukei* leaders and restored the traditional chiefs and their Alliance supporters to nominal power in a third post-coup Government, with the former Governor-General as President of the Alliance leader as *de facto* Prime Minister. The old leadership rules, but only with army support. Moves to restore *Taukei* dominance have been suppressed. The new constitution is delayed indefinitely in this tense situation. Many of the wealthy and skilled, Fijians as well as Indo-Fijians, have left Fiji. In mid-1988 no end is in sight; an uneasy new Fiji has been created.

### The eastern islands

The islands with which this book is concerned comprise only a part of Fiji, and exclude the main island of Viti Levu where the capital, Suva, is situated and where the events of April and May 1987 principally took

place. None the less, they have an important role in the national story. The eastern island region is part of the historical heartland of Fiji, the area in which the 'sea-states' of Bau, Rewa, Verata, Bua, Cakaudrove and Lau struggled for power in the nineteenth century, and in which the settlers backing the victorious ruler of Bau established the first national capital, at Levuka on Ovalau. A high proportion of the Alliance Party leadership is drawn from this region, and especially from its high-ranking chiefs and members of high-ranking descent groups. The Prime Minister, the President (formerly Governor-General) and his predecessor have all been from this region. The coup leader, though a commoner, is a member of a high-ranking descent group living within it. Most of those men and women whose demonstrations through Suva after the April 1987 election provided the excuse for the coup were people from the east, especially from the Lau islands, and much of the crowd that vociferously supported the coup was also made up of Lauans. Though the eastern region itself now houses only a small share of the national population, many of its native people are in and around Suva, and they include a wide spectrum from the unemployed to people firmly established in the corridors of national power. There are few Indo-Fijians in the east, and this region is politically the most important of the three main areas of little-diluted indigenous-Fijian rural hegemony, the others being the south of Vanua Levu and the rugged interior of Viti Levu.

Paradoxically, it was largely the fact that the eastern islands represented a region of Fijian rural people that took us to the east when we embarked on the UNESCO/UNFPA Project on Population and Environment in Fiji in 1974-6. The project which we set up in 1974 was part of that section of the international Man and the Biosphere Programme of UNESCO that was concerned with islands, and principally with small islands. The conventional wisdom of the day had it that islands and their people could be studied in isolation, as a microcosm of the larger world. Eastern Fiji was not our own first choice, but in the early 1970s Fiji was the only fully independent country with an archipelago of small islands in the south Pacific, and UNESCO could itself mount a pilot project only in such a country. When sent to Fiji by the decision of our masters in Paris, we laboured under no illusions about studying islands 'in isolation', a matter to which we return again in our concluding chapter. We recognised from the outset that no island is truly an island in the modern world. We went there to study islands in the periphery of a nation itself part of the world periphery, and our team was formed with this perspective in mind. But we at first saw the eastern region as a wholly dependent periphery, and it was only after we arrived that we began to appreciate the importance of the 'other island population' in Suva and in the corridors of power.

Issues of land, and of national policy toward a region perceived both as 'core' and as 'periphery' in different contexts, thus formed important elements in our research, and because of this idiosyncratic – though not unique – interrelation of core and periphery we found much of the economic literature on islands and on core-periphery relations, whether neo-classical or Marxist, of rather limited value in our work. Our search for a relevant literature is discussed in some detail in our second major report for UNESCO (Brookfield 1980), where we found reason to question not only the utility of the island literature but also of dependency theory, in particular because of the failure of the latter to take full account of adaptation and resistance to external forces in the periphery. In longer retrospect, we would now add that the island economic literature has stagnated since the 1970s for want of adequate consideration of all those essentially political forces which introduce 'distortions' into the market for factors of production and goods. Later in this book, in chapter 10, we take up this point in the specific context of these islands.

Allowing the peculiarity of islands that they are isolated from the systems of land transport, and the further peculiarity of limited and skewed resources, we found it more helpful to draw on the literature of rural development as a whole, and again to draw out contrasts between theoretical expectation and reality. Peripheral rural Fiji, islands though it be, shares many of the same problems as peripheral rural anywhere else, but it also exhibits many of the positive characteristics of other areas of rural periphery. It experienced a period of heavy capitalist penetration during the later stages of which the rural village population, though exploited, were able to enjoy higher living standards than were people in other parts of rural Fiji. Locational disadvantage grew as capitalist enterprise entered a withdrawal stage, much as Crotty (1979) describes for Ireland. But throughout, the people of the eastern islands resisted efforts to convert them wholly into cash-crop producers, and clung stubbornly to control over the means of subsistence, while selecting among the alternatives available to them for earning money in a rational manner. We discuss this in detail in the case studies which form chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9.

When we went back to Fiji in 1983, for a period only a fraction of the length of our 1974–6 field work, we encountered a number of surprises. Cyclones and a collapse in the prices of all Fiji's products after 1980 had greatly reduced producer incomes and the national economy was perceived as still in crisis. Unemployment was for the first time since Independence a serious issue; real incomes of cane growers had been almost halved, and the economic differentials between a salaried middle class and the self-employed and the lower-paid workers were sharpened.

This was the environment in which the formation of the Labour Party was first mooted in the following year. Yet in the eastern islands a recent rise in the price of copra, their main economic product, generated a spirit of optimism and it was possible for much of 1983 that a new major initiative to revitalise the industry might be undertaken with World Bank support. It was, moreover, a time of innovation as we describe below. These circumstances dulled our perception of the deeper stresses that had emerged in the islands as well as in all of Fiji during the hard times after 1980. We certainly became aware of a widening gulf between the more arrogant of the aristocracy and the common people among the Fijians, perceptibly wider than in the mid-1970s, but we did not become aware of a hardening of attitudes toward the Indo-Fijians. The greater stress that we give to class than to ethnicity in the chapters which follow reflects this perception.

#### **A question to ourselves**

Today, after the May 1987 events in Suva and in the sugar-cane regions, those who 'know' Fiji all say that a Fijian coup against an elected Indo-Fijian majority government was inevitable. We feared it, being aware that the Fijian Military Forces have in effect for years been undergoing a form of training, through their assignment to UN Peace-keeping Forces in Sinai and Lebanon, for the role within Fiji they were most likely to be called on to perform. But we were not sure, having believed optimistically that the emergence of a multi-ethnic political party heralded the emergence of a new form of politics, and being aware also of the widespread mutterings about the high chiefs and their dominance among the commoner Fijians, not least Fijians in the east. We hoped, with many others, that a commitment to democracy had become established at the popular level, as well as in law. The fact that we were wrong, and had not perceived (or allowed ourselves to perceive) that communal fears and hatreds lay so near the surface, quickly able to muster so many ethnic Fijians behind the chiefly leadership, throws into question all our interpretations in this book. It is some years now since a Fijian colleague, writing in a book edited by one of us in which we claimed to be seeking understanding as well as explanation, questioned our ability to achieve understanding of a society not our own. Among other perceptive comments he wrote of

a measure of pride [among Melanesians] in the knowledge that the expatriate cannot really grasp the inner workings and nuances of indigenous societies. This leads in many cases to a patterned and artificial set of behaviour by many Melanesians in the presence of most expatriates, in contrast to the more casual and

more real responses in the company of familiar local people. This is not dishonest behaviour: it is simply a natural reaction to a colonial [or recently colonial] status which contains little that encourages and preserves self-respect among islanders. This is the sort of feeling and situation that is not likely to be immediately apparent to expatriate observers, thus missing study and analysis. (Lasaqa, 1973: 309–10)

Expatriate researchers such as ourselves, and some indigenous social scientists too, are often further drawn away from the phenomenological search for real understanding by the academic imperative of seeking theoretical meaning in their findings. Human ecologists look for adaptive systems that can be set out in diagrammatic form; radicals seek to generalise modes of production articulated through the capitalist system; 'small-l' liberals seek behavioural interpretations in the theories of such writers as Chayanov, Schultz, Lipton and Sahlins. Explicitly or not, we seek models, and so inevitably select among our data. If we use case-study material there is often a measure of selection according to the system of explanation on which we have resolved, though this need not necessarily be so stark as the method of an earlier generation of anthropologists thus caricatured by Leach (1961: 11–12):

Case-history material ... seldom reflects objective description. What commonly happens is that the anthropologist propounds some rather preposterous hypothesis of a very general kind and then puts forward his cases to illustrate the argument ... Insight comes from the anthropologist's private intuition; the evidence is only put in by way of illustration.

Confronted by so dramatic a failure to predict – though far from alone in this failure – we are forced to ask ourselves just how much our interpretations also reflect 'private intuition', and – more importantly – what we wished to see. In an unusual book on explanation in behavioural science an exchange took place between Jarvie (1970a,b) and Winch (1970) which is highly germane to this question. Winch (1964) had earlier argued that the institutions of a 'primitive' society can only be understood if their internal rationale is first accepted within the whole context of the society concerned, and only afterwards and as a secondary task confronted with a 'western' standard of comparison. Jarvie, on the other hand, argued that cross-cultural value judgements, such as the use of the norms of one's own society as a measuring instrument or sounding board, are the principal way in which sociological understanding of alien societies is reached (Jarvie 1970a: 232). Winch hotly denied this claim, and in particular rejected Jarvie in denying that 'the almost universal success of western ways of life in ousting other "more primitive" ways shows anything about the superior rationality (or superior anything else, except persuasiveness) of western institutions' (Winch 1970: 259). Jarvie (1970b: 268–9) retorted that the success of western rationality lies in its

scientific basis, and that its superiority is the reason why it has been able to displace other and more 'primitive' systems: 'action taken to gain scientific knowledge is at the heart of any idea of rationality.'

The chapters which follow were all written before the Fijian events of May 1987, and in editorial revision have not been changed greatly in content. This applies even to most of chapter 10, which is concerned with planning. It is therefore appropriate in this chapter, the last to be written, to consider where we seem to stand in relation to the Winch/Jarvie controversy, and in relation to Lasaqa's scepticism. If we look at what we have written we find that we explain farmers' behaviour in regard to an economic calculus, very much following the approach pioneered by Schultz (1964). We note the failure of attempts to solve modern problems by traditional methods. We seek evidence of the emergence of classes, and we note the way in which certain chiefs have used change in order to reinforce the position of their class. We conclude that survival of a 'Fijian way of life' in the outer islands is something of a *faute de mieux*, the product of an externally imposed political economy more than of conscious resistance. Notwithstanding our professed sympathies with the position taken by Winch, all this smacks rather heavily of Jarvie's point of view.

Yet could we have done differently? In our defence we can certainly point to the weight given to the heavy centralisation of decision-making in Fiji, an observation that would be hard for any researcher to miss. Perhaps more pertinently, we also made much of the importance of the eastern islands as a power-base for an aristocratic national leadership, and of the mutual interdependence of people in the rural periphery and a national leadership which transfers national resources to ensure that their marginalisation is muted. Though we made some attempts in 1976, not followed up in 1983, we did not, however, adequately examine the conditions of the large numbers of islander migrants in and around the capital, from whom some of the mass support for the 1987 coup was drawn. In 1975-6 we were constrained by our status in a project mounted by a United Nations agency from examining too closely, and more specifically from writing about, the relations between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians in those islands where Indo-Fijians are found; perhaps, however, this should not have prevented us from making more use, in subsequent writing, of our own observation of a situation full of stress, jealousy and prejudice.

There is one way in which we might have been more prescient. We might have thought more about a daily contradiction in the behaviour of Fijian commoners toward their chiefs, and placed it in an historical context. All of us noted, and often, that the many Fijian commoners who

revile certain chiefs behind their backs, and the smaller number who describe the whole chiefly system as a pernicious anachronism doomed to an early end, will humble themselves before chiefs in their presence. They will say, in effect, 'I am against chiefly privilege, but I owe allegiance to the Tui X [the high chief of one of the pre-colonial states]'. If, therefore, it is the decision of the chiefs that a supposed Indo-Fijian threat to their hegemony must be overthrown, the people will still rally behind them, at least in eastern Fiji where the chiefly system has deep historical roots. This is in contrast to the western regions, and it helps understanding to recall that the Labour Party Prime Minister elected in April 1987 is not only a commoner, but is also from the west.

Continuing in this vein, we might then have followed Sahlins (1983), who has rejected Marxist interpretations of Fijian history, and has turned instead to the Mediterranean classical writers for inspiration. In revising the history of a mid-nineteenth-century east Fijian war, he has stressed the importance of 'heroic kingship' and its divine right in Fijian affairs. Thinking along these lines, rule by the high chiefs of the east from Independence until April 1987 really meant that history could continue to 'unfold as the social extension of the heroic person' (Sahlins 1983: 521). The loss of power was the defeat of the sacred chief, and the stage was set for 'heroic action' by a Lieutenant Colonel whose family ranks high in one of the major old confederacies. And the people cheered him, as crowds composed mainly of eastern islanders living in Suva did during the May days. Following this reasoning further,

the pertinent historiography cannot be – as in the good Social Science tradition – a simple quantitative assessment of the people's opinions or circumstances . . . as if one were thus taking the pulse of generative *social tendencies*. Heroic history proceeds more like Fenimore Cooper Indians – to use Elman Service's characterization: each man, as he walks single-file along the trail, is careful to step in the footprints of the one ahead, so as to leave the impression of One Giant Indian. (Sahlins 1983: 519)

An indigenous Fijian historiography of the 1987 events might indeed follow such a path. But the issues are confused by elements of a more modern kind. Western Fiji, where political opposition to the Alliance had its own regional movement for some years before the formation of the Labour Party, is the sugar-growing and tourist-serving region whose people, both indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians, have produced the wealth that supports the national economy as a whole. The growth of a web of transfer payments to the poorer east, which we describe below, has been resented in the west, where a sense of being under-served in the national distribution of infra-structural investment and benefits has long been festering. Urban Fijians in Suva, whose votes swung the 1987

election, were protesting in a very modern way against the economic sovereignty of chiefs and their allies, and its exercise for very modern forms of gain.

### Conclusion

With hindsight, it might have been better had we recognised more clearly that we were in the presence of a complex and changing play of contradictions, in which allegiance and rebellion, ethnic confrontation and cordial interdependence, traditionalism and modernity, clan and class, east and west within the nation, all had their parts. Fijians whose daily speech and behaviour reflect these unresolved contradictions could not themselves have predicted how they would respond to the pressures of April and May 1987, still less to tell us. Lasaqa's disregarded warning to us contained yet another, but unstated warning. Islanders in the modern island world are so beset by the conflicts and contradictions under which they labour that even their own perceptions are flawed. Our compounding failure was to over-simplify this complexity, to select within it, and to impose our perceptions on the analysis.

Even when a real effort is made to 'understand' the minds of a people being studied, social scientists inevitably find themselves asking questions which derive from their own disciplinary systems of theory, and moreover reasoning from the norms of their own society. When, as in Fiji, they are dealing with a people very many of whom speak fluent, idiomatic English, it is easy to be lulled into believing that an open one-to-one relationship of understanding is being achieved, and for Lasaqa's warning to be disregarded. By training, anthropologists are less likely to fall into this trap than are geographers or sociologists, and they in turn less likely than economists. None the less, all do fall into this trap, which even applies when undertaking social research within different classes in one's own society. Recently in reviewing some of the underpinning assumptions of behavioural geography one of us (Brookfield, forthcoming) wrote that

The behavioural environment that we need first to study, then, is our own as social scientists. Our own training, value systems, ideology and preferences impose themselves on any research inquiry. It is important that we recognize this, and that we are projecting our own behavioural environment onto the data.

He did not, however, expect so soon to have this lesson pressed so firmly home! Our confidence that we have correctly interpreted the 'colonial and post-colonial experience of the eastern islands of Fiji' is a very minor casualty among the much greater consequences of the events of May 1987 in Suva. But the realisation does mean that we must present the chapters which follow as no more than our own interpretation, blinkered, shaded

through dark glasses and limited by selective hearing, and not as the whole 'truth'.

It is one of the 'iron laws' of observational research that hindsight is the least useful of tools; one cannot go back to observe a second time. We did get so far as to appreciate the dependence of the island periphery on the state of the national economy; we did not get so far as to appreciate the full measure of its dependence on the course of national politics. If the outcome of the 1987 coup is the firm intrenchment, for the foreseeable future, of the mainly eastern chiefly class in national power, then the eastern islands have probably little to fear for continuation of the mass of direct and indirect supports that they have enjoyed since Independence. If, on the other hand, the improbable happens and the anti-chiefly sentiments of April 1987 ultimately prevail, then the future for the islanders will become much more uncertain. The coup and its still unknown aftermath are thus a vital part of the context of the story we tell in this book. Unfortunately, however, the reader will seek in vain for any real premonition of this disaster for Fijian democracy, social harmony and economic progress in the pages that follow.