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Anawaite Matadradra & Nicholas Halter

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# ‘Na Viti’: A Magazine for Young Fiji

ANAWAITE MATADRADRA  AND NICHOLAS HALTER 

## ABSTRACT

The early 20th century was a tumultuous period for Indigenous Fijians who were coming to terms with a changing social and economic environment while constrained by colonial British regulations that placed them firmly under the supervision of their chiefs. Although the intentions of the ‘Native Administration’ were to protect and preserve Fijian populations, evidence of local responses to this system of indirect rule are less well known. This article proposes to examine a Fijian language publication between 1924 and 1925 known as ‘Na Viti’, which was addressed to young Fijians under the editorship of a colonial official who was also involved in two Fijian social movements – Viti Cauravou and Ruve. We explore how the magazine ‘Na Viti’ negotiated the complex political relationship between Europeans and Fijians at the time and reflect more broadly on the perspectives towards colonial rule that were expressed in the publication in the 1920s.

**Key words:** Colonialism, iTaukei, development, civil society organizations, leadership, women

This article closely examines the content of a Fijian language publication titled ‘Na Viti: A Magazine for Young Fiji’. Edited by Ronald Albert Derrick, Headmaster of the Methodist Mission Technical School, this magazine for young iTaukei

**Anawaite Matadradra** – University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji. [anawaite.matadradra@usp.ac.fj](mailto:anawaite.matadradra@usp.ac.fj)

**Nicholas Halter** – University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji. [nicholas.halter@usp.ac.fj](mailto:nicholas.halter@usp.ac.fj)

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published articles related to and written by members of Viti Cauravou and Ruve between 1924 and 1925.<sup>1</sup> These two organizations represented iTaukei men and women respectively at a time when Fiji was undergoing significant changes. 'Na Viti' can offer insights into the role of the Methodist Mission in discourses about education, governance, and development at this time, and the ways Indigenous groups advanced their interests while charting a course that carefully navigated between vigilant colonial officials and Indigenous chiefs.

In this article we focus on three interconnected themes that emerge from 'Na Viti'. The first is economic development, which was deemed a priority by the editors who wished to improve standards of living for iTaukei through business. While the editors were willing to publish criticisms of European commercial dominance, they were also careful to remind iTaukei readers to obey colonial rules and restrictions, which is the second theme that emerges. These imposed British codes also applied to gender roles, which were reinforced through a special column specifically for women. This second theme reinforces a patriarchal attitude to women's development that emphasized Victorian ideas of domesticity, child-rearing, and marriage. We argue these themes highlight the ways in which missions impacted iTaukei attempts to negotiate British indirect rule, and its inherent contradictions and inconsistencies. We argue that 'Na Viti' demonstrates some of the leading ideas about ordinary iTaukei (as opposed to those of chiefly rank) and what needed to change to enhance iTaukei achievement and standing in Fiji's colonial society.

## Fiji SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND THE 1920s

Historians of Fiji have thoroughly documented the challenges that colonial rulers faced in the 1920s and 1930s as Fiji's population was transformed.<sup>2</sup> The system of governance initially devised by British Governor Arthur Gordon in the 1870s to rule Fiji's

<sup>1</sup> Original copies are held in the Fiji Museum archives. Digitized copies are freely available via the National Library of Australia at <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-2887895123>. All copies of 'Na Viti' were published in standard Fijian only and translations were made by Anawaite Matadradra with the assistance of Inise Kuruwale. For more details of the communalects of Fiji, see Paul Geraghty, 'The Ivosavosa and Codification of Fijian', *Directions: Journal of Educational Studies* 27, no. 1 (2005): 77–94. Some words or concepts have been challenging to translate. For example, the publication refers to itself both as 'Viti' and 'Na Viti'. Since 'Viti' means 'Fiji', we will use 'Na Viti' throughout this article to refer to the publication. The word 'pepa' typically means 'newspaper', although the format, size, and regularity of this publication resembles a magazine compared with other newspapers in Fiji at the time. The front cover uses the Fijian name 'Viti: Na nodra pepa na gone iTaukei e Viti', while the table of contents inside translates this phrase as 'Viti: A Magazine for Young Fiji'. In the 1920s, Indigenous Fijians were referred to as 'natives' or 'Fijians'. Indigenous Fijians have also used the term 'iTaukei' to describe themselves as landowners, and that has been the official term used since 2011. This article will use the term 'iTaukei' except when quoting from a source.

<sup>2</sup> Most notably, Brij V. Lal, *Broken Waves: A History of the Fiji Islands in the Twentieth Century* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1992); Robert Norton, *Race and Politics in Fiji* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1990); Timothy J. Macnaught, *The Fijian Colonial Experience: A Study of the*

Indigenous population separately from the rest was increasingly tested by new ethnic groups that were growing in number. In 1921 the population of Fiji was 157,266. Of these, the three largest ethnic groups recorded in the census were Fijians (84,475), Indians (60,634), and Europeans (3,878).<sup>3</sup> Between 1879 and 1916, over 60,000 indentured Indians, or *girmitiya*, were brought to Fiji by the British as a source of cheap labour. On 1 January 1920 the indenture system was formally abolished when all existing contracts were cancelled, and many Indians and their descendants chose to remain in Fiji. Of all the minority ethnic groups recorded in the Census (including ‘Part-Europeans’, ‘Polynesians’, ‘Chinese’, and ‘Others’), Indians were the largest. As the Indian population grew, their demands for political representation increased, as did colonial fears of an Indian uprising, particularly after widespread strikes in 1920 and 1921.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, new movements and organizations were treated with caution by the vigilant colonial government.

‘Na Viti’ is part of a rich archive of Fiji publications in vernacular languages, which have yet to be examined closely by historians. Some early examples include *Na Mata*, a newspaper published in Fijian by the colonial government in 1876; the bilingual English-Hindi newspaper *The Indian Settler* in 1916; and the Hindi newspaper *Fiji Samachar* from 1924 to 1974.<sup>5</sup> Peter France highlighted the power of particular stories that emerged in publications like *Na Mata* and developed into long-lasting myths.<sup>6</sup> Regional scholarship in Hawai‘i and Aotearoa has also shown how Indigenous communities use media and literature to question colonial structures, reclaim their identities, and uphold traditional values. This engagement with the media is critical to preserving and promoting Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in the face of ongoing colonial challenges, and it also serves as a tool of resistance.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately details about ‘Na Viti’ are limited – it is not clear how many copies were distributed, or how many iTaukei were literate at the time, so the impact on readership is less well known. Nonetheless, the role of the mission in encouraging literacy and spreading new ideas is a significant factor in this case.

Kirstie Close-Barry’s history of the Methodist Mission in Fiji is useful for understanding the ways in which missionaries may have influenced ‘Na Viti’. Missionary ideas about progress and civilization resonate with the language and content of ‘Na Viti’,

*Neotraditional Order under British Colonial Rule Prior to World War II* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2016); Deryck Scarr, *Fiji: A Short History* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> Lal, *Broken Waves*, 63.

<sup>4</sup> Norton, *Race and Politics in Fiji*, 37.

<sup>5</sup> Lal, *Broken Waves*, 47; Anurag Subramani, *The Fiji Times at 150: Imagining the Fijian Nation (or a Scrapbook of Fiji’s History)* (Suva: Fiji Times, 2023), 239.

<sup>6</sup> Peter France, ‘The Kaunitoni Migration: Notes on the Genesis of a Fijian Tradition’, *Journal of Pacific History* (hereinafter *JPH*) 1, no. 1 (1966): 107–13.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. Noenoe K. Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Wanda Ieremia-Allan, ‘Feiloa’iga ma talanoaga ma ‘aiga: Talanoa with family in the archives’, *Waka Kuaka: The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 132, no. 1/2 (2023): 183–202; Alice Te Punga Somerville, “[Modernism] in Māori Life”: Te Ao Hou’, in *New Oceania*, ed. Matthew Hayward and Maebh Long (New York: Routledge, 2019), 156–67.

which encouraged agricultural enterprises. This was reinforced in mission schools like Navuso Agricultural School (led by principal Benjamin Meek at Davuilevu) with popular ideas that iTaukei needed to shift 'from communalism to a more civilized, if agrarian, capitalist social stage'.<sup>8</sup> A new educated elite produced by mission schools encouraged iTaukei individualism (*galala*) as a way to transform iTaukei society. This was not only a reflection of humanitarian democratic ideals but also served a practical purpose – the mission needed its members to be allowed to earn wages so they could make financial contributions to the church (*vaka misioneri*). Such ideas that encouraged individual iTaukei participation in the cash economy posed a potential threat to the established power of chiefs, and missionaries were aware that chiefly support was necessary to legitimize the mission's position. As Close-Barry noted, 'The mission's long-term aspirations to establish a financially self-sufficient church conflicted with the colonial administration's protectionist policies that sought to minimize wherever possible the transformative influence of colonialism'.<sup>9</sup> It is for this reason that the Methodist mission was seen as both a force of conservatism and a force for modernity in the 1920s, and the varied content of 'Na Viti' reflects this ambiguity.

While 'Na Viti' emphasized economic development for all iTaukei, it was operating within the constraints and contradictions of the colonial policy of indirect rule. Although the British tried to elicit iTaukei support through Indigenous advisory bodies like the Council of Chiefs and claimed a responsibility to protect iTaukei, Robert Norton stresses that:

There was thus a contradiction in the colonial society between the European-dominated capitalist economy and a Fijian social system perpetuated on the basis of subsistence cultivation. The preservation of village society obstructed the expansion of capitalist enterprise by restricting access to labour and land.<sup>10</sup>

Deryck Scarr and Timothy Macnaught presented this as a tension between tradition and modernity, emphasizing the ways in which iTaukei paramountcy was advocated by its chiefs from a position of privilege supported by the British. Their attitudes to indirect rule and chiefly government contrast with Brij V. Lal and Robert Nicole who stressed the exploitative and divisive nature of colonial rule, as well as the ways in which chiefs abused their power. Lal was critical of a leadership that was struggling to respond to the demographic changes in Fijian society, including the impact of urban migration and social mobility. While Fiji's population was predominantly rural at this time, there were increasing cases of villagers moving to towns and seeking individual employment, and the content of 'Na Viti' reflects some of these new urban challenges.<sup>11</sup> Nicole's revisionist history of resistance in Fiji is particularly

<sup>8</sup> Kirstie Close-Barry, *A Mission Divided: Race, Culture and Colonialism in Fiji's Methodist Mission* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2015), 80.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>10</sup> Norton, *Race and Politics in Fiji*, 35–6.

<sup>11</sup> Lal, *Broken Waves*, 66.

useful for highlighting the contradictions of colonial rule, such as the case of Apolosi Nawai, an iTaukei entrepreneur whose commercial activities were viewed as a direct threat by chiefs and colonialists alike.<sup>12</sup> Born in 1885 in Narewa village, Nadi, he established the company ‘Viti Kabani’ in 1913, which curtailed European dominance in the banana trade, and advocated for economic autonomy for iTaukei. Although his father was a Methodist teacher, and he attended the Methodist training school at Navuloa, his outspoken views were not welcomed by Methodists at Davuilevu. Nawai was ostracized by the establishment for criticizing chiefs, and as the financial affairs of the company became mired in controversy, he was imprisoned and exiled by the government. ‘Na Viti’'s authors and Nawai may have shared similar views on commerce, but the editors were more cautious than Nawai in their judgements of chiefly rule. Nonetheless, ‘Na Viti’ did publish articles that criticized colonial regulations and chiefly power, and so we argue that it attempted to present a more diverse range of perspectives of/for ordinary iTaukei, rather than an assertion of conservative iTaukei paramountcy that would emerge more strongly in subsequent decades. The next section explores the influence of two Indigenous groups, Viti Cauravou and Ruve, with a shared goal of progress for iTaukei (‘toro cake’ or ‘veivakatorocaketaki’).<sup>13</sup>

## VITI CAURAVOU

Ahmed Ali cited Viti Cauravou as a rare and isolated example of reform in Fiji’s colonial history.<sup>14</sup> Viti Cauravou (translated as ‘Young Fijian Society’) originated in Davuilevu in 1922, founded by Derrick. It was initially created as an alumni network, though he extended membership to the Queen Victoria School to form ‘a mutual improvement and debating society’.<sup>15</sup> By 1926, the organization had a formal constitution and by-laws in English and Fijian languages, a president (Mosese Buadromo), two vice presidents, including Opetai Dreketirua (assistant master at Queen Victoria School), a secretary (Lepani R. Vaniqi), and 20 branches around Fiji. Buadromo wrote to the governor inviting him and other members of government to their general conference in October 1926 at the Suva Town Hall, and included a programme and a short statement about the society’s membership and aims.<sup>16</sup> ‘Native’ young iTaukei men were eligible, provided they had educational

<sup>12</sup> Robert Nicole, *Disturbing History: Resistance in Early Colonial Fiji* (Suva: USP Press, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> Viti Cauravou’s logo had the banner ‘toro cake’ literally meaning ‘move up’, which could also be interpreted as ‘develop’ or ‘improve’. Methodist Mission Society of Australasia – Fiji District, Miscellaneous Papers: Correspondence and notes regarding the Young Fijian Society (Viti-Cauravou), M/55 (1926–7), National Archives of Fiji, Suva.

<sup>14</sup> Ahmed Ali, ‘Fiji and the Franchise: A History of Political Representation, 1900–1937’ (PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1974).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 189. Queen Victoria School was originally situated closer to Davuilevu at Nasinu, and there was a friendly rivalry between them.

<sup>16</sup> Methodist Mission Society of Australasia – Fiji District, Miscellaneous Papers: Correspondence and notes regarding the Young Fijian Society (Viti-Cauravou), M/55 (1926–7), National Archives of Fiji.

qualifications, evidence of 'good character', church membership 'irrespective of sect', were 'engaged in some useful work or occupation', and operated a savings bank account.<sup>17</sup> It outlined a number of aims, which are worth quoting here in full:

The objects of the Society are to provide for good fellowship among the educated young men of the Race: to provide means of studying and discussing problems affecting their Race and its development; to provide facilities for improving the minds of members by discussion, lectures, etc.; to provide occasions on which members, with their wives and families, will meet together, socially; will engage in loyal exercises on such occasions as Empire Day, Cession Day, etc.; to stimulate in an organised way the efforts of members to undertake productive work (especiall [sic] agriculture) and encourage the use of Native Lands by the Native people; to provide a means whereby Fijians engaged in various branches of useful work may meet together, talk together, compare notes and discuss difficulties.

It is expressly agreed that the Society will not engage, as an organisation, in Commercial enterprises; but on the other hand, it is expected that all members will engage in some useful work as Government servants, Mission teachers or Workers, or in some Commercial or Agricultural undertaking of their own, etc.<sup>18</sup>

Ali notes some successes of Viti Cauravou, such as securing employment for its members, building homes, and lobbying on behalf of its members.<sup>19</sup> Its membership grew to almost 4,000 in the 1930s.<sup>20</sup> Some of its members were notable leaders in the community, such as Joeli Ravai who succeeded Buadromo as president. Born in Tailevu, Joeli was educated in New Zealand and was assistant master at Queen Victoria School. Later he was the first non-chief to be appointed provincial chief of Tailevu, and the first non-chief to be a member of the Legislative Council in 1947.<sup>21</sup>

Curiously, one statement in the miscellaneous archival files mentions 'Na Viti' as 'the official organ of the society, though that paper is not owned or controlled by the Society. This paper is the chief medium of communications between Head Office and the Branch members'. The only other explicit connection between the

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ali, 'Fiji and the Franchise', 190.

<sup>20</sup> Macnaught, *The Fijian Colonial Experience*, 110.

<sup>21</sup> 'Fijian Leader Who Is Not a Chief', *Pacific Islands Monthly* XX, no. 12 (1950): 30, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-324882731> (accessed 24 July 2023). Scarr also mentioned Bauan chief Ratu Isikeli Tawake (Roko Tui Ra). Ratu Sukuna never joined Viti Cauravou, but his brother, Ratu Tiali W.T. Vuiyasawa, Roko Tui Lomaiviti, did. Deryck Scarr, *Ratu Sukuna: Soldier, Statesman, Man of Two Worlds* (London: Macmillan Education for the Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna Biography Committee, 1980), 109.



magazine and the organization was that Viti Cauravou listed R.A. Derrick as the editor, and Mosese Buadromo as associate editor.<sup>22</sup> Prior to serving as president of Viti Cauravou, Mosese served in Fiji's Transport Corps in France, and his wife, Vetinia Buadromo, a mission school graduate at Lau, was among the first six to graduate in 1909 from Suva Colonial Hospital as a Native obstetric nurse.<sup>23</sup> Little else is known about Mosese or the extent of his contribution as associate editor. Given the reluctance to allow Indigenous clergy leadership roles in the Methodist Mission at the time, and initial hesitance by some members of the mission to sanction Viti Cauravou's establishment, it is likely Derrick was involved in authoring or reviewing 'Na Viti' content. Although some ideas within 'Na Viti' align with Methodist values at the time, it is not clear to what extent iTaukei Methodist clergy members participated in Viti Cauravou or wrote for 'Na Viti'.

According to Macnaught, 'Viti Cauravou conferences provided an orderly but freer vehicle of Fijian opinions than the decorous provincial councils and Council of Chiefs'.<sup>24</sup> At the time, the government was cautious of the potential political involvement of groups like Viti Cauravou. Another group at the time, the Indian Reform League, was recognized on the condition that it be apolitical.<sup>25</sup> Some of the members of Viti Cauravou expressed political sentiments freely but these were the views of an educated non-chiefly minority. Their efforts to argue for political representation in the Legislative Council and Council of Chiefs in the early 1930s were not successful, and they struggled to obtain widespread support. Ali argues that their demise was due to its restricted membership, failure to compete with chiefly influence, and principles of iTaukei paramountcy and racial purity that meant alliances were not sought with other sections of the community who were dissatisfied with the government, such as Indians.<sup>26</sup> Lal concurs, arguing that Viti Cauravou threatened the privileged positions of chiefs and colonial officials.<sup>27</sup>

## RUVE

Ruve was founded in 1924 by Ruby Derrick (wife of Ronald) and Lolohea Akosita Waqairawai at Davuilevu. Initially founded as a small organization for Davuilevu

<sup>22</sup> Methodist Mission Society of Australasia – Fiji District, Miscellaneous Papers: Correspondence and notes regarding the Young Fijian Society (Viti-Cauravou), M/55 (1926–7), National Archives of Fiji.

<sup>23</sup> Victoria Lukere, 'Mothers of the Taukei: Fijian Women and the "Decrease of Race"' (PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1997), 153.

<sup>24</sup> Macnaught, *The Fijian Colonial Experience*, 110.

<sup>25</sup> Ali, 'Fiji and the Franchise', 190.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 192–4. Macnaught, *The Fijian Colonial Experience*, 110. Deryck Scarr gives an example of a petition for prohibition of marriage of Fijian women to non-Fijians in order to 'preserve our customs and usages from the off-spring of these undesirable unions which will tend to destroy them'. Scarr, *Ratu Sukuna*, 108.

<sup>27</sup> Lal, *Broken Waves*, 74.



women with strong influences from Victorian domestic living, ‘The Ruve taught women to sew, cook (using new recipes), keep their homes and villages clean and to bring up healthy families’.<sup>28</sup> It gradually grew into something larger, holding its first annual meeting in 1938 and charging an annual subscription of two shillings, and was renamed in 1942 as Soqosoqo Vakamarama (henceforth SVM) though it retained the dove as its symbol.<sup>29</sup> Ruby Derrick is typically identified as the founder since she was the wife of R.A. Derrick when he was principal of the Lelean Memorial School in Fiji, however it is disputed whether the name of the group was a direct reference to her (literally the group belonging to Ruby/Ruve) or to the symbol of the dove (‘ruve’). Though the Derricks may have played a leading role in the beginning, it was Waqairawai’s contribution that was the most longstanding.<sup>30</sup> When Derrick retired as the head, it was taken over by chiefly women. Yet the majority of its members were rural women, and Waqairawai’s central efforts as a non-chiefly woman cannot be overlooked.

Waqairawai was born in Natuatucoko, Nadroga, in 1893. After completing Matavelo Methodist Girls School, Reverend C.O. Lelean sent her to Australia for teacher training. She was the first iTaukei woman educated overseas, graduating in 1914 from Sydney Teachers’ Training College. She subsequently taught at Davuilevu, Suva, Rewa, and Nadarivatu until 1950. In retirement, Waqairawai worked for SVM and the Pan-Pacific and South-East Asia Women’s Organisation, receiving the Empire Medal and Queen’s Medallion in recognition.<sup>31</sup> She was a champion of women’s education, establishing SVM scholarships for iTaukei girls to study in Methodist schools, and successfully lobbying the Great Council of Chiefs to establish Adi Cakobau School in 1948. She also published two hymn books and a book about motherhood and childcare.<sup>32</sup> Throughout her long association with SVM, Waqairawai repeatedly refused the presidency on the grounds that she was not of chiefly

<sup>28</sup> Debbie Wendt, ‘Ruby’s Legacy Lives On’, *Fiji Times*, 30 January 1992, 15.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.; Meli Laddpeter, ‘Back in History: Leading iTaukei Women’, *Fiji Times*, 6 July 2022, <https://www.fijitimes.com/back-in-history-leading-itaukei-women/>. Soqo meaning ‘to gather or assemble’, vaka is a prefix and marama means ‘a lady’. Margaret Mishra also refers to the organization by the name ‘Qele ni Ruve’, since ‘qele’ means cluster, shoal, or swarm. Margaret Mishra, ‘A History of Fijian Women’s Activism (1900–2010)’, *Journal of Women’s History* 24, no. 2 (2012): 115–43.

<sup>30</sup> Ruby was Ruve’s first president and Ronald Albert Derrick was treasurer. He retired from Ruve after 20 years according to Wendt. There is limited archival information in the National Archives of Fiji or the SVM headquarters in Nabua to verify this. SVM celebrated their 100-year anniversary in Suva on 7 November 2024.

<sup>31</sup> For an obituary published by one of her children, see *Methodist Church in Fiji 1835–1935, 150th Anniversary Celebration, Souvenir Programme* (Suva: Lotu Pasifika Productions, 1985). See also John Kamea, ‘The Most Notable Woman’, *Fiji Times*, 11 November 2020; Lukere, ‘Mothers of the Taukei’.

<sup>32</sup> The 1984 book was titled ‘Na Tina ni Gone i Taukei’, which translates as ‘Fijian mothers’. It included translations of three booklets by Australian doctors and nurses, as well as discussing the duties of SVM members and how to run the branches. It was distributed to all SVM members according to Wendt. We have not been able to find a copy.

rank. Instead, as vice president, she advised a number of presidents until her death in 1967.<sup>33</sup> According to Victoria Lukere, ‘Lolohea came to embody a “new” type of Fijian leader: a non-chiefly woman dedicated particularly to the needs of women and children, whose humility and Christianity were deeply respected’.<sup>34</sup>

Ruve is cited by feminist historian Margaret Mishra in her attempts to demolish the colonial conceptions of women’s liberation in Fiji reported in the Australian media in the 1920s.<sup>35</sup> Australian journalist Thomas McMahon wrote in 1922 about the ‘emancipated women’ of Fiji, attributing their status to colonial education. The wives of missionaries inculcated ideas of Victorian womanhood according to Claudia Knapman.<sup>36</sup> The ideas of a new modern iTaukei woman were, however, varied, inconsistent, and exclusive to chiefly women.<sup>37</sup> Opportunities for non-chiefly women to experiment with new roles and opportunities were limited by the colonial administration. In 1923 and 1926 for example, women needed a chief’s consent to be away from the village for more than 28 days.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, some iTaukei women found work in saloons, and as house workers or governesses. Indeed, economic participation would become a prominent theme in the ‘Na Viti’ publications, reflecting a growing interest on the part of iTaukei to expand beyond the confines of the village.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

This change towards increased economic engagement emerged as a major issue in the publications of ‘Na Viti’. By emphasizing economic development in all areas, it continuously sought to enhance the welfare and development of Fijians:

Na Viti is for us Fijians. The main purpose of the magazine is to improve the livelihood of Fijians. Support our aspirations, read it and give it some thought. No family member of yours has remained by your side in the new work of restoration except for Na Viti alone.<sup>39</sup>

To this end, ‘Na Viti’ encouraged iTaukei to pursue business opportunities by asking them to market their products or services around Fiji through the magazine. The

<sup>33</sup> Presidents of SVM are as follows: Lady Maraia Sukuna, 1956; Lolohea Waqairawai (Acting), 1956–8; Adi Litia Tavanavanua, 1958–68; Adi Laisa Ganilau, 1968–71; Adi Lady Lala Mara, 1971–92; Adi Salaseini Kavunono Iloilo, 1993–2020; Adi Finau Tabakauco, 2020–present.

<sup>34</sup> Lukere, ‘Mothers of the Taukei’, 153.

<sup>35</sup> Margaret Mishra, “‘Emancipated Women’: The Adis of Fiji and Their “Native Sisters””, *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 22, no. 5 (2021): 163.

<sup>36</sup> Claudia Knapman, *White Women in Fiji: The Ruin of the Empire* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986).

<sup>37</sup> Mishra, “‘Emancipated Women’”, 167.

<sup>38</sup> Lal, *Broken Waves*, 67 in Mishra, “‘Emancipated Women’”, 168. Robert Nicole argues that women’s leadership was eroded in the early meetings of the Council of Chiefs. See Nicole, *Disturbing History*, 190.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Na Viti’, December 1924, 3; ‘Na Viti’, March 1925, 2.

paper, which claimed to have a sizable readership by virtue of its agents spread throughout Fiji, was eager to print any information on iTaukei business activities. By 1925, it claimed to have agents in Levuka, Bua, Ra, Lautoka, Suva, Beqa, Kadavu, Nadroga, Ovalau, Cakaudrove, Yasawa, Lakeba, and Matuku (Lau).<sup>40</sup> In order to bolster this expanding business sector even further, it was decided that:

starting next month, there will be a business column for at least the next six months due to the breadth of the business segment. The head of the Fijian business school hopes that his explanation of business administration will be extremely beneficial to you and the vast majority of readers of this magazine.<sup>41</sup>

The editors advocated for iTaukei to invest in any business in any sector – tourism, agriculture, fishing, manufacturing, handicrafts, creative arts, or the cultural sector. Agricultural businesses were the most prevalent and may have reflected the agricultural training agendas of Davuilevu and Queen Victoria School. It was not always clear who the authors were since most published articles rarely included author names, but they frequently assumed an authoritative Indigenous voice: ‘What about us the iTaukei? Why is it impossible for us to improve our standard of living through business? We are capable of applying what works for others to our situation as well.’<sup>42</sup>

The editors of ‘Na Viti’ proudly claimed the magazine as a place for iTaukei and businesses to voice their opinions, implying that these views were not adequately represented in official fora:

Prior to the publication of this magazine, we had endured the following: There was no means to communicate our concerns to others or even to acknowledge some of these challenges. The role of our representatives, according to the government, is to serve as Legislative Assembly members; and that they may mention us or our issues; or that they could be held accountable to the Council of Chiefs.<sup>43</sup>

Yet many of the articles addressed ordinary iTaukei, rather than chiefs or European leaders, and tended to be direct and even condescending in tone. iTaukei were urged to take care of the land and their resources by working it themselves rather than allowing others to do so, as well as to consider the needs of their offspring:

Let us diligently cultivate our land and remember that, because if foreigners were to take possession of what is readily ours for their own gain and their posterity, we could wind up as impoverished outside the bounds of our village.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> ‘Na Viti’, June 1924, 57.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Na Viti’, August 1924, 16.

<sup>42</sup> ‘Na Viti’, February 1925, 38.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Na Viti’, August 1924, 20.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Na Viti’, February 1925, 60.

iTaukei were urged by the editors to strive to become agricultural producers as the Europeans had done. Advertisements for commission agents, general merchants, importers, and exporters could be found in 'Na Viti' columns. A few Fijian men took up the editors' offer to place advertisements. Ropate B Senikuraciri, from Waisa, Kubulau, Bua, listed himself as a farmer, carpenter, and general merchant who was available to anyone interested in purchasing handicrafts or root crops. Manasa Q. Seru, from Suva and Beqa, promoted a variety of fruits and vegetables for sale at the Naiqaqi market in Suva (near present day Carnarvon Street).

While 'Na Viti' provided a valuable platform for iTaukei to advertise and grow their businesses, many still faced fierce, usually racially charged, opposition from European competitors. Seru, for example, was despised by European banana exporters for growing his own business. In 1925, some European businesses managed to temporarily stop Seru's fruit exporter's licence, which at the time cost £100 a year. They even went so far as to see the Auckland importer and demand that he stop business deals with Seru because he was iTaukei. Ultimately, however, the Auckland importer, who supported Indigenous rights, kept doing business with Seru.<sup>45</sup> It is curious that although the editors were willing to publish such stories, no comparison was made to Apolosi Nawai and the widespread commercial success of Viti Kabani. Perhaps Nawai's exile in 1917 was sufficient deterrence, or it is also possible Derrick was reluctant to use Nawai's example given his reputation as a prophet and association with the occult.

Young iTaukei men were encouraged to work in groups to ensure their success and as a way to share ideas and responsibilities. Viti Cauravou was promoted in 'Na Viti' as an association that was established for the progress of young iTaukei men. Readers were urged to join Viti Cauravou for 'the improvement of the iTaukei' by writing to the president at Davuilevu for his approval;<sup>46</sup> 'Na Viti magazine, however, asserts that we must be prepared to start farming in our own fertile grounds, nurture it in accordance with our true spirit, and practice self-control individually'.<sup>47</sup>

Apart from these idealistic statements, the magazine also contained practical advice on how to start a business and how to open a bank account, including explanations about the function of a bank and how interest rates could help to save money.<sup>48</sup> According to the editors, such explanations were necessary because while the iTaukei were expected to be farmers of the land they owned, they were instead working as labourers for foreign-owned plantations that were exporting bananas, pineapples, and watermelon. According to one anonymous article, 'The iTaukei should be ashamed, don't you think? ... The Europeans did not grow bananas; instead, they purchased them from us and resold them, earning tremendous profits and interest that we, the iTaukei, might have achieved'.<sup>49</sup> Confronting

<sup>45</sup> 'Na Viti', May 1925, 155.

<sup>46</sup> 'Na Viti', February 1925, 57.

<sup>47</sup> 'Na Viti', March 1925, 86.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>49</sup> 'Na Viti', May 1925, 155.

statements like this, though rare, reflect that not all iTaukei were satisfied with the status quo under British rule and the commercial dominance that Europeans enjoyed in Fiji.

## RULES AND RESTRICTIONS

Although the editors were eager to motivate iTaukei with ideas of entrepreneurship, 'Na Viti' also provided regular reminders of the colonial ordinances that regulated iTaukei movement and behaviour (under the heading 'A Lawa i Taukei'). These included laws about marriage and divorce, fires, boats, plantations, housing, health, traditional healers, provincial levies, births and deaths, disease, alcohol consumption, gambling, and children born out of wedlock. The editors paid close attention to gambling and the consumption of alcohol. People who gambled money or their possessions, or those who encouraged such behaviour, were subject to fines of up to £25 or three months' hard labour. Alcohol use was also strictly regulated, although the responses of 'Na Viti' suggest that these restrictions were ineffective in preventing alcohol consumption by some iTaukei.

Contact with alcoholic substances occurred in Fiji through encounters and increasingly frequent contact with voyagers, traders, and sailors. Alcohol was well known among Indigenous societies by the 19th century because it had developed into an addictive commercial commodity.<sup>50</sup> A prohibition on alcoholic beverages was first introduced in 1871 following a meeting of the Wesleyans in the Fiji District and it was formalized under British colonial rule after 1874 to apply to all 'Natives'. According to Jacqueline Leckie, "Native" did not just equate to iTaukei but as defined in the 1911 Liquor Ordinance, included Indians if they were indigenous Pacific Islanders or members of "an aboriginal race of India".<sup>51</sup> iTaukei were prohibited by law from consuming alcohol or 'yaqona ni vavalagi' (referring to 'foreigner's kava') yet, according to 'Na Viti', 'Although alcohol is illegal for us, it is nevertheless distributed and sold in our nation, where many of our elders and naïve young men have fallen for it.'<sup>52</sup> Europeans were not subject to the same restrictions and so alcohol use was recognized as an entitlement of race, even though alcoholism and intoxication were detrimental outcomes of so-called 'civilization'. The editors of 'Na Viti' echoed colonial ideas of civilization to encourage compliance

<sup>50</sup> Jacqueline Leckie, "White Man's Kava" in Fiji: Entangling Alcohol, Race and Insanity, c. 1874–1970', in *Alcohol, Psychiatry and Society: Comparative and Transnational Perspectives, c. 1700–1990s*, ed. Waltraud Ernst and Thomas Müller (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022), 126–56.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 129. 'An ordinance to consolidate and amend the law relating to the sale of spirituous liquors', 17/1911. Part II referred to liquor prohibition. In Fiji, the term 'aboriginal Indian' referred to any Indian, whether tribal, caste Hindu, or Muslim. See also Niel Gunson, 'On the Incidence of Alcoholism and Intemperance in Early Pacific Missions', *JPH* 1, no. 1 (1966): 43–62.

<sup>52</sup> 'Na Viti', August 1924, 10.

among its readers: ‘Let’s introduce this notion to protect our nation from adversaries who hold unfavourable opinions of our honourable people’.<sup>53</sup>

‘Na Viti’'s focus on this issue may have reflected its urban readership or the nature of urban migration during the 1920s, as some iTaukei moved to Suva for employment and educational opportunities. According to one issue, ‘alcohol misuse and punishments handed out to each drunkard appeared regularly in the English papers in Suva’.<sup>54</sup> There were also suggestions that villages investigate the issue of drunk iTaukei women near the Suva dock.<sup>55</sup> It is unsurprising that the editors of ‘Na Viti’ reinforced the same directives from the colonial government. ‘Na Viti’ justified the outright prohibition of alcohol usage in Fiji as a way to safeguard all iTaukei citizens, but particularly young men:

If alcohol is prohibited, it must be absolutely forbidden so that so many of our young men will not be overcome by it. We must thus take great care to ensure that this law applies equally to everyone who lives in Fiji whether a Chief or commoner; and that its production or distribution needs to be totally banned in Fiji.<sup>56</sup>

The editors were alarmed that young male iTaukei students in Suva were openly criticized in the European newspapers for their excessive drinking, poor behaviour, and attitudes that resulted in jail sentences.<sup>57</sup> However, occasionally there were alternative opinions expressed in ‘Na Viti’ by anonymous authors. In one example, a column in ‘Na Viti’ questioned why iTaukei were punished for drinking alcohol when foreigners were permitted to do so in Fiji.

Examples of dissension are most often found in a section of ‘Na Viti’ titled ‘Noda Vale ni Bose Levu’, which was similar to a ‘Letters to the Editor’ column. Each column started with the following disclaimer by the editors:

Note: The ‘Na Viti’ magazine does not endorse anything that is said in this column of the magazine – it is for those who are inspired to speak. Concerns raised will not be published here or accepted; we are merely interpreting and conveying people’s thoughts and ideas.

In addition to criticisms of the liquor ordinance, the editors published complaints that iTaukei were not receiving money from the leasing of land. In the February 1925 issue, one iTaukei suggested restricting land leases because of unfair distribution of lease money by the colonial government.<sup>58</sup> Another issue raised in this column pertained to children born out of wedlock. Concern was expressed by a reader that Christian ideas of marriage meant that children born out of wedlock were considered

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Na Viti’, July 1924, 19.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Na Viti’, August 1924, 10.

<sup>57</sup> Regulation XXI, 2 in ‘Na Viti’, July 1924, 7.

<sup>58</sup> ‘Na Viti’, February 1925, 49–50.

‘gone ni sala’<sup>59</sup> and were denied rights to inherit land, as well as denied home ownership and social standing.<sup>60</sup> This was likely a minority view at the time and one not shared by the editors, who, only a few issues prior, had warned iTaukei to take precautions when associating with non-iTaukei and advised readers to avoid intermarriage in order to maintain the ‘pure Fijian race’.<sup>61</sup> In another issue, the editors admitted that some letters from young men regarding the decisions made by the government were not published to avoid promoting violence or hatred.<sup>62</sup> While these statements may have reflected the orthodox views of the main editor R.A. Derrick, they are also consistent with the conservative attitudes of Viti Cauravou identified by Ali and Lal. This was most clearly evident in the articles published about iTaukei women in ‘Na Viti’.

## WOMEN’S COLUMN

The editors dedicated a column for iTaukei women in every issue of ‘Na Viti’. The column was titled ‘Nodra na Marama’ (translated as ‘Women’s Column’) and published under the name ‘Adi Ruve’. The identity of Adi Ruve is unclear, although it may have been Ruby Derrick since it encouraged readers to join the association or ‘sisterhood’. The editor wrote:

To all the ladies in Fiji – a woman named Adi Ruve will be looking after this section of the newspaper. This woman wants to get to know you all, her family, and is trying to be of assistance to you all.<sup>63</sup>

Adi Ruve encouraged iTaukei women to write to her with any interesting or difficult experiences, and she promised to provide support, counsel, and help through the column:

Please write to me if you have any questions or issues about our conversations. I’ll make an effort to help or provide insightful advice on relevant topics. I won’t be able to respond to each letter personally because of the limited printing space. To ensure that I am able to respond to you individually, it would be ideal if you wrote to me and included your address.<sup>64</sup>

While she did not publish their letters in ‘Na Viti’, Adi Ruve discussed the issues that iTaukei women wrote to her about, particularly their complaints about their frequent mistreatment and overwork. In one such instance, she gave an illustration of men in a village sitting with the chief while the women were working in the plantation or

<sup>59</sup> The phrase ‘gone ni sala’ can also be loosely translated as ‘children of the road’.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Na Viti’, April 1925, 123.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Na Viti’, December 1924, 28.

<sup>62</sup> ‘Na Viti’, August 1924, 19.

<sup>63</sup> ‘Na Viti’, July 1924, 33.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.



fishing, implying that men were lazy and emphasizing the importance of shared responsibilities and the need to prioritize women's lives and wellbeing.

Adi Ruve's attempts to advocate for iTaukei women were, however, tempered by colonial assumptions that British gender roles were morally superior to traditional iTaukei values. In the July 1924 edition, an article highlighted that 'iTaukei women were encouraged to follow the British way of living and child rearing which was believed to be the more developed and advanced way of living'. They were also reminded to 'slowly do away with the iTaukei way of life'.<sup>65</sup> In some cases, this was promoted as beneficial to their children and families: 'We will make available instructions on how to look after small children, give them cow's milk, or carry out any other tasks that a mother of young children would need to understand.'<sup>66</sup>

The emphasis on practical advice for giving birth and rearing children in 'Na Viti' may be explained by the 1896 'Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Decrease of the Native Population'. Commissioned in the aftermath of the devastating 1875 measles epidemic, the report incorrectly assumed women's reproductive health to be a factor contributing to the supposed depopulation of iTaukei, and it was popularly believed by Europeans that educating iTaukei women about health and hygiene could help to stop the spread of diseases brought by foreigners. Unlike the columns addressing male readers that gave direct instructions for compliance, Adi Ruve took a more emotional approach by asking women to show 'genuine love and care' rather than simply following the rules.

In other cases, the language used in the Women's Column emphasized individual empowerment and innovation:

There are many useful information that will be published in this column of the magazine. Perhaps you're interested in learning about novel things, like what some English women did. Maybe you want to learn how to make better pants? Or how to sew a dress? There will also be new techniques for weaving, sewing, and cooking, allowing you to make goods for yourself like how to make 'jam', which is so difficult to find in stores.<sup>67</sup>

iTaukei women were encouraged to develop new domestic skills (such as using a sewing machine) in order to 'advance with time'.<sup>68</sup> Adi Ruve presented her advice as a means of assisting iTaukei women and communities in adjusting to the changes brought by colonization. Fiji would struggle to prosper if Fijian women were not given enough opportunities, according to 'Na Viti'. Instead, readers were encouraged to adapt to change: 'Put off bad habits and be new in spirit, and you will be able to grow. It is difficult for Fiji to expand without the development of women'.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>65</sup> 'Na Viti', May 1925.

<sup>66</sup> 'Na Viti', June 1924, 29.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> 'Na Viti', July 1924, 31.

<sup>69</sup> 'Na Viti', January 1925, 25.

In addition to practical advice, Adi Ruve also stressed the moral imperative of heeding her advice and encouraged her readers to convert to Christianity:

I emphasized the significance of knowing Christ to the iTaukei ladies in the December issue of *Na Viti*. Women are stereotyped and devalued outside of Christianity, but after accepting Christ, they now enjoy greater independence. Women are now achieving their full potential in Fiji, which is a testament to this.<sup>70</sup>

Women were also encouraged to win their husbands, brothers, and sons over to Christianity. The Christian overtones of the Women's Column are unsurprising given the prominence of European missionary wives in Fiji at the time who were deeply concerned with the health and wellbeing of iTaukei women and children. 'Na Viti' reminded iTaukei women of their status as women of God and, comparing them to biblical female characters, encouraged them to uphold their dignity, value, and worth. In the April 1925 publication, 'Na Viti' emphasized the importance of women in their households and explained that wives had three obligations to their husbands – love, responsibility, and respect. These three values were explained in patriarchal language that focused primarily on the wellbeing of men – love was important as it would enable women's willingness to support their husbands while they worked; responsibility referred to the wife's duty to keep everything tidy and clean so her husband could maintain his health; and respect was explicitly described as submission to one's husband.<sup>71</sup>

Despite reinforcing Victorian ideas of gender, the magazine did include some inspirational examples of successful Indigenous women, such as Kiti Fau, a Rotuman woman who supported missionary activity. She lost her husband to the 1911 influenza pandemic and became a widow. She was described as a kind and generous woman, who supported the founding of churches, spoke out for Rotumans throughout Fiji, and urged them to make church contributions. To inspire iTaukei to contribute generously, Kiti Fau's example was cited when she gave £100 for the construction of a church in her village, and two bells for the church, which cost an additional £90. These donations to the church were like 'rain striking the ground' according to 'Na Viti'. Kiti Fau's wealth derived both from her banking activities and her livestock had increased significantly, as had her bountiful crops. She raised over a hundred pigs and fed them every day. All she asked for was the prayers of iTaukei so that she could heal and help them with her generosity. Kiti Fau mentions that: 'God has showered me with his vast, deep love today, which has filled my heart with gladness'.<sup>72</sup> 'Na Viti' noted that Kiti Fau supported Indigenous rural development for the people of both Rotuma and Fiji, and was committed to seeing it through to fruition. Although there is insufficient information available to verify Kiti Fau's story as presented in 'Na Viti', her example confirms Mishra's argument that colonized women were able to

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> 'Na Viti', April 1925.

<sup>72</sup> 'Na Viti', March 1925, 84.

learn skills that enabled them to participate in new and innovative ways in a restrictive colonial and patriarchal society.<sup>73</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Viti Cauravou and SVM have appeared in a number of historical studies, and the connection between them is worthy of explanation. The 'Na Viti' publication provides some further clues about how these organizations operated. Unfortunately, we cannot say for certain why these organizations chose 'Na Viti' as the medium for the expression of their ideas or why the publication only lasted two years. No other clues were found by the authors to explain the demise of Viti Cauravou, or the evolution of Ruve into SVM. They are distinct as some of the earliest examples of what is commonly referred to today as civil society organizations. Comparative studies of contemporary civil society organizations and their role in shaping iTaukei politics risk overlooking the value of a historical approach that acknowledges the earliest attempts at political organization and activism a century ago. Fijian historians have confidently diagnosed the failures of Viti Cauravou but it is less clear why SVM has been so successful by comparison. Unlike Viti Cauravou, SVM earned the support of traditional iTaukei chiefs and is widely acknowledged as a legitimate voice for iTaukei women (chiefly and non-chiefly alike) in spaces that have been dominated by men since the colonial period. While some criticize SVM for its close associations with chiefly leadership and Christianity, particularly during the turbulent political events in Fiji from the 1980s to the 2000s, many celebrate the longstanding organization as a vehicle for economic empowerment and female organization and agency.<sup>74</sup> The individual achievements of women like Waqairawai or Fau and their efforts to mobilize and collaborate with other iTaukei may also explain the success of SVM and draw attention to the need for more biographies of iTaukei women to address the gender bias in Fiji's historiography.

This article has sought to extend understandings of iTaukei society, including its relationship with Europeans, by drawing on vernacular language sources in the colonial archive. A close thematic analysis reveals the prevalence of three major concerns at the time – economic development, rules and regulations, and the lives of women. Of these three themes, economic development remains a key priority among iTaukei communities and leaders today, but it is expressed through contemporary mediums like Fiji Television's iTaukei programme 'Na Ketekete nei Nau', which highlights examples of iTaukei entrepreneurship and individual achievement. While 'Na Viti' magazine may be commended for its efforts to promote a similar message, it is crucial to remember that it is not clear to what degree the Derricks shaped the publication according to their own agendas and biases. Different excerpts of 'Na Viti' can be read as either an empowering or disempowering force in early

<sup>73</sup> Margaret Mishra, 'A History of Fijian Women's Activism (1900–2010)', *Journal of Women's History* 24, no. 2 (2012): 123.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

colonial iTaukei society and may reflect the challenges that missions faced to transform iTaukei without losing their chiefly support. As a voice for ordinary iTaukei, the 'Na Viti' magazine is a valuable resource to better understand how iTaukei thought about their place in the colonial hierarchy. It also reflected the aspirations of Fijians for better political representation, economic development, and the need to be included within the colonial system. 'Na Viti' can be read as highlighting shifting power dynamics and iTaukei attempts to negotiate and alter the spaces within which they co-existed by drawing attention to local issues and encouraging discussion.

## ORCID

*Anawaite Matadradra*  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3151-6945>

*Nicholas Halter*  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4871-1533>